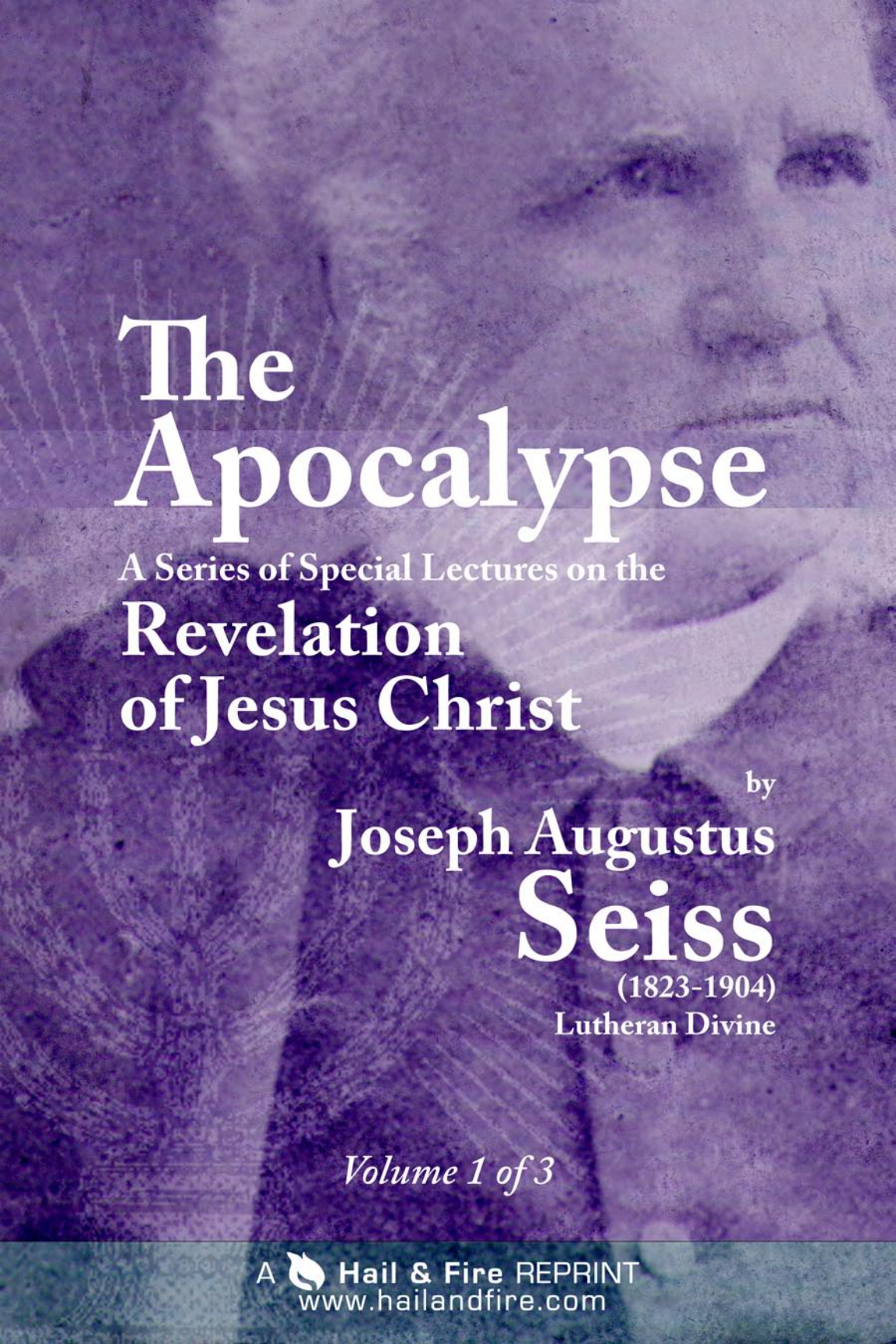


The Apocalypse

A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ

by

Joseph Augustus Seiss

(1823-1904)
Lutheran Divine

Volume 1 of 3

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Joseph Augustus Seiss, D.D.,
(1823-1904), Lutheran divine

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THE APOCALYPSE.

A SERIES OF SPECIAL LECTURES

ON THE

REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST.

WITH

REVISED TEXT.

BY J. A. SEISS, D.D.,

AUTHOR OF "LAST TIMES," "THE GOSPEL IN LEVITICUS," "PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS," "LECTURES ON THE GOSPELS," ETC., ETC.

VOL. I.

TENTH EDITION.

(CONSISTING OF 5000 SETS.)

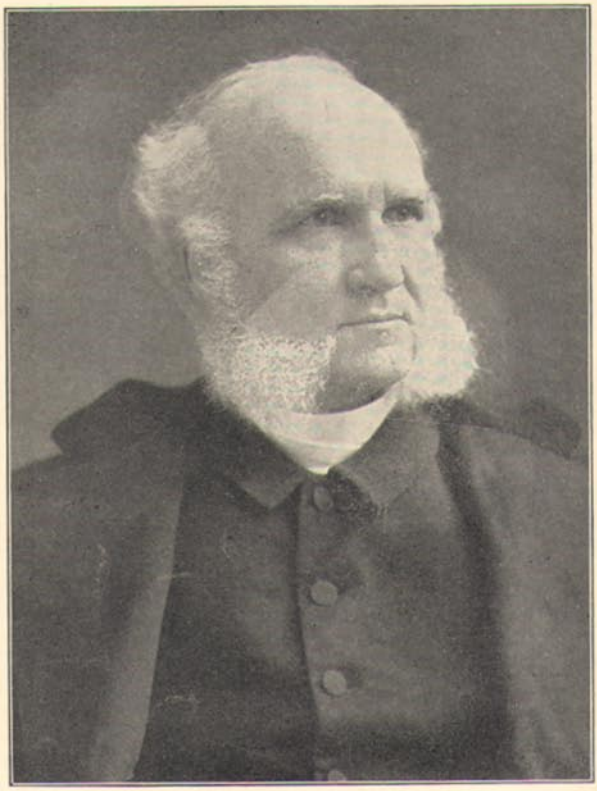
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Joseph A. Seiss, D. D.

PREFACE.

THERE is a widespread prejudice against the study of the Apocalypse. Though it is the great prophetic Book of the New Testament, the last of all the writings of Inspiration, a special message from the ascended Saviour to His Churches on earth, and pressed upon every one's attention with uncommon urgency, there are religious guides, sworn to teach "the whole counsel of God," who make a merit of not understanding it, and of not wishing to occupy themselves with it. If such treatment of an acknowledged part of the Sacred Canon is compatible with ministerial fidelity and Christian duty, the author of these Lectures is very much mistaken in his understanding of Christ's commands, as well as in his estimate of the purposes for which a Divine Revelation has been given.

It is also manifest, if the Apocalypse is to be comprehended by Christians, and made to serve them as a writing from God worthy of the Holy Ghost, that a

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new style of dealing with it must be inaugurated, and a different class of books made to take the place of the prevailing literature on the subject. Indeed, there is no part of Biblical exposition in which real guides are so scarce, or fresh effort so much needed.

Whether the work here offered is of the class to be desired, is to be determined by the character of its contents. Candid readers will hardly deny to it the merit of honesty of purpose, straightforwardness in the treatment of Divine things, simplicity and consistency in the application of what the rapt Seer narrates, direct leaning on the Sacred Word over against the stilted theories and rationalistic systems of men, and a self-evidencing force and satisfactoriness not generally found in attempts at Apocalyptical interpretation.

The theological stand-point of the author is that of Protestant orthodoxy. He claims to be in thorough accord with the great Confessions of the early Church and of the Reformation. Contrary to these he has nothing to teach, though he is quite convinced that they have not, in every direction, altogether exhausted the contents of the Scriptures. Their Eschatology, particularly, is very summary, rendering further inquiry and clearer illustration desirable. These Confessions

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themselves also legitimate and provide for such further investigation of the Divine Oracles. It is contrary both to them and the Scriptures, to undertake to warn off from the study of anything which God has caused to be written for us, provided that no part of settled Christian faith be contravened. Not *against* that whereunto the Church has hitherto attained, but *on the basis of* it, it is the vocation of Christians to go on exploring for the full truth which God has given for their learning and profit. And if anything is encountered in these Lectures, beyond what has been commonly thought, let it not be rejected too hastily, but dispassionately weighed, in the fear of God, and in just regard for His infallible Word.

A "Revised Text" has been printed at the heads of the Lectures. It is not offered as a substitute for the common English Version; though the received text of the Apocalypse is in a worse condition than that of any other book of the New Testament. The object of the author's "Revised Text" is simply to present, in connected form, the best results of modern textual criticism, as developed by Tischendorf, Tregelles, Hengstenberg, Alford, Trench, Wordsworth, and other able and laborious investigators, together with an original collation of the lately discovered and

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highly to be prized *Codex Sinaiticus*. The value of such a "Revised Text," in more fully representing the idiom of the inspired record, in exhibiting what certainly belongs to the most ancient copies, and in assisting the verification of the expositions given, will not be disputed by scholars, nor lightly esteemed by the common reader. As Tregelles has said of his version of the Apocalypse, translated from the Ancient Greek text, so it may be said of this, and now with greater certainty, that "the reader may rest satisfied, that he has here a version of a Text, of which every word rests on competent evidence of twelve hundred years old at least; and almost all on consenting evidence of fourteen hundred years old; indeed, including the evidence of the Versions, ALL has authority of at least this antiquity." And as to the translation, nothing has been given which has not the concurrent sanction of eminent masters of the Greek tongue in general, and of the Greek of the New Testament in particular.

The Lectures themselves have been composed and delivered at different intervals of time, as occasion rendered convenient. From the interest manifested in them at their delivery, and at the urgent solicitation of many who listened to them, their publication has

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been commenced before the completion of the course. Some of them have gone forth in numbers, even in advance of the first volume, which is now presented to the public. It is the intention of the author, if life and health be spared, to continue the series, and to go through the whole Apocalypse, after the same manner of this first volume.

Those of God's people who find pleasure and edification in such studies, are earnestly requested to give these labors a place in their prayers, that the author may successfully complete what, under particular constraints of conscience, he has thus begun, and that God's blessing may be upon what he now devoutly commits to the care of Divine Providence, and to the serious attention of all Christians and all men.

PHILADELPHIA, May, 1869.

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THE APOCALYPSE.

LECTURE FIRST.

THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THE SUBJECT IS TAKEN UP—THE PREFACE—THE SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE BOOK—WHAT THE REVELATION OF CHRIST IS—JOHN IN THE DAY OF THE LORD—THE DERIVATION OF THE APOCALYPSE—THE VALUE AND PRECIOUSNESS OF THIS BOOK—OUR SPECIAL STUDY DEMANDED.

REV. CHAP. 1 : 1—3 (Revised Text).—The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants that which must come to pass speedily; and he signified [it] sending by his angel to his servant John; who attested the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ, what things soever he saw. Blessed he who readeth, and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and observe the things which are written in it: for the time [is] near.

IT has been upon my mind, and in my heart, for a long time, to deliver a series of special discourses upon this remarkable portion of the Holy Scriptures; not from a conceit of superior wisdom or spiritual gifts;—not with the vain ambition of making all mysteries plain,—nor yet out of mere curious desire to pry into the things of the future; but out of solemn reverence for all that God has caused to be written for our learning, with a view conscientiously to declare the whole counsel of

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God, and with an earnest desire to secure for myself and those who hear me that special benediction which is pronounced upon them that read, hear, and keep what is written in this prophecy.

I have delayed the commencement of this work till now, partly on account of the bodily infirmities under which I have labored for the past two years, and partly because I desired first to qualify myself better by ampler investigation, and by a more thorough mastery of the difficulties which have hindered the success of other attempts to explain this book. And, for the same reasons, I am unable, even now, to promise the continuation of these discourses, except at irregular intervals. So far, however, as God shall give me strength, I shall pursue them to their end.

I am also very sure, as God has promised his Spirit to them that ask him, and directed those who lack wisdom to seek for it at his hands, and pronounced all inspired writings to be "for our learning" and comfort, that it will be profitable for all of us, in humble dependence upon Divine grace and guidance, carefully to review what this book was meant to teach.

And may I not ask you, to give me your attention, as I proceed with these expositions, and to unite with me in earnestly invoking God's helpful illuminations, that we may rightly understand his solemn message to his people.

The words which I have announced for our present consideration, give us the Divine Preface or superscription to this book. They are meant

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to advise the reader as to that with which he is about to deal, and to prepare him to appreciate what is to follow. They relate to three leading points:

I. The Subject and Contents of the Book.
II. Its Derivation and Authorship.
III. Its Value and Preciousness.

Let us look briefly at these several particulars.

What concerns the subject and contents of this book, I find for the most part in the name which it gives itself. It is the common rule with Scripture names, to express the substance of the things to which they are applied. The name of God expresses what God is; so the names of the Lord Jesus Christ, and all the leading names found in the Bible. Even those which the Church has given, are often wonderfully expressive and significant. *Genesis* is the generation of things; *Exodus*, the going forth from bondage; *The Gospel*, the very heart and substance of all God's gracious communications—the good news. And when God himself designates this book *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, we may rest assured, that it is the very substance and kernel of the book that is expressed in this title.

What, then, are we to understand by "*The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ?*" There are certain books (adopted and held sacred by the Church of Rome, which we, however, receive only as human productions), which have a name somewhat similar to this in sound. You find them in some Bibles, between the Old and New Testaments,

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bearing the name of *Apocrypha*. But *Apocrypha* is just the opposite of *Apocalypse*. *Apocrypha* means something that is concealed, not set forth, not authentic; *Apocalypse* means something revealed, disclosed, manifested, shown. The verb *αποκαλύπτω*, means *to reveal, to make manifest, to uncover to view*. The noun *αποκάλυψις*, means *a revelation, a disclosure, an appearing, a making manifest*. The Apocalypse, or Revelation of Jesus Christ, must therefore be the revealment, manifestation, appearing, of Jesus Christ.

Some accept the words as if they were meant to express the revealment of the Revelation. This I take to be a mistake, and a vital mistake, as regards any right interpretation of this book. It is not the Apocalypse which is the subject of the disclosure. This book is not the Apocalypse of the Apocalypse, but THE APOCALYPSE OF JESUS CHRIST.

And this is the key to the whole book. It is a book of which Christ is the great subject and centre, particularly in that period of his administrations and glory designated as the day of his uncovering, the day of his appearing. It is not a mere prediction of divine judgments upon the wicked, and of the final triumph of the righteous, made known *by* Christ; but a book of the revelation *of* Christ, in his own person, offices, and future administrations, when he shall be *seen* coming from heaven, as he was once seen going into heaven. If "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" meant nothing more than certain communications made

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known by Christ, I can see no significance or propriety in affixing this title to this book, rather than to any other books of holy Scripture. Are they not all alike the revelation of Jesus Christ, in this sense? Does not Peter say of the inspired writers in general, that they were moved by the Spirit of Christ which was in them? Why then single out this particular book as "The Revelation of Jesus Christ," when it is no more the gift of Jesus than any other inspired book? Besides, it would be particularly strange, that this book should be so specially designated "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" in the sense of revelation *by* Christ, when the book itself declares that it was not received from Christ, but from *an angel* or messenger of Christ. These considerations alone ought to satisfy us that there is something more distinctive and characteristic in this title than is embraced in its ordinary acceptation. For my own part, I am perfectly convinced, from a review of the places in which the word occurs in the New Testament, as well as from all the contents of this particular part of it, that *The Apocalypse*, or Revelation of Jesus Christ, means Jesus Christ *revealed*, and uncovered to mortal view; and not merely Jesus Christ *revealing*, and making known hidden things to be recorded for our learning. Let me refer to a few passages bearing upon the case.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 : 7), speaks of them as enriched in every spiritual gift, confirmed in the testimony of Christ, and "waiting for *the Apocalypse* (*την αποκάλυψιν*) *the coming* of

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our Lord Jesus Christ." The original word here is exactly the same as that in the text; the structure of the sentence is also much the same; but no one mistakes its meaning for a moment. All agree that it refers to Christ in his revelation from heaven, when he shall come in the clouds with power and great glory. And if such is its unmistakable meaning here, why not take it in the same sense in the text? So in Thessalonians (1 : 6–10) he refers his readers to a time of rest, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven (εν τη αποκαλυψει του Κυριου, literally, *at the Apocalypse of the Lord*), with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God;—*when he shall come* to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." No one misunderstands what The Apocalypse of the Lord Jesus is in this passage. Paul himself explains it to be His *coming*, in just such administrations as were shown John in this book.

So again in 1 Peter 1 : 7, where that apostle speaks of his brethren as "in heaviness through manifold temptations," that the trial of their faith, "being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory *at the Apocalypse* (εν αποκαλύψει), *appearing* of Jesus Christ." Also in verse 13, where he exhorts his readers to "be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto them at *the Apocalypse* (εν αποκαλύψει), *the revelation* of Jesus Christ." All understand the reference in these

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passages to be to the coming of Christ in the glory of his second advent, when "every eye shall see him, and they which pierced him." We all feel that it would be a wilful perversion of the word of God to make *the Apocalypse of Christ*, in these passages, mean anything else than his *personal appearing*. And the same is the fixed meaning of this phrase in every other passage in which it is used. Even in that from Galatians (1:12), which might seem to assign it a different signification, the idea is not simply that of a revealer, but of one revealed by personal manifestation. Paul there avers, that the gospel he preached was not of man; "for," says he, "I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by *the Apocalypse* (δι' αποκαλύψεως) *through the revelation* of Jesus Christ;" that is, by Christ's personal *appearance* to him, as the succeeding verses show; for he straightway proceeds to narrate that marvellous affair on the way to Damascus. What that Apocalypse was, he on various occasions described. Before Agrippa, he said,—"As I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O King, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in a Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest, but rise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have *appeared unto*

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thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou *hast seen*, and of those things in which *I will appear unto thee.*" Hence his appeal in vindication of his apostleship. "Am I not an apostle? Have I not *seen Jesus Christ* our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1.) All this shows, as conclusively as may be, that the Apocalypse of Christ, through which he obtained at once his office and his text, was a *personal appearance*, as every real Apocalypse predicated of a person must be.

With the meaning of this word thus established, what can that book be, of which it is descriptive, but an account of the revelation of Christ in his personal forthcoming from his present invisible estate, to receive his Bride, judge the wicked, and set up his eternal kingdom on the earth.

With this also agrees the statement of John as to the circumstances under which he came to the knowledge of the things which he narrates. He says he "*was in Spirit in the Lord's day*," in which he beheld what he afterwards wrote. What is meant by this *Lord's day?* Some answer, *Sunday*—the first day of the week; but I am not satisfied with this explanation. Sunday belongs indeed to the Lord, but the Scriptures nowhere call it "the Lord's day." None of the Christian writings, for 100 years after Christ, ever call it "the Lord's day." But there is a "*Day of the Lord*" largely treated of by prophets, apostles, and fathers, the meaning of which is abundantly clear and settled. It is that day in which, Isaiah

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says, men shall hide in the rocks for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty;—the day which Joel describes as the day of destruction from the Almighty, when the Lord shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shall shake;—the day to which the closing chapter of Malachi refers as the day that shall burn as an oven, and in which the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings;—the day which Paul proclaimed from Mars' Hill as that in which God will judge the world, concerning which he so earnestly exhorted the Thessalonians, and which was not to come until after a great apostacy from the faith, and the ripening of the wicked for destruction;—the day in the which, Peter says, the heavens shall be changed, the elements melt, the earth burn, and all present orders of things give way to new heavens and a new earth;—even "the day for which all other days were made." And in that day I understand John to say, he in some sense was. In the mysteries of prophetic rapport, which the Scriptures describe as "*in Spirit*," and which Paul declared inexplicable, he was caught out of himself, and out of his proper place and time, and stationed amid the stupendous scenes of the great day of God, and made to see the actors in them, and to look upon them transpiring before his eyes, that he might write what he saw, and give it to the Churches.

This is what I understand by his being "in

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Spirit in the Lord's day."* I can see no essential difference between ἡ Κυριακη ἡμερα—*the Lord's day*,—and ἡ ἡμερα Κυριου—*the day of the Lord*. They are simply the two forms for signifying the same relations of the same things.† And if John was thus mystically down among the scenes of the last day, and has written only what he says he has written, that is "*things that he saw*;" it cannot be otherwise but that in dealing with the contents of this book we are dealing with what relates pre-eminently to the great Apocalypse and Epiphany of our Lord, when he cometh to judge the world in righteousness.

And when we come to consider the actual contents of this book, we find them harmonizing exactly with this understanding of its title. It takes as its chief and unmistakable themes what other portions of the Scriptures assign to the great day

* And so Wetstein, Züllig, Dr. S. R. Maitland, Dr. Todd, and B. W. Newton.

† Our English Translators have frequently used both these modes of expressing the genitive case of the same noun, both in Hebrew and Greek. Compare Gen. 28 : 17 and Gen. 28 : 22, where "House of God" and "God's house" mean precisely the same. So "Lord's law," Ex. 13 : 9, and "Law *of* the Lord," 2 Chron. 12 : 1;—"The Lord's people," 1 Sam. 2 : 24, and "People *of* the Lord," Judges 5 : 11. In all these instances the Septuagint presents the same forms as the original. So in the New Testament we have the same variety of expression to signify exactly the same relations. In 1 Cor. 10 : 21, for the same grammatical form in Greek, we have "Lord's table," and "Table *of* devils;" in 2 Cor. 2 : 12, "Christ's Gospel" for "Gospel *of* Christ;" in 2 Pet. 4 : 13, "Christ's sufferings," and in 1 Pet. 5 : 1, "Sufferings *of* Christ." The same may be seen in Rev. 11 : 15, where the kingdoms *of* the world become our *Lord's* and his *Christ's* kingdoms.

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of the Lord. It is nothing but Apocalypse from beginning to end. First we have the Apocalypse of Christ in his relation to the earthly Churches, and his judgment of them; then the Apocalypse of his relation to the glorified Church, and the marshalling of them for his forthcoming to judge the world; then the Apocalypse of his relation to the scenes of the judgment, as they are manifested on earth under the opening of the seals, the prophesying of the witnesses, and the fall of Babylon; then the Apocalypse of his actual manifestation to the world in the battle of the great day of God Almighty, the establishment of his kingdom, and the investiture of the saints in their future sovereignties; and finally the Apocalypse of his relation to the final act of judgment, the destruction of death and the grave, and the introduction of the final estate of a perfected Redemption. What, indeed, is all this, but just what was foretold by all the prophets, by Christ himself, and by all his apostles, as pertaining to THE DAY OF THE LORD? Verily, this book is but the rehearsal, in another and ampler manner, of what all the Scriptures tell us about the last day and the eternal judgment. It is pre-eminently The Apocalypse and Epiphany of Jesus Christ.*

II. Notice now *its derivation and authorship.* The

* "This divine book, let others call it what they please, is an admirable prophecy, directed wholly to the times, immediate upon the coming of the Lord. In which are announced all the principal matters which shall immediately precede; in which is announced in a manner the most magnificent the

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text represents it as the gift of God to Christ. It is called "The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him." Some understand this gift in the sense of *signified, made known to;* and so put themselves under the necessity of explaining how this could be without compromising our Lord's Divinity. This is the first difficulty engendered by the departure from the proper scriptural meaning of the word Apocalypse. People take it as denoting a piece of information, and so represent Christ in a state of ignorance respecting the sublimest results of his mediatorship until after his ascension into heaven. The incongruities of such an acceptation should teach men better. The Apocalypse of Christ is the future reappearance of Christ, clothed with the honors and crowned with the triumphs which are to characterize that forthcoming, and not the mere knowledge or description of these things. And it is that Apocalypse, with all its glorious concomitants and results, that God has, in covenant, given to Christ;—given to him as the crowning reward of his mediatorial work, as the Scriptures everywhere teach.

The promise of the victory of the woman's seed involved this gift. Hannah's song speaks of it as strength and exaltation which the Lord be-

very coming of the Lord in glory and majesty; in which are announced the admirable and stupendous events which shall accompany that coming, and which shall follow it. The title of the book shows well to what it is all directed; what is its argument, and what its determinate end: *The Apocalypse—Revelation of Jesus Christ.*"—Emanuel Lacunza, "*Coming of Messiah,*" p. 200.

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stoweth upon his anointed. God's promise to David of a son whose kingdom is to be established forever embraces it. It is the great theme of the second Psalm, where God says to his son: "I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession—thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." It is in Isaiah's pictures of Messiah, in Jeremiah's prophecies, in the words of the annunciation to Mary, in Christ's own parables, and in all the writings of the Apostles. *Because* Christ "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." We are told that there was joy set before Christ as the reward of his sufferings and death, and that it was "*for* the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame." And whatever else may be included in that exaltation or that joy, highest and greatest of all is a future Apocalypse, when "the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, and he shall sit upon the throne of his glory." This, then, is what God

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"gave to Jesus Christ," in promise, when he commenced his work, in its earnest, when he raised him from the dead and received him into glory; and *thus gave* what constitutes the substance of this book.

But as the full manifestation of this endowment of Christ is still future, and it is important for his followers to be well informed concerning it, the blessed Saviour, after his ascension, took measures to have the facts becomingly communicated to his servants on earth. "*And he sent and signified* [*the same*] *by his angel.*" In stating who this angel was, I do not venture to be specific. His own account of himself to John, was, "I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book" (Rev. 22 : 9). From this, it has been thought, that he was one of the old prophets, or some one standing in a closer relation to Christ and the Church than can be affirmed of angels proper. It is also somewhat confirmative of this view, that whilst the angels are called "ministering spirits" (Heb. 1 : 14), they are not called "God's servants," nor fellows of the prophets and apostles, as in the case before us. Let it suffice, however, for us to know, that it was some heavenly messenger, commissioned by the Lord Jesus in glory, to come and make known these apocalyptic wonders.

Some have found difficulty in tracing the agency of this angel in the book itself. "It is remarkable," says one, "that this angel does not appear as the imparter of the visions until chapter seven-

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teen." This would imply, that what God here says about the derivation of this book is only true with respect to a very small fraction of it. I cannot agree thus to stint and stultify the words of the Almighty. The proper explanation of the office of the angel is to be found in the words *signified* and *saw*. The word rendered *signified*, taken in connection with the fact that the things signified were matters of contemplation by means of the eyes, can denote nothing else than an actual picturing of those scenes—a making of them pass before the view the same as if they were really transpiring. The office of the angel, then, as I take it, was, to form the connection between John's senses or imagination and the things which he was to describe, making to pass in review before him what was only afterwards to take place in fact. How this was done, I cannot say: but as the devil could take Jesus to a high mountain, and show him at one view "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them," I am sure that it falls sufficiently within the sphere of angelic natures thus to picture things to man; and that when commissioned of the Lord for the purpose, no good angel is wanting in ability to be the instrument in making John *see* whatever visions he describes in this book. And when God himself tells me that what is here set forth *was* thus signified to John, I will persist in referring every one of the visions, with all that he says he saw and heard, to the intervention of this angelic agent, and believe that in all sacred things we are vastly

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more dependent upon angelic ministrations than we know or can understand. "*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*" (Heb. 1 : 14.)

But there is still another link in the chain of agencies through which the great things of this book have been made known to men. Given of God, sent by Christ, signified by an angel, they were finally recorded by John, and by him communicated to the Churches.

Nor need we be in doubt as to what John this is. The text describes him as that "John, who attested the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ." And who is it that the Churches from the beginning have known as the attestor of the *Logos*, or Word of God, and of the testimony which Christ gave, but John the Apostle, the beloved disciple? Turn to the Gospel by John, and see whether it be not wholly taken up with exactly these things. The first chapter gives the only full account which the Scriptures contain respecting the pre-existence of the *Logos*, or Word, in the Godhead, and the sameness of that Word with him who was born of Mary, tabernacled in the flesh, and was called Jesus of Nazareth. Was not this bearing "record of the Word of God?" Do we not find another summary of the same testimony in the first chapter of his first epistle? What else does he mean by the account which he gives of his testimony, when he says, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have

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looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life, declare we unto you?" Are not both his first and second epistles but arguments, against various evil spirits which were gone abroad, that Jesus is the Word of God, the only Christ, the Son of God, and that all who deny this are liars and Antichrist? And in reference to the great body of his Gospel, does he not himself say, "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?" Does not all this make out for John a particular distinction as the apostle "who attested the Word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ?"

Some say that it was not John the Apostle who wrote this book, but another John, contemporaneous with the apostle. But it is not yet conclusively proven that there was such a John other than the apostle; and, if there even was, there is not the first tittle of evidence that he had ever distinguished himself for his record concerning the Logos, or concerning the testimonies, which he himself saw, by which Christ announced himself as the Messiah and the Son of God. I conclude, therefore, upon the solid basis of God's own identification of the author of this book, that it was the Apostle John who wrote it.

Such also has been the conviction of the best portions of the Church from the beginning. For the first two centuries the universal Christian testimony ascribed the Apocalypse to the pen of

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"that disciple whom Jesus loved." In the third century, out of a desire to get rid of its authority for certain unpalatable doctrines, there were some who ascribed it to Cerinthus, a reputed heretic of the first century. But, "if the common consent of all antiquity is to overturn the heady rashness of well-meaning but inconsiderate men of evil name; then we have the most satisfactory evidence that this book was written by John the Apostle, and believed by the Church to be most fully inspired. Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Tertullian, Clemens Alexandrinus, Origen, Jerome, Augustine, and a continued stream of Orthodox authority to our day, from the age next to that in which it was written, concur in the reception, the admiration, and the observance of this book."*

* Irving *in loc.* Some have sought to make a great deal of certain alleged discrepancies between the style and modes of expression used in the Apocalypse, and those contained in John's Gospel and Epistles. But Alford has very well observed, that "there are at the same time striking notes of similarity in expression and cast of thought," and that "we are not in a position to take into account the effect of a totally different subject and totally different circumstances upon one, who though knowing and speaking Greek, was yet a Hebrew by birth."—*Greek Test. Prol. Rev.*

And one of our ablest linguists and critics, "after an examination successively renewed through many years," says, "I have never been able to satisfy myself, that what has been the common belief of the Churches in all ages respecting the authorship of the Apocalypse, is not sustained by more and better grounds than any other opinion."—*Stuart on Apoc.*, I, 285.

"There is scarcely a book in the whole Bible whose genuineness and inspiration were more strongly attested on its first appearance than the Apocalypse. No doubts whatever seem

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Such, then, is the exalted source and derivation of this wonderful production. It takes its origin in God's covenant gift to Jesus Christ as the reward of triumph and glory for his humiliation and obedience unto death. It was sent by the loving Saviour from heaven, in the charge of an angelic messenger, to be shown to John. And by the hands of "that disciple whom Jesus loved," thus visited in his lonely exile—emblem of that consolation in distress with which this book has ever irradiated the dark and gloomy days of the Church,—was traced out in the language of mortals, and delivered over as Christ's last message to his people on earth.

III. A word or two now as *to the value and pre-*

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to have been entertained on these points. Suffice it now to say, that Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Melito,—that is, eminent teachers in the Church, in the next age to that in which it was written—proclaim that its writer was St. John, the beloved disciple of Christ. Such was *then* the voice of the Church."—*Wordsworth on Apoc.*, p. 22.

"So ends our Catena of testimonies to the genuineness and divine inspiration of the Apocalypse traced through the three half centuries that followed after its publication. Alike from East and West, North and South,—from the Churches of the Asiatic province and the Syrian, of Italy and of Gaul, of Egypt and of Africa,—we have heard an unbroken and all but uniform voice of testimony in its favor. And on the whole, and in conclusion, it does appear to me that Augustine and the Latin Council had good reason for their solemn verdict; and that we may safely and unhesitatingly direct our inquiries into the meaning of the Apocalypse, as into that of a prophecy of the future, revealed to the beloved disciple, by none other than Christ's own divine, eternal, omniscient Spirit."—*Elliott's Horæ Apoc., Prel. Essay.*

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ciousness of this book. A gift which the Great God thinks a befitting honor and compensation to Christ for all his great deeds of love and condescension; a thing which the blessed Lord in heaven esteemed of sufficient moment to be made known by a special embassage, which holy angels considered it an honor to be permitted to signify, and which the tenderness of the disciple of love so conscientiously recorded for the comfort and admonition of the people of God in every age, certainly is not a thing of trifling significance. If we are interested in the story of the manger and the cross; if we can draw strength for our prayers and hopes by invoking Christ by the mystery of his incarnation, fasting, temptation, agony, and bloody sweat; if we find it such a precious treasure to our souls to come into undoubting sympathy with the scenes of his humiliation and grief; what should be our appreciation of this book, which treats of the fruits of those sufferings, and tells only of that wronged Saviour's glory and triumphs, and shows us our Lord enthroned in majesty, riding prosperously, and scattering to his ransomed ones the crowns and regencies of empire which shall never perish, and celestial blessednesses without number and above all thought!

"All Scripture," indeed, "is profitable, for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works;" but there are some portions more especially signi-

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ficant and precious, and proper attention to which is fraught with particular advantages. Of this sort is this book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. What saith the text?—"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." The same is repeated in chapter 22 : 7,—"Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." Of course, the more we learn and know of Christ, the better it will be for us, if the spirit of faith and obedience be in our hearts; and this book is pre-eminently the Revelation of Christ. It sets out our blessed Lord, and draws away the veil which hangs between us and him, and lifts us up into the sublimest things of heaven. It shows us how the Son of man has been rewarded by the Father, and what works and offices are assigned unto that meek Lamb. It shows us the history of our Saviour's person, all-glorious and exalted, and his great ministrations in the Church and in the universe, until his coming again from the throne and in the power of the Father, with all the armies of heaven with him. Above all does it dwell upon that great Apocalypse, the condition in which it will find the world, what it will bring to his prepared and waiting saints, what it will inflict upon lukewarm believers, infidels, and evil-doers, and what will be the character and issues of that great day of God Almighty. It tells what the Church will be till Christ comes, what it will be in that period of dreadful trial, what Satan and his children will attempt, and how the

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Lord Jesus shall trample them down under the glory of his power, raise the dead, renew the world, and set up forever his blessed reign in it. It shows us what will be the final triumphs and rewards of the saints for their present griefs and toils; what will be the future of our world; how it is to be renewed, cleansed, beautified, and invested with heavenly excellencies; and how the light, and knowledge and glory of God is to become its eternal possession.

It is always important for us to be forewarned with regard to the future. It is our nature to be forecasting, and it is one of the necessities of our well-being to be able to anticipate with accuracy, at least with regard to the leading things that shall concern us. He who does not shape the conduct of to-day with reference to some end foreseen or calculated on for some other day, is a mere fool and madman, whether it be in the things of God, or in the things of the world. And in this book we are certified beforehand of what God hath determined concerning the future —what the devout may hope for, what the indifferent and unbelieving have to fear, wherein the true safety and consolation of man is to be found, what tribulations are to come upon the world, and what birth-pangs are yet to be passed through to reach that Golden Age of which prophets and poets of all nations and times have spoken.*

* "The Apocalypse *completes* the Canon of Scripture; and with reverence be it said, the sacred Canon would be imperfect without it."—*Wordsworth.*

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There is also a peculiar efficacy and power in the doctrine of Christ's speedy return. Like a magnet, it lifts the heart of the believer out of the world, and out of his low self, and enables him to stand with Moses on the mount, and transfigures him with the rays of blessed hope and promise which stream upon him in those sublime heights. It is the most animating and most sanctifying subject in the Bible. It is the soul's serenest light amid the darkness and trials of earth. And the great end and aim of this book is to set forth this doctrine. The things of which it treats, are things touching the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ, and which it describes as "things which must shortly come to pass." *The impending Advent* is the theme which pervades it from its commencement to its close. And just in proportion as he who is awake to the great truth of the Saviour's speedy coming, and is engaged in waiting and preparing himself accordingly, is a better man, and in a safer condition, and really more happy, than the half-christian and the lukewarm;—in that same proportion is he who reads, hears and keeps the words of this prophecy blessed beyond all other people. This book, at least its subject-matter, thus becomes to him an instrument of security and attainment to save him from surprise when his Lord cometh, and from the tribulations which shall try the indifferent; as well as a passport to admit him to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and to the highest awards of eternity. Precious book! and happy they who study it!

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Nor can I close without remarking how all this plucks up, and crushes to atoms, those erroneous and mischievous notions entertained by many, that there is nothing useful in prophetic studies. To say nothing of the duty of giving heed to what God has thought it important to record, or of the folly of seeing only peril in trying to understand what the Spirit of God has inspired for our learning and consolation, what man is he, who, in the face of this text, and its outspoken benediction, will venture to denounce investigation into sacred prophecy? What if it is often dark and mysterious? The darker and more difficult, the greater the reason for earnest examination. Be the obscurity and mystery what it may, God says, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words, and keep those things which are written." What if this book of Revelation is the fullest of all of dark things and perplexing mysteries? It is then a book which above all needs our most solemn and studious attention. Nay, it is concerning this book especially that God pronounces this blessedness upon the devout and obedient inquirer.

Some tell us that what is yet future ought not to be examined into till after it has come to pass. I can hardly realize that this is seriously meant. Yet I have had it argued to me, even in Jerusalem itself. Do such persons not perceive that they thus judge God, and Christ, and the sent angel of Christ, and John the beloved disciple of Christ, and join issue with the God of truth as to the

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correctness of his utterances? I find also that those who so argue are prone to insist that the day of death is the same as Christ's coming. Do they then mean that a man is only to study the predictions of that coming after he is dead? Out upon such doctrine as this! Away with such presumptuous deprivation of the Church of the precious legacy left her by her ascended Lord! I will not for a moment regard that as wrong and dangerous which the Lord himself hath pronounced *blessed*. Jesus knew what he was about when he sent this book to be shown unto his servants. He understood his own words when he said and repeated: Blessed is he that reads and he that keeps what is in this book. And I will insist that it is to be studied. As Christ said to the writer of it, so he says to all his ministers, and all his people, in all time: "SEAL NOT THE SAYINGS OF THE PROPHECY OF THIS BOOK." It is an open book, and meant to be ever kept open to the view of the Church from that time forward to the end. Woe, then, to the man who undertakes to draw away God's people from it, or to warn them against looking into it! He takes from the Church, which has now been these 2000 years among the dashing waves, the chart by which above all Christ meant she should be guided, and wherein she may best see whither she is bearing, what are her perils, and where her course of safety lies! He undertakes to seal what God has said should not be sealed! He not only "takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy,"

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(which who does, "God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book,") but seeks to take away the book itself!

And the more dangerous and reprehensible is such a course, now that "the time is near." Nearly two thousand years ago, it was said of the things herein written, that they must speedily come to pass. These records were from the first pressed upon the study of the Church by the solemn consideration that the period of their fulfilment was rapidly approaching. But if this argument was of force then, how much more now?

Standing, then, as we do, upon the very margin of the great Apocalypse, by all the solemnities with which it is to be accompanied, I not only invite and recommend, but conjure Christians, as they hope to be present at the marriage supper of the Lamb, not to put this precious book from them, or to forego the faithful study of its contents.

The Lord open our hearts to its teachings, and make us partakers of the blessings it foretells!

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LECTURE SECOND.

JOHN'S SPECIAL INTRODUCTION—CHRISTIANITY COURTEOUS—THE CHURCHES—THE BLESSING IMPLORED UPON THEM—AN EXULTANT ASCRIPTION—THE BASIS AND CHARACTER OF IT—A SOLEMN PROPHETIC ALLUSION—THE COMING AGAIN OF CHRIST—HOW THE EARLY CHRISTIANS VIEWED THE SUBJECT—A DEVOUT REFERENCE TO THE SAVIOUR'S TESTIMONY CONCERNING HIMSELF.

REV. CHAP. 1 : 4–8 (Revised Text).—John to the seven churches in Asia, Grace unto you and peace, from Him 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 of the dead, and The Prince of the kings of the earth.

Unto Him that loves us, and freed us from our sins by his own blood, and hath made us a kingdom,—priests unto Him who is his God and Father; to Him be glory and dominion unto the ages. Amen.

Behold, he cometh with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they which pierced him, and all the tribes of the land shall mourn about him. Even so; Amen.

I am Alpha and Omega, saith the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.

THERE is not another book of holy scripture which opens with so much special remark and solemnity. There is everything here to impress the belief, that there is not another so profoundly important, or meant to be studied with such particular care and seriousness. We have had before us the impressive account of itself with which this

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marvellous book opens. The text is a special additional preface, by John, which will be quite sufficient to occupy us to-night. Strictly, it is no part of the Apocalypse. It has proceeded from the same Spirit, and is in a measure anticipative of its contents; but it deals more with the writer's personal feelings, than with any features of the grand message itself. It is the mere prelude to the piece—the apostolic overture to the Revelation of Christ. But, it is a magnificent introduction. Though marked with the frequent sententious abruptness of this apostle's writings, there is not, in all human literature, a more sublime or appropriate opening. Separating it into its several parts, I find

I. An affecting Salutation;
II. An exultant Ascription;
III. A solemn prophetic Allusion;
IV. A devout theological Recognition.

Having carefully surveyed these, we shall have comprehensively explored the whole text. May the Lord aid us in the attempt, and fill us with the Spirit of him whose words we are to consider!

As to the Salutation, we may note first that Christianity is courteous. It enlivens all kindly feelings, and prompts to every gentle amenity from one to another. There is no refinement of manner, or polish of feeling and behavior, which it does not foster. Coarseness and vulgarity have no place in the domain of genuine piety. He who speaks in the text was bred in humble life, but, by

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the exalting power of the gospel which he preached, he was raised into a courtliness of tone and temper, as sincere as it was lovely. He does not venture to deliver his great message to the Churches without first declaring his own kind wishes towards them. Though a high officer, and addressing persons of much inferior estate to himself, his loving heart begins with the pouring out of gracious affection, sympathy and benediction. By apostolic example, then, as well as by apostolic precept, we are taught to be kindly affectioned one toward another, and to be courteous to all men.

This gracious Salutation is addressed "to the seven Churches in Asia." We sometimes speak of "the Church" in its entire collective capacity, as if it were but one body. And such it really is in its source, head, faith and sacraments, but not in its earthly organization. We also speak of the Church of a particular country or denomination; and not improperly when we wish to designate clusters of Churches of particular and distinctive type, or regime, or geographical contiguity. But the Scriptures express themselves differently. They do not contemplate the Christians of so many countries or confessions, as so many Churches; but find a Church in every individual congregation, having its own minister, elders and deacons, without regard to any corporation other than itself. "Asia" is a large district of country, lying on the north of the Mediterranean, east of the outlet of the Euxine. It had but one general govern-

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ment at the time. But the Apocalypse does not speak of the collective body of Christians on that territory as "the Church of Asia." They were organized into distinct congregations in the several towns and cities, and these separate and independent assemblies are spoken of as so many "Churches." They are addressed singly as "the Churches which are in Asia," such as "the Church in Ephesus," "the Church in Smyrna," "the Church in Pergamos," &c. The ecclesiastical unit is, therefore, to be reckoned from the local assembly under one minister, and such helpers as may be grouped around him, in the acknowledgment and the administration of the commands of Christ. These several units, or any number of them, may lawfully join together in other and more general organizations and administrations, but never so as to ignore or supersede the proper churchly character of each without regard to the rest. The original order of the Church, as the apostles founded it, and as they addressed and left it, is *congregational.* And every system which obliterates that order, in so far departs from what God and his inspired servants have authorized and ordained. John knew of no Churches but the individual congregations, however they might voluntarily come together for mutual counsel and general edification.

Note also the style and substance of this Salutation. Such addresses were common in the intercourse of the ancients. Their writers were accustomed to wish to their readers every good

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and prosperity. The Egyptian steward greeted the Hebrew strangers with the words—"Peace be to you." The Assyrian King headed his royal proclamation with—"Peace be multiplied unto you." And David sent to Nabal saying: "Peace be to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast." The like may be heard to this day, in the common salutations of the people of those lands. But never did Jew or Gentile give such a salutation as this. It is not the ordinary prosperity of the world which is here bespoken, but something infinitely higher. John wishes the Churches "peace" indeed, but a peace preceded by, and rooted in "Grace." No one, in his right mind, will despise the comforts and blessings of this life. They are all good and precious gifts of God, which are to be thankfully received and devoutly appropriated. But, what is all this world's prosperity if there be no peace with God, and no spiritual consolation in the conscience? Of what avail is it to pass brilliantly over the stage of time, only to sink forever in the darkness and sorrows of eternity! What we sinful beings need is *Grace*, and the peace which has its root in grace. "By the deeds of the law shall no man living be justified." There must be some outlet of Divine benignity by which we can be accepted notwithstanding these disabilities under the law. That outlet has been found in the Gospel, which publishes absolution and eternal life on the simple condition of faith. And this is that "Grace" of which the apostle speaks, and

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by which Paul declares Christians to be saved. It is God's favor to us in Christ Jesus, notwithstanding our fallen condition. It is the forgiveness of sins, the inspiration of a new life, the renewal of the soul to holiness. It is the removal of God's wrath from us and our purgation from all enmity towards God, reconciliation and atonement with our Maker, and full participation in all the blessings of his uninterrupted favor. It is justification, and all the peace with God, and in our own hearts and estate, resulting from justification. In other words, what the apostle here bespeaks upon the Churches is, the entire fulness of the blessing of the Gospel, in all its length and breadth and depth and height of consolation and eternal prosperity.

Notice also the sources from which he implores all this. From man, no such blessings could come; nor yet only from God as God, or from this or that person in the Godhead alone. The whole Deity in its mysterious and eternal Triunity is concerned in furnishing what is bespoken. It is first of all "*from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come;*" that is, from the Absolute One, who knows no change, no dependence on time or place, but to whom the present, the past, and the future are one and the same eternal now; who is, and who was, and who is to be, even the infinite, incomprehensible, unapproachable Father of lights, from whom cometh every good and every perfect gift, and with whom is neither variableness, nor the least shadow of turning.

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Hence the joyful thanksgiving, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope."

In the next place it is "*from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;*" that is, from the Holy Ghost, in the full completeness of his office and powers, as sent forth for the illumination, comfort and edification of all the subjects of God's redeeming grace. "Seven" is the number of dispensational fulness and perfection; and as there are seven Churches, making the one Church, so there are "the seven Spirits of God," making up the completeness of the one gracious administration of the Holy Ghost. "*Before the throne;*" that is, connected with the throne, and fulfilling the purposes of Him who sits upon the throne. The Holy Ghost is one sent. (Jno. 14:26.) He goeth forth from the throne, and serves in behalf of the throne. He is God himself *imparted* to work in his elect the good pleasure of his own will, making his grace availing in them and for them, filling them with "all peace and joy in believing," helping their infirmities, witnessing to their adoption, and carrying into effect all the divine administrations of the kingdom of grace.

But there is a third, from whom these great blessings are implored—"*from Jesus Christ.*" There is neither grace nor peace for man, except through Christ. He is the stone which was set at naught by the builders, who is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any

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other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4 : 11, 12.) If God the Father hath begotten us again to a lively hope, it is only "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." If we now have liberty to enter into the holiest, it is only "by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh." (Heb. 10 : 19, 20.) And if there cometh to us peace, it is because "this man is our peace," and standeth and feedeth in the strength of the Lord, and in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. (Micah 5 : 4, 5.)

And as three titles are given to each of the other sources of grace and peace to the Churches, three are also given to Christ. If the eternal Father is He which is, and which was, and which is to come; if the Holy Ghost is spirit, sevenfold, and before the throne: Jesus Christ is "*the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth.*" Isaiah prophesied of him as "A witness to the peoples: a leader and commander of the peoples." God said of him, "I will make him my first-born, higher than the kings of the earth," and his throne "as a faithful witness in heaven." (Is. 55 : 4; Ps. 89 : 27, 37.) And as was predicted, so it has come to pass. "To this end was I born," says he, "and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." Having died a martyr to his testimony, and given his life an offering for sin, he was restored to life again, as all the Scrip-

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tures witness, and became "the first fruits of the resurrection," "the first-born from the dead." And having been "faithful unto death," God hath exalted him, far above all principalities and powers, that at his name every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Conceive of these three, then, as one Almighty and ineffable Godhead,—the Father in the absoluteness of his unchanging nature and universal presence, the Spirit in all the completeness of his manifold energies and diversified operations, and the Son in the virtues of his blood-sealed testimony, of the new begotten power of his resurrection, and of the super-royal administrations of his eternal kinghood, each in his place, and all as one, laid under contribution, and unreservedly and irrevocably pledged, for the blessedness of them that believe;—sound the depths of such a fountain of good; test the firmness of such a basis of confi dence; survey the strength and majesty of such a refuge for the soul; weigh the treasures of bliss which are opened up in such a presentation; and you may begin to form some conception of the resources of the saints, and of the real breadth and joyousness of this apostolic Salutation to the Churches. Is it any wonder that John's heart took fire at the contemplation, or that he should abruptly pass from affectionate greeting to jubilant doxology? Surely "the name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is set on high."

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II. Let us look, then, for a few moments at this exultant Ascription. He does not even name the object of it. He seems for the time to be so bewildered among the glories of the Godhead as not to distinguish whether but one, or three, are embraced in his joyous adoration. He speaks of One who loves, and one who atones, and one who renders this love and atonement effective to our deliverance and exultation; and yet includes the three in one, giving glory and dominion forever and ever unto Him that loves us, and freed us from our sins by his own blood, and made us a kingdom, priests unto his Father and his God. But before he completes the sentence, his rapt heart settles upon Him alone whose Apocalypse he is about to unfold. A higher testimony to the proper Deity of Christ could not well be given. He also runs together the present, the past, and the future in the same conception, as in the previous description of God himself. He speaks of an exercise of Divine love, which *now is* (ἀγαπῶντι, *loves*; not ἀγαπησαντι, *loved*); of a cleansing by blood, which *has* taken place; and of a regeney and priestly dignity which remains to be realized in its fulness hereafter. All these are embraced in the grace and peace of which he had just spoken, and each separately, as well as all conjointly, is made the subject of sublime praise to Him from whom it proceeds. Observe the particular specifications.

The ever adorable One "*loves us.*" We are apt to think of the great love of God as past; as having spent its greatest force, and reached its

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highest culmination, when he gave his only begotten Son to humiliation and death in our behalf. But in this we are mistaken. That love is *a present love*, and in as full force at this moment as when it delivered up Jesus to the horrors which overwhelmed him on the cross. Nay, the greatest stress and perfection of it is in exercise now, being the more intensified by reason of what was there so meekly endured for us. That was a love for enemies; what must it then be for friends? That was for man in his unloveliness and sins; what must it then be for those who have been washed from their sins, and clothed in all the heavenly beauty of the Saviour's righteousness? That was a love for the self-ruined and the lost, without claim upon Divine compassion; what must it then be to the redeemed, who are recommended by all the worth and claims of the sinlessness, and unswerving obedience, and high Divinity of Christ? Oh, the breadth, the length, the depth, the height, of the love of Christ! Who shall measure it? Who can comprehend it? It encompasses us like a shoreless, bottomless sea. It passeth knowledge. It transcends all thought. And it is in full force *now*, to make us forever blessed. Alas, what Doxology is strong enough adequately to acknowledge it?

"*And freed us from our sins by his own blood.*" We are prone to overlook this as an accomplished fact. As we refer the height of the Divine love and compassion to the past, and so diminish the comfort which belongs to us from it as a present

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reality; so we are too apt to refer our absolution in Christ's blood to some future attainment, and to hold back from the proper appropriation of its virtue except as connected with certain works or experiences of our own. In both instances we are grievously at fault. As God's great love, in all its fulness, is a present love; so our absolution through the blood of Christ is a *past* absolution. We have not to wait and work to be forgiven. The work has long since been done. The decree went forth, the releasing word was spoken, the forgiveness was declared, when Jesus left his tomb; and all that any man has to do on that subject is to believe it, and to appropriate to himself the glorious reprieve. What saith the Scripture? "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned." (Jno. 3 : 17, 18.) What of "the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us?" Has not Jesus long since entirely disposed of it? Does not the apostle testify that He hath blotted it out, and taken it out of the way, nailing it to his cross? (Col. 2 : 14.) Is it not written, that "there is now therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit?" (Rom. 8 : 1.) And in the light of passages like these, I should stultify the message which God has given me to deliver, and detract from the richness of that Gospel which I am ordained to preach, if I did not come to you with the blessed announce-

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ment of a pardon already passed, and a complete absolution already spoken, for all your sins, however many or deep-dyed, on the simple condition that you but believe my word, and take the assurance to your souls. And we live beneath our privilege and fail to make the required use of the great expiation which has been wrought, and want in proper appreciation of our Saviour's work, if we do not rise up from our prostration under the law, and cast from us forever the whole burden of its condemnation. Can you not feel, even as I pronounce these words, the starting pulsations of that life of freedom which flows down to us from Calvary's cross? Can you not this moment look back to that mysterious and all-availing immolation of the Son of God, and believe that it was the taking away of your guilt, even yours? O my downcast, sorrowing brother, look, look, at that scene of sacred bloodshedding; weigh the virtues of that expiation; fathom the depths of its power; realize the blessedness of its efficacy; behold in that day of atonement the incoming of thy year of jubilee, breaking thy bonds, returning to thee thy lost estate, restoring thee to thy unfallen friends; and see if there be not cause for some Miriam's song of triumph—some reason for thee to join in this joyous doxology.

"*And made us a kingdom—priests unto his God and Father.*" The glory brightens as the account proceeds. That we should have a place in the affectionate regard, and tender, effective love of the great Lord, is much. That we should have

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forgiveness for all our sins, made perfect by his free grace at the cost of his own life's blood, is almost too much for belief. But, to affection is added honor, and to salvation, official dignities. We are not only loved, and freed from our sins, but, if indeed we are Christians, we are princes and priests, named and anointed for immortal regencies and eternal priesthoods. Let men despise and contemn religion as they may, there is empire connecting with lowly discipleship, royalty with penitence and prayers, and sublime priesthood with piety. Fishermen and taxgatherers, by listening to Jesus, presently find themselves in apostolic thrones, and ministering as priests and rulers of a dispensation, wide as the world, and lasting as time. Moses, by his faith, rises from Jethro's sheepfold to be the prince of Israel; and Daniel, from the den of condemnation and death, to the honor and authority of empire; and Luther, from his cell, to dictate to kings and rule the ages. There is not a believer, however obscure or humble, who may not rejoice in princely blood, who does not already wield a power which the potencies of hell cannot withstand, and who is not on the way to possess eternal priesthood and dominion.

Consider, then, what is embraced in the priestly reign of the saints in the ages to come,—"what untried forms of happy being, what cycles of revolving bliss," are before us in those high spheres,—what sceptres are to be wielded and what altars served amid the sublimities of our im-

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mortal destiny,—what streams of ascending influence shall concentrate in those holy administrations, letting forth God to his creatures, and guiding the adoration of realms unknown as yet to the unsearchable bosom of the invisible God; —and who that believes does not feel his heart stirred to its profoundest depths, and the devout ascription of "glory and dominion forever and ever" rising unbidden to his lips, unto Him who so loved us, and has done such great things for us? "Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works toward the children of men!"

III. But we pass to another topic, in which we find a pre-eminently solemn prophetic Allusion. The mention of these kinghoods and priesthoods of the saints, and the glory and eternal dominion of Christ, suggests an occurrence which must precede the full realization of these things, both for Christ and his people. And, with his soul on fire with these sublime contemplations, thirsting for the great consummation, and running over with interest in the tidings which he was about to communicate, the loving apostle seems to have felt as if the grand climacteric of time had come: "Behold he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they which pierced him: and all tribes of the land shall mourn about him. Even so. Amen."

Again he omits to mention the name of Him of whom he is speaking. There is, however, no room for mistake. This coming One is the same

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who freed us from our sins by his own blood, and who is to have glory and dominion forever and ever. John was present when that blessed One left the earth. He had heard the angels say: "Ye men of Galilee, this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1 : 11.) He had seen how "a cloud received him out of their sight," and thenceforward carried in his memory what the words of the angels authorized him to regard as a picture of something in the future to which he ever looked with the profoundest interest. And all the stupendous visions of the Apocalypse did not for one moment disturb that picture, or divert his mind from it. However variously he may have been moved, as scene followed scene in the great exhibition of the Divine purpose, the key-note to which he ever returned was the coming and kingdom of that ascended Lord. Even in all the long course of unending ages, that upon which his thoughts most firmly fastened was, the coming again of the Lord Jesus. With this he begins; with this he continues; and with this he ends. But let us separate his words a little, and look at their several implications individually.

"*He cometh.*" Here is the great fact unequivocally stated. Christ has not gone to heaven to stay there. He has gone for his Church's benefit; and for his Church's benefit he will return again; not in spirit only, not in providence only, not in the mere removal of men by death, but in his own

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proper person, as "the Son of man." Few believe this, and still fewer lay it to heart. Many sneer at the very idea, and would fain laugh down the people who are so simple as to entertain it. But it is nevertheless the immutable truth of God, predicted by all his prophets, promised by Christ himself, confirmed by the testimony of angels, proclaimed by all the apostles, believed by all the early Christians, acknowledged in all the Church Creeds, sung of in all the Church Hymn-books, prayed about in all the Church Liturgies, and entering so essentially into the very life and substance of Christianity, that without it there is no Christianity, except a few maimed and mutilated relics too powerless to be worth the trouble or expense of preservation. That religion which does not look for a returning Saviour, or locate its highest hopes and triumphs in the judgment scenes for which the Son of man must reappear, is not the religion of this book, and is without authority to promise salvation to its devotees. And those addresses to the Churches which have no "*Behold he cometh*" pervading or underlying them, have not been indited by "the Seven Spirits of God," nor sent by Him whose Apocalypse is the crown of the inspired Canon. Murmur at it, dispute it, despise it, mock at it, put it aside, hate it, and hide from it, as men may, it is a great fundamental article of the Gospel, that that same blessed Lord, who ascended from Mount Olivet, and is now at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, shall come from thence to judge the quick

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and the dead, and to stand again on that very summit from which he went up. This is true, as Christ himself is true; and "he that hath an ear to hear, let him hear." Amen.

"He cometh *with the clouds.*" Here is the great characteristic in the manner of his coming. "*With the clouds*," that is, in majesty and glory;—with the awful pomp and splendor of Him "who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind."

"*And every eye shall see him.*" Here is the publicity of the sublime event. It is not said that all shall see him at the same time, or in the same scene, or with the same feelings. Other passages teach us that some eyes will see him whilst he is yet to others invisible; and that he will be manifested to some at one time and place, and to others at other times and places, and in different acts of the wonderful drama. But, somewhere, at some time, in some stage of his judicial administrations, there never has been and never will be that human being who shall not see him. To every one that has lived, and to every one who shall live, he will show himself, and compel every eye to meet his eye. The dead shall be brought to life again, and shall see him, and the living shall see him. The good shall see him, and the wicked shall see him. Some shall see him and shout: "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation;" and others shall see him and cry to "the mountains

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and rocks: Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

"*And they which pierced him.*" Though his manifestation shall be absolutely universal, it has an awful distinction with reference to some. Of all beings who shall then wish to be saved that sight will be those who murdered him. But they shall not escape it. They must each and all some day confront him, and meet his all-penetrating gaze. From the wretched man who betrayed him, down to the soldier who pierced his side, and all who have made common cause with them in wronging, persecuting, wounding and insulting that meek Lamb of God, shall then be compelled to face his judgment-seat, and to look upon him whom they have pierced.

"*And all the tribes of the land shall mourn about him.*" Is not this a special word for the Jews? Is it not an allusion to a wail of penitence which shall be elicited from long apostate Israel, when they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and doubt of his messiahship no more? Does it not refer to the fulfilment of Zechariah 12:10, where the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him as one is in bitterness for his first-born? Oh, the intensity of that bitterness! Brethren, I do not wonder that worldlings and half-Christians have no love for this doctrine, or that they hate

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to hear about Christ's speedy coming. It is the deathknell of their gayeties and pleasures—the turning of their confidence to consternation—the conversion of their songs to shrieks of horror and despair. There is a day coming, when "the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of man shall be made low;" when there shall be "upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity;" when "all the tribes of the earth shall mourn;" when men shall "go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth," "into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty;" when men "shall seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them." And that day is the day of Christ's coming, and those dismayed ones are such as love not his appearing. Fear and dread shall fall upon the wicked; trouble and anguish shall make them afraid; and men's hearts shall fail them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming on the earth. The saints will then have been caught away to their Lord. From the same field, the same shop, the same bed, one shall have been taken and the other left. And on those remaining ones, who had not watched, neither kept their garments, nor made themselves ready, shall the terrors of judgment fall, and not a family or tribe of all that live shall escape.

"*Even so, Amen.*" Some take this as the seal and ratification of the solemn truths which have

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just been uttered. If this be the true meaning, what particular stress is to be laid upon these things—how sure to come to pass—how unmistakably certain! Brethren, it does seem to me, when I look at the Scriptures on this subject, that even the best of us are not half awake. May God arouse us by his Spirit, and not permit us to sleep till the thunders and terrors of the great day are upon us! But I find another and more natural sense of these words. I find in them John's acquiescence in all that the great day is to bring, and his prayer, as repeated at the end of the book, that the Lord would hasten its coming. Terrible as it will be to the wicked, and the unprepared, and those who refuse the warnings which we give them, it is a precious day to the saints, a day to be coveted, and to be prayed for with all earnestness of desire. The poor faint-hearted Christianity of our times can hardly contemplate it without trembling and annoyance. Many who profess and call themselves Christians would rather not hear about it, and would prefer, if they had their choice, that Christ might never come. It was not so in the days of Christianity's pristine vigor. Then the anxious inquiry of disciples was, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" Then Christians wrote to each other in joyous congratulation, that their citizenship was in heaven, whence they looked for the coming of the Saviour; and comforted one another in the

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assurance that the Lord himself is to descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and, as directed by their Lord, lifted up their heads, and looked up with joyful hope at every turn in human affairs which they could by any means construe into a probable herald of his nearing epiphany. Then the prayer, "Thy Kingdom come," had a depth of meaning and lively anticipation which now has well-nigh been lost. Then "the appearing of Jesus Christ" had a power over the soul which made it "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;" and the most earnest and constant call of apostles and their followers was, "Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly. Even so. Amen." Nor can the Church ever be her true self, or enter into the true spirit of her faith, or rise to the true sublimity of her hope, where this is not the highest object of her deepest desire. For how, indeed, can we regard ourselves as rightly planted upon the apostolic foundation, if we cannot join with heart and soul in this apostolic prayer?

IV. To all this, the apostle yet adds a most devout reference to Christ, and to Christ's declaration concerning himself, the further to confirm the solemn truthfulness of his words, and to incite us to lay the more stress upon them.

Great things, and, to human reason, very improbable things, were upon his mind, and about to be submitted to the Churches. Their importance, and the predisposition on the part of men to

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disregard them, seemed to call for some especial pledge of the likelihood and certainty of their accomplishment. And that pledge he gives by devoutly referring everything to that omniscient, eternal and almighty Being, whose Apocalypse he was commissioned to describe. He invokes the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending,—He who was, and is, and is to come, the Almighty,—as his judge in these utterances, to whom also he leaves the fulfilment of all that had been given him to write. It was as much as to say, if this was not a faithful and honest declaration of his inmost feelings and belief, and a true account of what he had seen and heard, such is the majesty of the Being who is to deal with him for it; and that, if there be any unlikelihoods in these things, such is the character of Him from whom he has received them, and to whom he refers for the power to make good his words.

And how sublime is the majesty of our blessed Redeemer as thus set forth! Never before had he given such an account of himself. He had intimated as much, and permitted his apostles to use language which implied the same. But never till in this Apocalypse had he formally assumed to himself such Divine majesty. He here proclaims Himself to be The Almighty, the very God, the One existing before anything was made, comprehending all things in His own existence, and possessing immensity and eternity. Look a moment at the particulars.

"*I am Alpha and Omega.*" These are the names

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of the letters which begin and end the Greek alphabet. It is the same as if it were said in English, "I am A and Z." That is, our Saviour claims to be what letters and language were meant to be, namely the expression of truth. He is THE WORD—the embodiment of all Divine verities from first to last. God is a Spirit—an invisible, incorporeal, intangible, unapproachable Spirit. But that hidden and unsearchable Mind may be expressed, may let itself forth in comprehensible utterance. And that expression, that utterance of invisible Godhead is Jesus Christ—the Divine Wisdom—the only communication from the absolute to the created.

"*The beginning and the ending.*" This is not found in some of the oldest and best copies of this book. It was, perhaps, introduced merely as an explanation of the clause going before it. It does not seem to convey any additional thought. He is the first, because all things took their beginning from him; and he is the last, because in him shall all things have their consummation. But what follows is unmistakably genuine.

"*Who is, and who was, and who is to come.*" This sublime form of speech is used to describe the Eternal Father; but it belongs equally to the Son. He is the I AM, whose being is the same through all reckonings of time. As the Father exists in all the past, present, and future, eternal and unchangeable; so Christ, who is the express image of the Father, is "the same, yesterday, to-day, and forever." He was with the Father

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before the world was. He is now at the right hand of the Father. And he is to come in the name and the glory of the Father in those eternal administrations which are the joy and hope of his people.

"*The Almighty.*" Than this there is no higher name. It declares the complete and unqualified subjection of all created things to our Lord Jesus Christ. It leaves nothing which is not put under Him. Oh, the adorableness and majesty of our Redeemer! Who could play false in such a presence? What son of Belial may escape righteous retribution in such hands? What untruthfulness can there be in such a Being? What lack for the full performance of all the will and purpose of One with such characteristics! Rather than give way to doubt and unbelief, let us fall down in lowly adoration at his feet, take His truth, and rejoice in Him as our hope and our everlasting consolation.

But, I must conclude these observations for the present. The Apostolic prelude to this solemn book is sufficiently before us to be made of great spiritual profit. Let us see to it that we do not fail to realize that advantage which it is intended and so well fitted to impart. Here is grace and peace from the Triune God spoken for our acceptance; let us see to it that we do not receive the inspired salutation in vain. Here is a glorious celebration of an accomplished absolution, an existing love, and sublime endowments, all made ours in Christ Jesus; let us make sure that our hearts

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are in tune to the same lofty song. Here is an apostolic admonition to direct our most earnest thoughts to the personal return of our Lord, which is to be so dreadful to the unready and so joyous to them that watch and pray; let us make it our business to be properly exercised in that "Behold." Here also we are referred to the ineffable greatness and Divinity of our Redeemer and Judge; and let us beware how we trifle with his word, question his power, or dash ourselves against his Almightiness.

And "unto Him that loves us, and freed us from our sins by his own blood, and hath made us a kingdom—priests unto Him who is his God and Father; to Him be glory and dominion unto the ages. Amen."

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LECTURE THIRD.

THE APOCALYPSE PROPER—FIRST SCENE—JOHN—THE BROTHERHOOD OF BELIEVERS—CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CONFESSION—PATMOS—THE WORLD AND THE CHURCH—CHRISTIAN FREEDOM—THE GREAT VOICE—THE GOLDEN CANDLESTICKS—THE SON OF MAN—HIS CHARACTER IN THIS VISION—DETAILS OF THE DESCRIPTION—MAGNIFICENCE OF THE PICTURE—EFFECT OF IT—DREAD OF THE SPIRITUAL—COMFORTING ASSURANCE OF CHRIST.

REV. CHAP. 1 : 9–17. (Revised Text.)—I, John, your brother and copartner in the tribulation, and the kingdom, and the patient waiting, in Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. I became in Spirit in the Lord's day; and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, ["I am Alpha and Omega," &c., is here without due authority] What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven Churches: to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamos, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.

And I turned about to see the voice that was speaking with me, and, being turned, I saw seven candlesticks [lampstands or lamps] of gold; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks [one] like to the Son of man, clothed in a long garment reaching to the feet, and girt at the breasts with a girdle of gold. His head and his hairs [were] white, as white wool, as snow, and his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet like fine brass glowing with fire as in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters; and he had in his right hand seven stars; and proceeding out of his mouth a sharp two-edged sword; and his countenance as the sun shineth in his strength.

And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not.

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WE now approach the Apocalypse proper. Hitherto we have only been considering superscriptions and prefaces. Henceforward we have to deal with the thing itself.

Those acquainted with the contents of this remarkable book are aware, that it is made up of several distinct scenes or acts. The first gives us the Apocalypse of Christ in his relation to his Churches on earth, and his judgment of them. The second gives us the Apocalypse of Christ in his relation to the Church in heaven, or his glorified Church, and the scenes into which the saints are introduced after they are caught up from the earth. The third gives us the Apocalypse of Christ in his relation to the world, and his administrations of retribution to the nations. And so on, till we see everything settled in the excellencies of the new heavens and the new earth. We have to do now only with the first, which extends to the close of the third chapter. It consists of two leading parts: first, a magnificent vision of the Saviour, with some circumstantial particulars and explanations; and second, seven epistles, descriptive of character, and how it fares in the solemn judgment. It is the first part of this first act that I propose now to consider; that is, THE VISION.

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF IT;

II. THE SUBJECT AND SUBSTANCE OF IT;

III. THE RESULTS OF IT.

Lift up your hearts, then, unto the Lord, the giver of light and grace, that He may enable us rightly to conceive of these important matters.

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The seer of this vision was *John*. At the time of the vision, he was the only remaining apostle, and perhaps the only survivor of those with whom Christ had personally conversed. He was therefore the most interesting and exalted Christian then living upon the earth—a most reverend and venerable man.

But he was as humble and meek as he was high in place. He gives himself no titles. He says nothing of his sublime official relations. It was enough for him to put himself on a level with the common brotherhood of believers. Whatever may be our gifts and stations, we are all one in Christ Jesus. The high and the low, the rich and poor, the bond and free, those who have known the Saviour after the flesh, and those who have seen him only with the eye of faith, are all brethren together, children of one Father, servants of the same Lord, and fellow-heirs to the same hopes and inheritance. He was the inspired teacher of those to whom he was writing. His words were to be to them a rule of faith and life. But, with all, he calls himself simply their "*brother*, and co-partner in tribulation, and in the kingdom, and in the patient waiting, in Christ Jesus."

And in this statement he brings out what were the chief characteristics of the Christian confession in those days; namely, a common brotherhood in Christ, a common suffering for Christ, a common royalty and kingship as yet unrevealed, and a common hopeful and patient waiting for the time of blessed coronation, and joyous entrance with

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the Lord upon the dominion of the world. The same may serve to show in how far our Christianity answers to the Christianity of the Apostles' days, and to assure us that, in so far as these characteristics appear in us, we are the brethren of Apostles, and partakers in the same fellowship with those who saw the miracles, heard the words, and waited about the steps of Him who now reigns in the highest heavens, and are also to reign with Him forever and ever.

John was at the time in exile, upon a lonely and desolate island. But neither seas, nor Alps, nor ages, can sever the bonds by which Christians are united to each other, or to Christ, their Lord. Less than a year ago I passed that island. It is a mere mass of barren rocks, dark in color and cheerless in form. It lies out in the open sea, near the coast of Western Asia Minor. It has neither trees nor rivers, nor any land for cultivation, except some little nooks between the ledges of rocks. There is still a dingy grotto remaining, in which the aged Apostle is said to have lived, and in which he is said to have had this vision. A chapel covers it, hung with lamps kept burning by the monks. He had been banished to this inhospitable place by the persecuting Roman government, not for crimes, but "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." He was the acknowledged head of the witnesses of Jesus, and the great promulgator and defender of the truth as it is in Jesus, and for his zeal and prominence in this, he was dealt with as a felon and an

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outlaw. The unconverted heart always has been, is now, and always will be, at enmity with God, and hence at disagreement with God's truth and people. It cannot endure what is not conformed to its views and tastes, and is full of malice, resentment, and revenge towards everything which holds with God and with Christ. And if the world is at any time at peace, and on good terms with the Church, it is because the Church itself has become debauched, and has descended to a compromise to be at one with the wicked. The nominal Christian and the formalist the world cannot hate, for they are of it, and it will love its own; but the Johns and Pauls must go into banishment, or give their necks to the stateblock.

But the wrath of the wicked does but bring saints the nearer to the choice favors of God. The Patmos of persecuting Rome is to John the door of sublimest communion with heaven. The chains of resentful power may confine the body, but they cannot bind the soul. The Apostle, doomed to the isle of convicts, soars on the wings of prophetic ecstasy, traverses ages, and moves among the most stupendous administrations of the last day. Circumscribed in his natural life, he is lifted to a higher life. Shut out from this world, and estranged from earthly friends, he becomes conversant with one of spiritual realities, and is made to communicate with celestial orders. In solitude secluded, if not in some dungeon immured, he is thrilled with visions and revelations of the Lord, "whose overpowering splendor that

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he might endure, whose great variety that he might remember and record, whose various places of representation that he might be transported to," the very conditions of his existence are transformed, as in the case of Ezekiel on Chebar's banks, and as in the case of Paul caught up to Paradise, and hearing unspeakable words, not knowing whether he was in the body or out of the body. In a word, he was (εν πνευματι) IN SPIRIT —in a condition wholly loosened from the earth— transported by means of the Spirit,—(εν τη κυριακη ἡμερα) INTO THE LORD'S DAY—stationed as a spectator amid the very scenes of the great judgment itself.*

In this state of prophetic exaltation, the first thing that arrested the Apostle's attention was, "*a great voice as of a trumpet.*" When God revealed himself on Mount Sinai, he broke silence with the "voice of a trumpet, exceeding loud." When the service of the temple began in the morning, and the great door was opened, it was at the sound of the trumpet. When the year of Jubilee came round, it was ushered in by the sounding of the silver trumpet. And so when the silence of the tomb is to be broken, and the scattered children of God gathered for their rewards, it shall be with "the voice of the archangel and the trump of God:" "for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." And whilst the sound-

* See First Discourse, pp. 20, 21.

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ing of the great trumpet in this case was intended to fix the attention of the seer, and assure him of the Divinity of the Speaker and of the importance of what was to follow, and to give him his commission with reference to this whole Apocalypse, I cannot disconnect it from the sounding of that very trump by which the blessed Lord, in the great day, will arouse, and call together his scattered saints, and announce to them their everlasting Jubilee. It summoned the Apostle, and it summons us, to the contemplation of the fact, that the great Apocalypse of our Saviour is to be preceded with the sound of "a great voice as of a trumpet." The godless world may not hear that voice; but Apostles shall hear it; and all who have place with them in the blessed brotherhood of suffering and patient waiting for Christ, whom John here represents, shall hear it; and they shall be transfigured when they hear it; and mount up with wings like eagles to the open presence of their Lord.

The instant John turned to "see the voice that spake with" him, he "saw seven golden candlesticks (or lampstands), and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like to the Son of man." From the conclusion of the chapter, we learn that these "seven candlesticks are the seven Churches." In all languages, truth and knowledge are likened to light. The Psalmist speaks of God's word as a lamp to his feet and a light unto his path. And so the Churches are the lampstands, or light-bearers. They have no light in them.

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selves, but they hold forth and diffuse the light which they have from the oil of grace and the fire of the Spirit. Each Christian is a lighted candle. And all God's children are described as "lights in the world, holding forth the word of life." It is therefore a most significant image by which the communities of saints are here set forth. They are as so many lampstands of God's light and truth in a world of darkness; and as such Christ deals with them.

These lampstands are *gold*—composed of the costliest, the most precious, the most glorious, the royal, the *sacred* metal. A saint is an excellent, a glorious, a royal, in some sense a sacred being; and a congregation of Christians is altogether the most precious thing on earth. It is the pure gold of the world.

Seven is the number of completeness. It here designates the whole Christian body, of all times and all places.

The "one like unto the Son of man," is Christ himself. He is described in the same way in the Psalms, in the visions of Daniel, and in his own discourses concerning himself. It is a form of speech meant to set forth the essential importance and prominence of the human element of the Saviour's character; for it is in his human nature that his redemption work is conducted, and his victories achieved. It is as the Son of man that he came, lived, suffered and died. It was as the Son of man that he rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and will come again, judge the world,

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and set up his glorious everlasting rule. But he is not to be conceived of as nothing but a man. He is "one *like* unto the Son of man." This word *like* sets us upon the scent of something higher than humanity, though conditioned as humanity, and having everything in common with it. Thus we read of him as "made in the likeness of men," —"in all respects made like unto his brethren." This assumption of likeness to man, presupposes some modification of what properly is not human. And so we also read of him as The Word made flesh—God manifested in the flesh—the Son of God condescending to be the Son of man,—not in appearance only, but in literal reality; not for certain acts of humiliation only, but for glory and dominion as well; not temporarily only, till a few facts are accomplished, then to return to what he was before the marvellous process began, but forever,—as well throughout the unending duration of the results achieved as in the immediate mysteries of the passion which laid the foundation of these results. It is a mischievous error to suppose that the Son of God's assumption of human nature was only for the immediate private end of redeeming fallen man—a mere phenomenon in Godhead's ever busy administration—a simple act the like of which may have been before, or may be again. It is the abiding miracle of eternity. It is, and was meant to be, a thing of abiding permanence, the eternal continuity of which is as vital to the everlasting future of the redeemed, and the great purposes of God, as the continuity

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of creative power is to the preservation of the universe. To deny this, is to strip the Gospel of its chief glory, and to start on a path of heretical peril almost sure to end in utter shipwreck of the faith. Christ is "one like unto the Son of man," that is Godhead embodied in humanity, not only for what has transpired in the past, or is going on at present, or is to be enacted at the judgment, but also for the whole eternity of administrations appertaining to the saints, and to the race. And this Divine man is the great subject of this vision, especially in his relation to the Churches. John beholds him "in the midst of the seven candlesticks," and "the seven candlesticks are the seven Churches."

Some have given out that it is simply in his character of *Priest*, that the Saviour appears in this vision. He is indeed a priest, even our great High Priest that has passed into the heavens; but this is not his only character, nor expressive of his entire relation to the Churches. Neither is it the only or even the chief aspect in which he comes before us in this vision. There is no mitre, no ephod, no breastplate, no censer, no blood. The garment reaching down to the feet is as distinctive of royal dignity as of sacerdotal functions, if not more so. The girdle might appear to be priestly; but it is *gold*, all gold, indicative of royalty; whilst the proper priestly girdle was not gold, but simply wrought and interwoven with gold. He also wields a sword, which is another mark of sovereignty and judicial power, which does not belong to the

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sacerdotal office, albeit that sword proceeds from his mouth. This ought to satisfy us that the character which Christ bears in this vision is something more than a Priest. There is royalty and magistracy, as well as priesthood. We here have to do with the Lord and Judge of the Churches. The throne is yet in the background, but the royal majesty is manifest. As Judge of the world, more is to be shown hereafter; but here he appears as Judge of the Churches. He is a Priest, but a Priest invested with royal prerogatives, and come forth to pronounce judgment upon the candlesticks which he attends. In a word, as this vision, and the epistles which follow it, have respect to the entire Church from the days of the Apostle on to the resurrection, grasped in a single view, so it is Christ's whole relation to that Church, with special reference to his judgment of it, that is here presented to our contemplation.

Behold, then, O man, thy Lord and Judge.

1. He is "*in the midst of the seven candlesticks.*" When he left the world, he said to his disciples, "Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." And lest the promise should be mistaken as belonging to ministers alone, he gave the still further assurance, that where two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is, in the midst of them. I cannot explain to you the method of this presence. Even in things with which we are familiar, there is mystery attaching to what we call *presence*. We speak of a man as present in a room, and of what transpires in that

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room as taking place in his presence. But how is he present beyond the immediate space occupied by his body? That his presence extends beyond the few feet marked by the outlines of his physical frame, is a fact which we all feel and realize; but how it is so, we cannot so easily explain. I am present in this audience-chamber. I am as much present to those in the remotest pews, as to those who are in the nearest. And yet, my body is present only in these few feet within the pulpit. Suppose, then, you were to conceive of me as suddenly exalted into a majesty and glory like that of Jesus. Imagine these walls widened out in corresponding proportion. Fancy everything now on the scale of the earthly and human expanded to the scale of the heavenly and glorified. And it may aid you somewhat in conceiving how Christ can be present with all his Churches, and yet occupy a definite space in heaven. The whole world is not as great to him as an ordinary room to us. And if my presence can fill this Church, whilst I keep my place in this pulpit, his presence can certainly fill all his Churches, even from his mysterious celestial location at the right hand of the Father. This, however, is certain, that he is, in some sort, in all his Churches. There is not a member which he does not see and know. There is not a Christian service held, of which we are not authorized to say, The Lord is there. He is in his Churches, not only by his word, by his sacraments, by his ministers, by his authority, power and Spirit; but he is there himself, as the Son of

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man. He is present as Priest, as Lord, as Judge; and hence in his own proper person, as the God-man. There is another, nearer, and more manifest presence, to be realized when he shall come again; but not more true or real than that by which he is even now in the midst of us. Were these dull, dim senses of ours but unlocked and energized, after the style of that transformation for which the saints are taught to look, we would see our Saviour, present to-night, as really as John saw him "walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." It is a solemn and startling thought; but it is true.

2. "*Clothed with a garment reaching to the feet, and girt at the breasts with a girdle of gold.*" In former times, and to this day in some sections of the world, the long trailing robe is the token of dignity and honor. Thus, in Isaiah's vision of the Lord upon his throne, he speaks of just such a robe, the train or skirts of which filled the temple. Righteousness is indicated by a garment. The priestly dignity was marked by a robe of this kind, though somewhat shorter, and hung around the skirt with pomegranates and bells. The high officer who drew the marks of distinction in Ezekiel's vision of the great slaughter was also similarly attired. One of those mighty personages with whom Daniel dealt in his heavenly visions was clad in this way, and also girded with gold, though about his *loins*, indicative of service, and not about *the breasts*, as indicative of privilege and superior dignity. If, then, we are to take this attire of the

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Son of man as symbolical, as commentators generally have taken it, it must describe personal qualities, official dignity, and celestial majesty, at which we may well bow down in the deepest reverence.

But why not also take it literally? There is no such thing as nakedness in heaven. Clothing and raiment enter into all the descriptions we have of the saints in glory. They have robes, they have crowns, they have wedding-garments. Christ is not naked; and when we see him, it will not be in a state of divesture and nudity. He has his appropriate clothing for every scene of his grand administrations. And when we have this minute account of his attire, why should we strive to explain it away as mere figure and symbol? Was it not the literal Son of man whom John saw? Did he not have explained to him what was mystical, leaving this to be taken just as it was seen? For my own part, I believe that our blessed Lord is at this moment arrayed just as he is here described, and that this is the dress in which he will deal with the Churches, and be seen of the saints, when the judgment begins. But everything outward in heaven is in exact correspondence with the inward. Official robes are confined to official dignities, and whatever the attire of Christ indicates, that he is. Everything there is reality. The garments are real, and that with which they connect is real. There will be no cloak there for unrighteousness, and no saints in tatters, or kings in rags, or plebeians in royal array. All

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are in dress what they are in reality. Christ in the priestly robe, is a priest;—in the royal dress, is a king;—in judicial attire, is a judge. And in the words before us, we have all these dignities in one, and each contributing to express the sublime power, majesty and glory of that great Lord and Saviour with whom we have to do.

3. And "*his head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow.*" The Scriptures tell us, that "the hoary head is a crown of glory." The same appears in Daniel's vision of "The Ancient of Days, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool." Many have taken these white hairs as symbolic of the Godhead of Christ. Pure, undistributed light certainly is the representative of Deity. Paul also says, "The head of Christ is God." White hairs connect with fatherhood, and patriarchal dignity; and "with the ancient is wisdom." But I take this peculiarity as I take the robe and the golden girdle. It belongs to the glory and beauty in which our Lord now appears, and will appear to his saints, when he shall call them to himself. It connects indeed with his eternal Deity, but also with his human majesty, and the sublime reverence that appertains to him as a man. He is the everlasting Father, as well as the Prince of Peace. He is the second Adam, with all the patriarchal honor and dignity which would by this time attach to the first, if he had never sinned.

4. "*And his eyes were as a flame of fire.*" Here is intelligence; burning, all-penetrating intelli-

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gence. Here is power to read secrets, to bring hidden things to light, to warm and search all hearts at a single glance. And all this is expressed in the very aspect of our Lord. It is given as one of the marks of Cæsar's greatness, that he had fiery eyes—a penetrating, warming, revealing glance—a look which enemies and dissemblers could not stand. Christ is the sublime and the almighty Cæsar of the Church. He trieth the hearts and reins. "His eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men." "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." The light of the human eye is from without, and shifts its focal point as the rays happen to fall on it; but the light in the eye of Christ is from the Divinity within, and streams forth with steady and all-penetrating sharpness, as well in the darkness as in the day, into the soul as well as upon the body. But his sharp look is one of inspiring warmth to the good, as well as of discomfiting and consuming terror to the hypocritical and the godless. Will you believe it, my friends, that this is the look which is upon you, and which is to try you in the great day! Well may we pray the prayer of David: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any evil way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

5. "*And his feet* [*were*] *like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.*" He once said, through

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Isaiah, "I will make the place of my feet glorious." But here we have the feet themselves, those feet with which he is to tread down the wicked; and the description corresponds with the rest of the picture. Christ is all-glorious, even to his feet. They are like *glowing brass*—like brass in the fire heated unto whiteness. The glory of this metal, in such a state, is almost insufferable to the human gaze. It presents an image of pureness which is terrible. And it is upon these feet of dreadful holiness that our Lord walks among the Churches, and shall tread down all abominations, and crush Antichrist, and Satan, and all who unhappily set aside his authority and his claims. Beautiful are those feet to them that love him, but terrible and consuming to those who shall be trodden by them.

6. "*And his voice as the sound of many waters.*" How could it be otherwise, considering how he is speaking and uttering himself throughout all his Churches, and all the world, from the beginning until now, and on to the day of his coming? Or, leaving this out of the question, how could it be otherwise, considering that the day is approaching when "all that are in the graves shall hear *the voice* of the Son of man, and they that hear shall live?" But this majesty and power of voice is elsewhere more especially referred to the dreadfulness of Christ toward his faithless servants and enemies. It is particularly characteristic of his rebukes. His word came to Jeremiah, saying, "Say unto them, The Lord shall roar from on high,

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and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation; he shall give a shout, as they that tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth, for the Lord hath a controversy with the nations; he will plead with all flesh; he will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the Lord." But whether for the overthrow of his enemies or the salvation of his people, "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty." It scattereth the proud, and it giveth joy and confidence to the lowly.

7. "*And he had in his right hand seven stars.*" "The seven stars are the angels (ministers) of the seven Churches," and, as such, they are distinct from the candlesticks. Christ walks among the candlesticks, but he holds these ministers in his right hand. The democratic idea of Church organization, which makes all power proceed from the members, and makes the ministerial position nothing more than what inheres in every Christian, is thus scattered to the winds. Ministers have relations to Christ and to the Church, which ordinary Church members have not. They partake directly of Christ's authority, and are responsible directly to him, and are upheld by his right hand, beyond the power of men or angels to displace them. What a lesson for ministers, as to the holiness of their office, the solemnity of their responsibilities, the necessity of unswerving fidelity, and the exercise of every confidence in their

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sacred functions. They are in Christ's hand. If they are unfaithful none can deliver them out of that hand; but if true to their position, none can touch them, or quench their light. They shall shine as the stars forever and ever. What a lesson for the people as to the authority of those ministrations which they are so prone to despise. Dealing with the regular ministers of the Churches, you are dealing with the jewels on Christ's right hand. And what a lesson for all as to the Divine majesty and glory of our Lord! The Pauls, and Johns, and Husses, and Luthers, and Cranmers, and Knoxes, and Wesleys, and all the hosts of those who have been teaching and guiding the Churches for these 1800 years, are no more than the rings upon his fingers. But they are jewels to him. He holds them as precious. Disregarded as they may be of men, they are dear to him. He holds them, as a man holds what he most esteems. He holds them, for service now, and for judgment when he cometh. He holds them, for success against the hosts of evil, for glorious honor if they are faithful, and for eternal disgrace if they are not.

8. "*And out of his mouth went a sharp, two-edged sword.*" The sword is the symbol of magistracy and judgment. But this is not a *hand*-sword, but a *word*-sword. Nevertheless, it accords exactly with what Christ has himself said. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Even

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now the word of Christ is all the while absolving, or binding under condemnation, every one to whom it is preached. A certain judicial process inheres in every faithful presentation of the Gospel. It is good news—glad tidings; but there is a sword in it; a sword of double edge; and that a sword of judgment. And all the solemn administrations of the last day are nothing more than the full revelation of this sword-power of Christ's word, cutting asunder the unfaithful servant, and carrying into effect what is now already spoken. The word of God is not an empty utterance. It is "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow." And this potency pertains to the matter of punishment, as well as to the matter of conviction. In the beginning, God spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. The word was potent. And so in the Gospel and the final summing up of this word of Christ. It will carry its own sharp execution into the Church and into the world, into the heavens and into the earth. "By the word of God the heavens were of old, . . but the heavens and the earth which are now *by the same word* are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." It is that word which is described as the instrument of punishment to the impenitent in Pergamos, and to the hosts of the mighty ones whom the great day is to overwhelm in the winepress of the Almighty's

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wrath. And it is that same word which is the sword that shall be bathed in heaven, when its powers shall be shaken, and its hosts fall. Oh, the majesty of Jesus, and the fearfulness of his judgments! Vengeance is his; and he will repay.

9. "*And his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.*" The Churches are *lamps;* the ministers are *stars;* but Christ is the *sun.* He is to the moral world what the sun is to the natural. But let us not consider the description exhausted by its spiritual significations. Christ has a literal face; and that face must have a form and expression. He is not a fiction, but a reality—not a spirit, but a man, with all the features of a man, though it be in a glorified condition. He has a countenance, and that countenance is "as the sun shineth in his strength." Something of this was seen in the mount of transfiguration, when "his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." Something of the same was manifest when he appeared to Saul of Tarsus in "a light above the brightness of the sun." And so glorious and pervading is this light which issues from his face, that in the New Jerusalem there will be neither sun, nor moon, nor lamp, nor any other light, and yet rendered so luminous by his presence, that even the nations on the earth walk in the light of it. And so the lightning brilliancy, which is to flash from one end of heaven to the other at the time of his coming, and the glory which is then to invest him and the whole firma-

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ment, is simply the uncovering or revelation of that blessed light which streams from his sublime person.

Such, then, is the full-drawn picture of our glorious Lord, as he walks among his Churches, and proceeds to pass his solemn judgment upon them. There have not been wanting some to pronounce it grotesque and intolerable. But I cannot so regard it. If a sublimer conception of Divine and glorified humanity, so true to the Saviour's offices and work, ever entered into the imagination of man, I have never seen it, and never heard of it. And when I recall the magnificent portraiture, the human form, walking majestically amid golden furniture, clothed with the garment of royalty, girded with gold, crowned with flowing locks that reflect the light and purity of heaven, having a glance of electric power, feet glowing with the liquid splendor of melted brass, a voice of majesty at which the earth and the heavens shake, the right hand lit with starry jewels, a mouth whose words carry their own execution in them, and a countenance as glorious as the noonday sun;—when I survey such majestic lineaments, and such mighty powers, and hear the possessor of them say: "I am the First and the Last, and THE LIVING ONE; and I was dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever: and I have the keys of death and of hades;"—I say, when I bring all this before me, and try to realize it in my imagination, I am almost overwhelmed with the sublimity of the picture, and with the goodness, and grace, and

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power, and might with which the eternal Father hath invested the person of Jesus Christ. In the Gospels even, I see him mostly as a man of sorrows, persecuted unto death, and laid in the grave, though raised again in vindication of his righteous goodness. But here I see him lifted up to the right hand of power, and clothed with all majesty, that creation's knees might bow at his feet, and creation's tongues confess his greatness and proclaim his praise. Here I see Godhead in manhood, unhumbled and unalloyed by the union; and humanity transformed and exalted to the sphere of the worshipful and Divine; and all, to give greatness to the lowly, and strength to the feeble, and honor to the despised; and to bring the lofty neck to obedience, tear away the masks of falsehood, and enforce the rule of heaven on the earth. I do not wonder at the effect the vision produced upon the exiled apostle as it burst upon him in his lonely solitude.

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead." Had it not been that he was in the Spirit, and sustained by the Spirit, it were hardly too much to suppose that it would have extinguished his life altogether. There is an awe and terror of a spiritual appearance which is indescribable. Job's friend says that when he saw a Spirit, the hair of his flesh stood up. Daniel, who feared not the wrath of a king, nor the lions' den, when he saw the vision, was left without strength in him. So also Ezekiel, and Isaiah, and others of whom we read. God has inwrought into our nature a com-

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mon reverence for a spiritual world. And there is something fearfully prophetic in these irrepressible instincts. They not only argue the existence of a spiritual world, and that we have deep, mysterious and awful connections with it, but also that the veil which covers it is very thin, and destined some day to be withdrawn; and that its withdrawal connects with realities which sinful humanity well may dread.

And if John was so overwhelmed with this vision of the Saviour, on whose bosom he leaned, and with whose power he was so familiar, how will it be with those who know him not, how will it be with us, when the startling trump of God shall make these heavens ring with the tidings of that great Saviour's presence, and these eyes of ours shall meet his eyes, and see him in his glory? Will there be no fainting, falling, swooning, then? Will there be no sinking in the souls of men, no drying up, as it were, of the very fountains of life at the stupendous Apocalypse? Do I not hear the anxious inquiry started in many a heart at the mere thought of it: Alas, alas, how can I behold it and live? But a single utterance made it all right with John; and with that, if you be indeed a Christian, I would have you comfort yourself in view of that awful moment. Jesus said, "*Fear not.*"

Great and dreadful was the glory, and power, and wonder, and majesty which had suddenly opened upon the seer. The trumpet sound, the scene of splendor, the all-revealing look, the voice

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of power, the countenance of blazing light, all commingling, were enough to undo humanity. But the word was *Fear not.* Still more awful scenes were coming. The Churches were to be sifted, the saints were to be crowned, the seals of judgment were to be opened, the days of vengeance were to be revealed, the sun was to be darkened, the moon to be turned to blood, the stars to fall, the hills to be overthrown, the islands to be shaken out of their places, the pit to be opened, the hordes of hell to overrun the apostate nations, the angels to shout from the sky, the martyrs to cry from under the altar, unprecedented plagues to overwhelm the world, the battle of the great day of God Almighty to be fought, the winepress of the wrath of God to be trodden, the places of the wicked to be swept with the besom of destruction, and the fowls to be called together unto the supper of the great God, to eat the flesh of kings, and of captains, and of mighty men, and of multitudes of small and great. But the word was *Fear not.* Thrones were to be set, the dead were to be raised, the heavens and the earth were to be changed, death and hell were to be summoned up for destruction, a city was to come down from God out of heaven, and wonders of power and glory were to be enacted as at the going forth of the words which spoke creation into being. But the word was *Fear not.*

The true Christian is forever safe. If you be in the Spirit, and the Spirit be in you, the life that would otherwise fail you will not fail; the

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fear that would otherwise overwhelm you shall not overwhelm you. In your weakness, Christ will give you strength. In your terror, Christ will be your consolation. In your wild wonderment, his hand will touch, and his gracious words assure you. Only see to it that you are on right terms with him—that you are one of his true people—that you are a brother of John, and a co-partner in the kingdom, and in patient waiting, in Christ Jesus. Having this, you have secured your armor against all the terrors of the Apocalypse. Let us, then, devoutly join in the prayer—

Draw near, O Son of God, draw near,
Us with thy flaming eye behold;
Still in thy church vouchsafe to appear,
And let our candlestick be gold.

Still hold the stars in thy right hand,
And let them in thy lustre glow,
The lights of a benighted land,
The angels of thy church below.

Make good their apostolic boast,
Their high commission let them prove,
Be temples of the Holy Ghost,
And filled with faith, and hope, and love.

Give them an ear to hear thy word;
Thou speakest to the Churches now:
And let all tongues confess their Lord,
Let every knee to Jesus bow.

LECTURE FOURTH.

THE VISION SUPPLEMENTED WITH DECLARATIONS—CHRIST THE FIRST AND THE LAST, THE LIVING ONE, DIED, IS ALIVE, HAS THE KEYS OF DEATH AND HADES—WHAT HE COMMANDED JOHN TO WRITE—THE KEY TO THE ANALYSIS OF THIS BOOK—THE HISTORIC INTERPRETATION—THE MYSTERY OF THE STARS AND CANDLESTICKS—THE WORLD IN WHICH THEY ARE STATIONED.

REV. 1 : 17–20. (Revised Text.)—I am the first and the last, and THE LIVING ONE; and I became dead, and behold, I am living for the ages of the ages; and I have the keys of death and of hades. Write therefore what thou sawest, and what they are, and what shall come to pass after these things; the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest upon my right hand, and of the seven candlesticks of gold. The seven stars are [the] angels of the seven Churches, and the seven candlesticks are [the] seven Churches.

THERE is much of glory and majesty in Christ which cannot be pictured to the eye. Hence the vision which John had of him is supplemented with titles and descriptions, the further to assure his faith, and to deepen our apprehension of the true nature and sublimity of our great Lord and Judge. Our business this evening will be,

I. TO TAKE A BRIEF SURVEY OF THESE SUPPLEMENTARY DECLARATIONS;

II. TO LOOK AT THE DIVINE COMMAND UNDER WHICH THE WRITING OF THE APOCALYPSE WAS ORDERED;

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III. To inquire a little more definitely into the mystery which John was directed to explain.

"*I am the First and the Last.*" This is a form of speech often employed by the Almighty, when about to comfort his people, and to assure their faith. We find it three times in Isaiah, and three times in the Apocalypse; and in every instance used for a like purpose. Its meaning is hardly to be mistaken; and yet it has been mistaken, by some who wished to avoid the doctrine which it teaches, and by others who did not sufficiently weigh it in all its connections. These take it as if the Saviour had said: "I am He who, being the foremost and first in all honor, became the lowest and last in dishonor, sounding the lowest depths of ignominy and shame." That this is true of Christ may readily be admitted. He was, as Artemonius says, "the most excellent, and the most abject." But this is not the truth meant to be expressed in this formula. It does not fall in with the course of thought, or the end for which it is introduced, in this or in any other connection in which it is found. In Isaiah 41 : 4;—45 : 6;—48 : 12;—and in Rev. 22 : 13;—it is plainly intended to express what appertains exclusively to the divine and the eternal; and it must be so taken here. It is not a mere statement of the extent of Christ's humiliation, from the estate of one first in honor to the estate of one lowest in disgrace; but a formula which sets forth the eter-

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nity of God, and his high superiority to all created things. Creation had a beginning; but God was first, before creation, without beginning, himself the beginner. All created things are continually changing, and each particular style or order is for some end beyond itself; but God is last, abiding when all these changes have been wrought, and surviving every consummation, himself the end. As appropriated by Christ, it asserts his proper and eternal Deity, and his real participation in all that is characteristic of Godhead. It assigns him an existence before creation, and after all consummations, himself the beginner and the consummator. Before him none was, for he "was in the beginning with God;" and after him none shall be. He is the first, in that all things are from him; and the last, in that all things are to him and for him. The beginning was made from him, and everything will be consummated by him and in him. The first motion of the absolute, eternal, unapproachable Godhead toward outwardness of expression, calling the worlds into existence, and organizing all created things, was this Christ and Son of God; and that to which all creation, providence and grace is ordered and tending, and in which all is to have, not a cessation of existence, but the fulfilment of its ultimate purpose and accomplishment, bodying forth all the harmony, richness, beauty, glory and perfection of every divine thought and intent, is nothing more nor less than the conformation of all things to, and the setting out of the unspeakable fulness

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of, this self-same Christ and Son of God. It is therefore a formula spanning the nature and philosophy of Godhead, in all his works, from the unsearchable depths of the eternal past, to the equally unsearchable depths of the eternal future, showing all to be from Christ, and by Christ, and to Christ, originating in him, perpetuated through all successions of change by him, and with their final consummation standing in and embodying his fulness. It is the title which Jehovah takes where he declares his eternal and universal creatorship, and his infinite superiority over all other beings: "Hearken unto me, O Judah, and Israel my called; I am he, I am the First, I also am the Last. Mine hand hath laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens." And when Jesus appropriates this description to himself, he identifies himself with the eternal Creator, and with the emphatic *I*, claims to himself what is distinctive of Godhead. Nor is he a whit less than God, though he did become man, and is now joined forever to a human nature.

"And The Living One."* This is another title of Deity. It refers not to mere manifested life, but to life inherent and underived. The words do not relate simply to the fact of Christ's having lived in the flesh, but to his possession of

* "'Ο ζῶν expresses not so much that He, the Speaker, 'lived,' as that He was 'The Living One,' the Life (Jno. 1 : 4; 14 : 16), αὐτοζωή, having life in Himself, and the fountain and source of life to others."—*Trench on the Seven Epistles*, p. 70.

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a deeper and self-existing life, of which that was only one manifestation. The life here claimed by Christ is life coeval with the creation of the world, and which had an eternal subsistence with the Father before the world was. John tells us that in Christ was life, and that that life was the same eternal life which was with the Father. (1 Jno. 1 : 1, 2.) All mere creatures are dying ones, except as their being is sustained by him who gave it; but God is the Living One, as life in him is self-existent. It needs no other to uphold it. It came from none, and it is sustained by none, but itself. Immortality may be imparted to creatures, but God only *hath* it in and of himself. And when Christ declares himself to be THE LIVING ONE, he claims and asserts a consubstantiality with the self-existent God, from whom all things proceed, and on whom all creatures depend.

And yet he "*became dead.*" It is impossible for our dull powers to penetrate the depths of these divine mysteries. When the ancient sage was asked to give a definition of God, he said, God is a circle, whose centre is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere. He had expressed the truth, but under very contradictory conceptions. God is truly in every particular place, and yet beyond all place at the same time. He is in every place entire, as a centre, and yet he is bounded by no lines of limitation. Neither is he diffused, or scattered in parcels here and there, partly at one place and partly at another. This is true, but it is very confusing to our feeble com-

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prehension. And we have like difficulty in explaining how Godhead is to be found, as in the Father, so in the Son, or how the self-existent and eternal could yet become dead. We are on safe and sure ground when we assert that God is ever-living, self-existent, and eternal; and that the same is true of the Christ and Son of God; and yet, it is equally true and certain, that this same Christ and Son of God, in that manifestation of his eternal life which he lived in human flesh, also died—as we say in the Creed, "*was crucified, dead, and buried.*" He who had life within himself from all eternity, he who was made the depository of all outward life before any creature was formed, became a dead person. All this, indeed, was accomplished in the flesh, in the man Christ Jesus; but it was that flesh and manhood to which The Living One was conjoined in one person. It is the same *I* who proclaims himself the First and the Last, and The Living One, who says that HE became dead. Some tell us that what was of the Divine substance in Christ withdrew when he died; this I cannot admit. It was

> — "God the mighty Maker died
> For man the creature's sin."

If it was not so, then I am at loss to know what atoning power there could be in his death more than in that of any martyr to the truth. And yet there was no suspension of the continuity of that which is eternal and ever-living. That there was a certain emptying of himself on the part of Christ

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in his humiliation and death is taught us. And that there was a certain quitting of the use and claim of his Godhood in his incarnation and submission to death—a certain putting of himself out of self-existing life in order to receive it again from the Father,—we must believe. But we must at the same time hold, that it was somehow The Living One that became dead, and the eternal life that had share in the mysterious immolation, giving virtue to the sacrifice, and imparting itself through it.

But this becoming dead is specially connected, and that with a note of exclamation, with another announcement, that this same who became dead is *alive, and living for the age of the ages.* The state of death was but for an instant, and was succeeded by a resurrection, which put him again in the possession and exercise of the attributes of the ever-living. He laid down his life that he might take it again, and thus gave the more brilliant proof that he is The Living One. The most successfully to show that the distinction belongs to one man to accomplish what no other man can accomplish, is to have the experiment made by each. "So God, in order to prove that Christ, and he alone, is The Living One, doth permit the many to come under the dominion of death; and having thus proved that no man is The Living One, he then bringeth Christ into the same controversy with death, who, by overcoming it, doth prove himself the Prince of Life, and the Master

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of Death; so that he could say, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life.' By being the Resurrection, he is proved to be the Life. He is not the Life in consequence of the resurrection, but in antecedence of it. The resurrection proves him to be that being in whom it had pleased God that it should reside as in an invincible fortress, which was tried and proved to be death-proof."*

Hence the further proclamation, "*and I have the keys of death and of hades.*' † It is hardly possible that the Saviour meant to represent death as a *place.* It is, however, a power, and a fearful power, locking up and holding tight all who come under its sway. What millions have gone down beneath that power, and are now held by it! Every acre of the earth is full of them, and the bottom of every sea. I have seen their grim skeletons on mountain summits, eight thousand two hundred feet above the level of the sea; and I have walked upon their ashes more than a thousand feet below that level. And from far deeper depths to still more elevated heights, on all the slopes and hillsides, and in all the fields and valleys of the earth, death's victims lie in fetters of

* Irving *in loc.*

† "So all the best MSS. and Versions have it, while the reading of our Translation inverts the natural and logical order; for it is death which peoples hell or hades; it is a king of death who makes possible a kingdom of the dead (6 : 8; 20 : 13, 14); for by hell, or hades, this invisible kingdom or dominion of the dead is intended, and that in all its extent, not merely in one dark province of it, the region assigned to the lost."—Trench *in loc.*

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darkness, silence and dust. Even on the life-powers of the Son of God were these manacles made fast. But by him they were also opened; for he hath the keys of death.

And as death holds the bodies of men, so hades holds their souls. There is an under world, intermediate between death and the resurrection, and the souls of all the dead are in that world, the good in rest and hope, and the wicked in unrest and fearful awaiting of judgment. I know not where it is, nor what it is. I only know that it is Paradise for the righteous, and anything but Paradise to all others—that all who die are retained there, shut in and locked up till the time of the fulfilment of this Apocalypse. It was into this "hell" that the soul of Christ descended when he expired, and where it would be retained till now, had he not been master of the keys, by which he opened its gates, and came forth to make this glorious declaration to his people. But the new cords of the Philistines could not tie down the strength of Samson, nor the gates of Gaza retain him in their custody. Whilst his enemies were shouting against him, the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax when touched with fire, and the doors of the gates that were shut upon him, and their very posts, his shoulders bore away in everlasting triumph.

And those keys and potencies are still in his possession, and wielded by him. He giveth persons to death and hades, and retains them there,

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as he will, and he brings them forth again at his pleasure, as he did the nobleman's daughter, the widow's son, and Mary's brother. When he arose, he not only brought his own soul forth, and his own body from the grave, but likewise those of other saints, levying tribute on those mysterious realms, as now their conqueror, and henceforth their Lord. And there is no hell so deep but he can open it, and thrust his enemies in, and lock it that they may never more come out. Nor is there any disability of the saints by reason of death or hades, nor any doors or bands locked upon them in their state of separation from the body, but he has the key to turn back the dingy bolts and set all such prisoners free. And as he said of old, "O death, I will be thy plague: O grave, I will be thy destruction;" the time is coming when he will apply those keys, and leave not a soul or body more in death or hades which shall not be brought forth in the power of his resurrection.

Some tell us that this was all spoken to John in his affright, that he might not be overwhelmed with his fears. But I cannot see how such grand and overpowering declarations of the majesty of Christ could add to the strength and confidence of a man already sinking and next thing to dead on account of the glory he was called to contemplate. It was the "Fear not," and the strength-imparting touch, that were for John's special benefit; but what is said more than that is the filling out of the picture on which the apostle had just been

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gazing, and which he could not perhaps have endured to hear from Christ's own lips, but for this "Fear not," and assuring touch. No, no; let us not thus miss the great meaning of the Scriptures. It was not John's particular comfort, but the world's enlightenment, that was intended by these overwhelming proclamations. What the Saviour here utters in the terrified apostle's ears, the same as what had just passed before the apostle's astonished eyes, relates to the grand portraiture of Christ, as he now stands related to his churches and ministers, and as he will presently come to judge them. He is the First, and the Last, and The Living One. He is the same who died on Calvary's cross a sacrifice for our sins, and descended into hell as the vanquisher of all the dominions of darkness. Though once dead, and an inmate of hades, he is alive now for all the ages of ages. In this eternal life, which he had from all eternity, he walks among his people, locking and unlocking death and hades, disposing of souls and bodies as to him seems best, and keeping them in his own power for that Apocalypse and administration which it is the office of this book to describe. This is the Christ, in those great attributes, acts and offices, on whom the Churches are built, in whom our faith and hopes as Christians stand, and with whom we have to do as our Lord and Judge.

II. Hence the command, not with reference specifically to the apostle's fears, but with refer-

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ence to the seven Churches, "*Write* (οὖν)* *therefore what thou sawest, and what they are, and what shall come to pass after these things.*"

Here, then, is the great starting-point, and grand foundation of this book, and the key to its true analysis. Assuming all the facts of the Gospel history,—the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ,—as accomplished; the Churches fully organized and equipped; the new dispensation established and in working order; the Apocalypse starts with a presentation of the character, titles, and administrations of our risen and glorified Lord in relation to the Churches, and the dispensation as then inaugurated. This first vision, and the proclamations and explanations connected with it, accordingly spans the whole interval from the time John wrote to the end of the dispensation, the outlines of which it sets forth. Christ is not one thing for one age and country, and another thing for another age and country. What he was then, and the characteristics and relations in which he then appeared, are those in which he now is to be contemplated, and in which he will continue until the entire

* "It is certainly a piece of carelessness on the part of our translators to have omitted, which none of the previous translators had done, the οὖν (*therefore*), about the right of which to a place in the text no question has ever been made. With what intention the illative particle is used is perhaps best referred to what goes immediately before: Seeing that I am this mighty One, the first and the last, who was dead and am alive, do thou therefore write; for the things declared by me are all steadfast and sure."—Trench *in loc.*

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economy reaches its consummation. And what he utters in the seven epistles is his judgment of the Church, his mind and decision with reference to it, not only as it then existed, but in its whole universality, and entire continuity, and multiform membership, from the commencement to the consummation, including the portion assigned to each and all when he comes.

Taking in, then, all that John saw and heard in his first vision, together with what he was commanded to write, we are carried down to the end of the third chapter. Everything to that point is received from one scene of observation, and holds together as belonging to one and the same order of things. From the same standpoint he sees and hears and writes it all. It is the same glorious Saviour that is first seen, then heard in the announcements concerning himself, in the explanations of what had been seen, and in the seven addresses to the seven Churches. From the first sound of the trumpet voice with which the Apocalypse begins, to the last "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches," we find no break, no change, in the speaker, in the position of the seer, in the outlines of the picture, or in the course of the communications made. It is all ONE, cohering in all the parts, touching only the same subjects, and finishing up in a clean and perfect conclusion. What follows introduces us to quite other scenes, other characteristics, and other administrations. There is no coming back again to this after it is once left.

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We then read no more of the Churches, or of Christ among the candlesticks. There is not anything of the order set forth in this first section after the third chapter. As perfect as the unity of everything up to the conclusion of the seven epistles, is the diverseness from it of everything that comes after.

Whatsoever then is signified by this vision of Christ among the candlesticks, its entire career is embraced. If it means the Church, it is the entire Church to its end in this world. If it is the present dispensation, it is that dispensation to its close. And if it be something else, it is that something to the conclusion of its history. This I consider important, and settled by the facts in the case. The whole character of the vision shows that it is not fragmentary or sectional, but complete. There is much coming after it, but the subject is no longer the same, and all the administrations are of a different order. What it sets forth is, therefore, the whole of it.

And with this point fixed, there is another equally important, which this command makes clear. As this vision embraces the entire career of that to which it refers, and stretches to the very end of its history, so what follows does not commence till what is signified by this first vision is accomplished. What there is more than was seen and heard in this instance, and in the accompanying explanations, is only to "come to pass *after these things*." In other words, the things presented are as consecutive in their fulfilment as

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in John's visions of them. What is contained in the first three chapters must run out and end, before what is contained in the subsequent chapters can begin. So that if we can ascertain what order of things that is which is set forth in the first vision, and whether it has run its course or still holds, we are in a position to know exactly whether what is to "come to pass after these things" is still future or not.

What have we then by which to identify what is contained in the first vision? Fortunately, the Saviour has not left us in uncertainty. His command to John was not only to write what he had seen, but also "*what they are.*" Nor was John unfaithful to the charge. He has written "what they are;" and we have the explanation in Christ's own words. "*The seven stars are* [*the*] *angels of the seven Churches, and the seven candlesticks are* [*the*] *seven Churches.*" Do you ask what Churches? The answer is, the Churches existing at the time of the vision. Not Churches in heaven, but Churches on the earth. Their very names and localities are given. So far, then, we are on solid ground. The vision is that of Christ in relation to his Churches on earth, or that economy of things which we call the Christian dispensation, which had come into full and settled force and sway at the time John wrote, and which exists now precisely as it existed then. There have been changes, but not in the laws of the dispensation, or in Christ's offices, relations, and administrations under it, or in it. We cannot, there-

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fore, be mistaken. It is *the present Church, or or der of things with respect to the Church*, which is the subject of this vision. And as the vision includes the whole course of that to which it relates, the present order, so far as respects the Church on earth, must wind up and close, before one particle of this book, beyond the third chapter, in any full and proper sense, can be fulfilled. And until people come to see and admit this, they will try in vain to understand or interpret this book.

Some maintain that we are now living under the sixth vial, and that nearly everything up to the eighteenth chapter has already been fulfilled. Nor will I dispute that there is a sense, dim and inchoate, in which this is true. Prophecy, in its fulfilment, is made up of several concentric circles, blended in the same general picture. It is said that history is continually repeating itself. Much truer is this of prophecy. But each fulfilment is in a higher fulness, till the last sums up all. There is but one proper and ultimate literal fulfilment of any prophecy; but, in anticipation of that there are typical and precursory fulfilments—preliminary rehearsals in advance of the grand performance. We can accordingly trace out in history a very interesting but not always distinct correspondence to what is contained in the first eighteen chapters of this book. But if that were the true and only fulfilment, so much learning and acquaintance with history would be necessary in order to track it through the multiplicity and complication of human events, that it

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must needs remain an uncertain and second-hand thing to the great body of the Lord's people. I look then for another, simpler, more direct and easier understood fulfilment.

It has been said that the way for a missionary to approach a non-christian population is to "carry his Bible in one hand and Gibbon in the other, to show out of the pages of an infidel historian how exactly the prophets have up to the present time been fulfilled." But it will require more evidence than I have yet seen, to convince me that it is necessary to take men through the school of the historian, whether skeptic or not, in order to teach them the truth of Christianity, or the meaning of the prophets. The Scriptures are self-demonstrative and self-explanatory, if men will only read them as they are written, and let them speak for themselves. Valuable as history is, and much as may be made of Gibbon, we need neither of them to get at the true meaning of the Apocalypse. The early Christians had them not, and yet understood this book better than all the hundreds of learned commentators who think to verify their interpretations out of Gibbon and history. In other words, the exclusively historic school of interpreters, as things appear to me, do but darken and obscure this book with learned rubbish, and lend their influence to the mischievous notion that it is a book of wild and grotesque fables, and uncertain riddles, which it is wisdom, greatness and piety in a man never to touch.

Whilst, then, I admit that these predictions

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may have had a dim, imperfect, but oft scarcely traceable fulfilment in the past, I am firmly convinced that the true and proper fulfilment of everything beyond the third chapter is to take place only after the Church has run its course, completed its history, and received its judgment. We are elsewhere told that "judgment must *begin* at the house of God." (1 Pet. 4 : 17.) If that be true, then the judgment of the world is something subsequent, a judgment which takes place *after* the judgment of the Church. The Seals, Trumpets, and Vials, therefore, must be future, as the judgment of the world is future; for it is the judgment of the world that they foreshow. Read the Apocalypse in this view, and you will find it a new book to you, luminous and precious, which needs no infidel Gibbon to explain it, or to prove it to be of God.

III. Look we now a little more particularly into the mystery which John was directed to explain, and the explanation given—the mystery of the seven stars upon Christ's right hand, and of the seven candlesticks of gold.

In the language of Scripture, a "mystery" is something which man is capable of knowing, but can only know when it is revealed. So here, it is not beyond the range of our understanding to take in what these stars and candlesticks represent; but we know what they represent, not from our own wisdom or searching, but through God's revelation. *He tells us* that "the seven stars are [the] angels of the seven Churches, and the seven

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candlesticks are [the] seven Churches," and a child at once understands what no sage could otherwise have known.

You will notice also that there is nothing in this vision to which the word *mystery* is applied, but the stars and the candlesticks. Everything else is its own explanation; that is, it is literal, and to be taken as it is written. The stars and candlesticks are symbolic, and stand for something which could not otherwise so well be fitted to the picture; but only these. We are thus furnished with several very important hints of interpretation. One is, that when the Scriptures employ symbols they tell you so. Another is, that where no indication to the contrary is given, we must interpret according to the letter. Another is, that what is symbolic and mysterious must have the mystery revealed to be correctly understood, and that what is revealed is no longer a mystery. This book, then, is not a book of symbols, as some speak. It is a book of *revelations*, as its own title declares; and revelations are not mysteries. Mystery and Apocalypse are correlative terms. (Rom. 16 : 25.) The one is the lifting off of the chief peculiarity of the other. We find mysteries or symbols in this book, but only exceptionally, and always accompanied with the proper note of indication, and the necessary ἀποκαλυψις, or unveiling of what is meant.

The stars are mentioned first and have the most conspicuous place. They are the angels of the Churches. Stars are frequently employed as re-

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presentative of lordship and authority, if not in its centre, yet in its distributions aroun l the centre. Symbolically they indicate high official place. They here denote the very highest officers of the individual Churches. They are called *angels*, and hence some have argued for an order of superhuman creatures. But the word *angel* is more descriptive of office than of nature. It means a *messenger*, one invested with a special commission. It can apply as well to men as to celestial orders. (Hag. 1 : 13; Mal. 2 : 7; 3 : 1.) And that it is here meant to apply to *men*, I gather from the delinquencies which are subsequently laid to the charge of some of these angels, and from the utter silence of the Scriptures with reference to any arrangement putting the Churches under the charge and instruction of heavenly beings. Some of the holy angels must be very naughty at times, and the ministers and Churches in very strange ignorance concerning an important part of their allegiance, or these mystic stars are but men of like passions with ourselves,—nothing more nor less than *ministers* in charge of the Churches; not only of the Churches named, but of all Churches in every age.

They are *stars* because they are illuminators, and because they are heads and leaders of the flocks over which the Holy Ghost hath placed them. They are *angels* or messengers, because God hath sent them, and made them his representatives, the guardians of his Churches, and the stewards of his mysteries. They are ambassa-

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dors for Christ, as though God did beseech by them. They are, for the purposes of their office, "in Christ's stead." (2 Cor. 5 : 20.) In Daniel we read of heavenly angels, guardians of *nations*, and communicating with men in God's name; and here we have earthly angels, guardians of *Churches*, set and authorized to exercise their ministry in the name of Christ.

Nor is it only *bishops*, in the modern sense of that term, as some have argued, that we are to understand by these angels. They are *overseers* indeed, but not of sees consisting of many distinct churches. There was just one angel for one Church, not one angel for the seven Churches; and so each angel was simply the pastor in charge of his particular Church.

Upon the dignity and importance of this office I need not dwell. That is manifest in the fact that it stands foremost in this Revelation of Jesus Christ. "And well is it entitled to that pre-eminence, for without the ordinance of preaching there would be no Church; and without a Church there would be no Christian kingdom; and without a Christian Church and kingdom there would be no apostacy, no beast, no false prophet: so that the whole substance of this book, the whole drama of God's providence therein, doth derive itself out of the office of the preacher of the word, the angel, the sent one of Christ, the Christian pastor."*

* Irving *in loc.*

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"*And the seven candlesticks are* [*the*] *seven Churches.*" I have already sufficiently remarked upon the aptness of this symbol. If the ministers are *lightgivers*, the congregations are *lightbearers*—the organization for upholding the light. Hence the Church is elsewhere described as "the pillar and ground of the truth." We must have Churches as well as ministers. This is the Divine order and constitution. "God hath set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. There are many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary." (1 Cor. 12: 18–22.) Yea, the whole Church, Christ the Head, the stars on his right hand, and the entire membership of believers clustered around them, are but one great mystic candlestick, for setting and holding forth the great light of salvation; which saves them that believe, and judges and condemns the world that lieth in unbelief and sin.

The number of these angels and Churches is *seven*. I must reserve for another occasion what I have to say upon the meaning of these numbers. There is a sacred arithmetic, as well as sacred persons, places, and times. Numbers in the Scriptures are as significant as words. They are as much a part of the Apocalypse as anything else. And there is as much resting upon them, as upon any other class of particulars contained in this

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book; as we shall see when we come to consider them. There were more Churches than these seven in existence when John received this commission; and some of more prominent standing than several of those named. But the number was fixed at *seven*, no more and no less, and to these particular seven for reasons which will appear in due time.

There is yet one point in this mystery of the stars and candlesticks to which I will refer. It is the realm in which they are stationed, and its characteristics as indicated in the provision made for it. Where you see stars, and need candles, there is darkness. And how dark is that world, that kingdom, that community, that heart, into which the light of Christianity has not effectually penetrated? With all the splendor of its genius, all the glory of its arms, all the brilliancy of its power, how savage, how beastly, how like a sepulchre, full of chilly gloom and festering death! When the Gospel first arose upon the world, in what state did it find mankind? Let the apostle answer: "Given up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts; filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful; doing these things, and having pleasure in them that do

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them." (Rom. 1 : 22–32.) The same had been true for ages—their governments, fierce beasts and monsters; their morals, selfishness and vainglory; their very gods deified vices and bad passions. And when God's messengers came to them with the light of truth and righteousness, how were they treated? Let the same apostle answer: "Some were tortured; and others had trial of cruel mockings, and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; compelled to make their homes in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." (Heb. 11 : 35–38.) Even the Lord of the covenant was crucified and killed, and all his apostles martyred, and the Church's first age made one continuous baptism of blood by the enthroned malignity of the unsanctified heart. Such is humanity, unreached and unredeemed by the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Such it was, and such it is, and such it always will be, as long as the world stands. And this is the realm in which God has stationed his candlesticks and his angels. Well might the Saviour say: "Behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves." (Luke 10 : 3.)

Those stars and candlesticks have not been useless. Some hearts, communities and kingdoms have been attracted by the light, and have learned to appreciate its transforming beauty, and are found to a greater or less degree walking and re-

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joicing in it. But still the world in the main is a dark and wicked world. The light sent of God is "a light that shineth in a dark place," and will so continue "until the day dawn," for the great consummation. Till then, therefore, we must expect to suffer and to fight. While the light will never fail to make itself felt upon the dark world, neither will the depravity and darkness of earth fail to make itself felt upon us. The wheat and the tares, good and evil, Christ and Antichrist, are side by side, each at war with the other, and the conflict ever increasing in intensity, until the Lord of the harvest shall come with his reapers, and make the separation by removing the candlesticks, and giving over what remains to its own proper darkness, and "the blackness of darkness forever." God make us faithful in our work of waiting and witnessing till the silver note from heaven shall sound the signal for our release, and welcome us to the glad home of light and rest! Amen.

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HE COMETH.

WATCH, fair Spouse; the heavenly Bridegroom neareth
Soon he comes, his waiting love to claim;
Quickly, surely, he, thy Lord, appeareth,
To bestow on thee his own new name.
Watch, in readiness of love, to meet him,
For his heart once throbb'd out blood for thee,
That thou might'st amid his glory greet him,
And the King in all his beauty see.

Mourner, wipe the tears thy cheeks bedewing,
For the Man of Sorrows draweth nigh;
He has wept, and he, thy struggles viewing,
Hastes to bid the flowing drops be dry.
Then shall all thy griefs be calm'd forever,
When thy Saviour clasps thee to his breast,
Whispering that no veil again shall sever
Thee from God, thy everlasting rest.

Sinner, dread! for the Avenger bendeth,
Looking on thy darken'd deeds of sin;
When his way amid the clouds he wendeth,
How wilt thou thy Sovereign's mercy win?
Haste, before that day's terrific dawning,
Trust the saving blood on Calvary spilt;
Though the ready gulfs for thee are yawning,
He can save thee, he can cleanse thy guilt

Trembler, let his trump thy spirit gladden,
Lo, it soundeth even now from far!
All the fears which now thy weak heart sadden,
At his coming shall be chased afar.
Jesus cometh, Saviour, Prince, Creator!
Christian, thy redemption draweth near
Watch we for the glorious Consummator,
So that we may meet him without fear

LECTURE FIFTH.

THE CHURCH—"ASIA"—EPHESUS—SMYRNA—PERGAMOS—THYATIRA—SARDIS—PHILADELPHIA—LAODICEA—SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES—MEANING OF NUMBERS—REASONS FOR TAKING THE SEVEN CHURCHES REPRESENTATIVELY AS WELL AS LITERALLY—THE SEVEN AGES OF THE CHURCH—THE SEVEN CLASSES OF CHRISTIANS.

REV. 1 : 20. The seven Churches.

THE word *Church* stands in the English Testament as the equivalent of a compound Greek word (*εκκλησια*, from *εκ* and *καλεω*), signifying *to call out of* or *from among*. In three instances, our translators have rendered it *assembly*. This is its primary sense, which underlies all its applications in the New Testament, the Septuagint, and the Greek language in general. The heathen Greeks used it to denote the select assemblies of free citizens convened for the transaction of public affairs, in which the common populace, strangers, and such as had forfeited civic rights, had no place. It is used by Stephen to denote the congregation of the children of Israel in the wilderness, who had been called forth from Egypt, and were on their way to the promised land. (Acts

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7 : 38.) It is sometimes used to denote the entire community of Christian people, of all nations and ages; as where the Saviour says: "Upon this Rock will I build my [εκκλησια] Church;" and where Paul exhorts the elders to "feed the [εκκλησια] Church of God which he hath purchased with His own blood." It is also used to denote the small companies of Christians belonging to one household, as where we read of "Nymphas and the [εκκλησια] Church which is in his house;" "Priscilla and Aquilla, and the [εκκλησια] Church that is in their house." But its most frequent application is to denote some particular society of Christians, in the same neighborhood or city, organized around a common altar, and statedly coming together in the same services: as we read of "the [εκκλησια] Church which is at Corinth;" "the [εκκλησια] Church which is at Jerusalem," &c. It means an assembly, convened by authority, and constituted of a specific class, out of, but withdrawn from, the general mass of the population. It therefore most expressively sets forth what a true Church is.

The Gospel everywhere speaks of a calling and an election, and the Church is the organized society of the called and elected. It is the assembly or community of those whom God has called out from the world into a common fellowship of faith, hope, and obedience, and which is preserved and perpetuated by means of functions and services included in the call. And wherever there is a company of such as have received and believed

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the Gospel, organized into one body, in the charge of one authorized minister, and coming together in the same stated services, there is a true Church. And such societies were "the [ἑπτα ἐκκλησιαι] seven Churches" of the text, concerning which I propose to notice more especially:

I. THEIR LOCATIONS.
II. THEIR SIGNIFICANCE.

The locations of these seven Churches are twice given: first, in the general commission which John received; and second, in the specific directions what to write to each. The command of the trumpet voice was: "What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven Churches: unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea." And in the succeeding chapters, he was further directed to write "unto the angel of the Church in Ephesus; unto the angel of the Church in Smyrna; unto the angel of the Church in Pergamos," &c.

These are not unknown places. They all lie within the scope of a few hundred miles north of the Mediterranean and east of the outlet of the Black Sea. The Churches in these localities are sometimes called "the seven Churches *of Asia;*" but the "Asia" of which the Scriptures speak is not the great continent of Asia, or even of Asia Minor, but only the western part of Asia Minor, directly south of the Black Sea. The whole of it

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does not include a larger territory than the single State of Pennsylvania. Less than thirteen months ago, I passed entirely around two sides of it, and visited two of the most noted places to which the text refers.

The first in the list is *Ephesus*. This was once an important and magnificent city—to proconsular Asia, about what Philadelphia is to Pennsylvania. Of the seven, it was the nearest to the point at which John had the vision. It was the centre of trade for a rich and beautiful country, and the seat of its government, learning, art, wealth and religion. It was a place specially consecrated, in the minds of the people, by many myths and legends of gods and goddesses, and by the presence of a temple which was one of the wonders of the world. It was here that Paul lived for two years, and achieved some of his most brilliant missionary successes. Here he wrought many "special miracles," healing the sick and casting out demons, even with "handkerchiefs and aprons" which he had touched. Here he gained that glorious triumph over the exorcists and magicians, for whom Ephesus was famous, who "brought together their books, and burned them before all men," the price of which was "fifty thousand pieces of silver." Here he daily taught and debated the great doctrines of the faith, till "all Asia" had tidings of the truth as it is in Jesus, and the frightened silversmiths began to cry out for their craft, in consequence of the power of his arguments against the alleged

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divinity of Diana and the worshipfulness of her shrines. Here he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians; and to the converts here he afterwards sent a masterly epistle, which constitutes an important part of the Christian Scriptures.

Ephesus was also the home of the Apostle John. Here he ministered and subsequently died. The ruins of a church still remain, which are said to mark the spot where he was buried. Here, most likely, the blessed mother of the Saviour had her last home, and laid off her mortal body. Here Apollos was converted to Christ, and first exercised his great gifts in the Gospel's interests. Here, too, the beloved Timothy lived, and discharged the duties of his sacred ministry, and died a victim of mob violence for his protests against the license and frenzy of the great festival of Artemis. And next to Jerusalem itself, the world, perhaps, has not another spot around which cluster so many holy histories, classic interests, and precious traditions.

But Ephesus is a mere desolation now, altogether waste, without an inhabitant. The great market-place, where the exchanges of a renowned metropolis were once conducted, I saw planted with tobacco, unenclosed, unattended, weedy, and forsaken. The great lizards, as we rode along, darted about in amazement at the sight of man, over fallen columns of porphyry and marble, and splendid cornices and capitals, which were once the admiration of the world. And silence, malaria and death brooded upon what was proudly

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styled "the first of cities," and embraced the names of some of the greatest in wealth and wisdom, religion and literature, arts and arms. The vast theatre, the largest ever constructed, which once rang with the shouts of the frenzied thousands who, "all with one voice, about the space of two hours, cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" still shows its grand outlines of walls and arches; but old wild bushes are gnarled about its heavy masonry, and the camel was browsing in its forsaken circles as I rode through it. Even the glorious temple of the great mother goddess can no longer be identified with certainty. Two piles of colossal ruins are each claimed as its remains, and I plucked wild berries in both of them. Remnants of cyclopean walls, causeways, temples, streets, and houses, line the plains and hills and mountain-sides of a vast area which once was filled with their glory; but the whole place is a complete desolation, enveloped in a poisonous atmosphere, and tenanted only by things unclean and vile.

Smyrna is the next in the list, the next nearest to Patmos, and the next in importance. It is the only one of the seven places named which retains anything of its ancient standing. It is finely situated, at the head of a beautiful bay, about forty miles northeast of Ephesus. It is now the commercial centre of the Levant, and is being invested with a system of railroads, sending out their iron arms into the interior, to gather to it the riches and trade of the fertile lands which lie almost

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desolate behind it. It has a population of about one hundred and twenty thousand, mostly Greeks, but profusely intermingled with people of all nations, languages, complexions, religions and fashions, who live in small, dark houses, strung along narrow, crooked and filthy lanes, dignified with the name of streets. There are a few good, clever buildings; but it does not appear so much like a city, as a sort of confused convention of the long-severed inhabitants of Babel, with a view to make a city, upon the plan of which they cannot agree. One of its most marked features is the constant coming and going of almost interminable strings of camels and donkeys, which even the railroads have not been able to supersede. The appearance and habits of the people are anything but attractive, and mosquitoes abound almost to suffocation.

Smyrna was originally founded by Alexander, and is stoutly claimed as the birthplace of Homer. It was at first laid out with great regularity and architectural taste, and was considered the most beautiful city in Asia. It was celebrated for its library, its temples, and its sacred festivals and games. There is no allusion to it in the Scriptures, except in the Apocalypse. How and when Christianity was introduced into it, we have no account. The Church there was no doubt founded during Paul's stay at Ephesus. It was the seat of Polycarp's ministrations and martyrdom. It was there that Irenæus studied, and that many Christians in different ages perished on account

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of their faith. The hillside of Pagus, on which Polycarp was burned, has since been reddened with the blood of fifteen hundred confessors at one time, and eight hundred at another. It is as sacred in Christian annals as it is majestic and conspicuous to the beholder. Remnants of the ancient acropolis still stand on its summit, from which the view is exceedingly attractive. Fancy could hardly paint a more fitting mount for the ascension of the saints who from thence went up to their rest.

Pergamos is the next in the list. This lies directly north of Smyrna, perhaps forty miles distant. It was settled and named by the Æolian Greeks, after the fall of Troy. I was within twenty miles of it, but no nearer. At the time the Apocalypse was written, it was a sumptuous city, the home of rich chiefs, who had adorned it with magnificent residences, temples and groves. It had a library which rivalled that at Alexandria, a great medical school, and was famous for the rites which were there celebrated in honor of Æsculapius. It was not a commercial town, such as Ephesus, but a union of a Pagan Cathedral city, a university seat, and a royal residence, embellished, during a succession of years, by kings and chiefs fond of expenditure and ample in resources. It was a city of heathen temples—a grand Pantheon of Pagan worship—a metropolis of sacred sensuality—and hence "Satan's throne." It is now a mere tomb of former greatness. Half-buried arches, columns prostrate in the sand, and

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a few thousand Turkish and Greek huts, is about all that remains to mark the luxuriant and sensuous city, where the faithful Antipas suffered, and so much glory reigned.

Twenty or thirty miles to the southeast was *Thyatira*, the fourth in the list, and once a considerable town, founded by Seleucus Nicator. In the time of John, it was mainly inhabited by Macedonians, who had formed themselves into various guilds of potters, tanners, weavers, rope-makers and dyers. Lydia, the seller of purple stuffs, whom Paul met at Philippi, was from this place, and was connected with one of these departments of the industrial activity for which it was distinguished. It was a place of great amalgamation of races and religious observances. It now has about thirty thousand inhabitants, and is full of ruins. The mouths of many of the wells are made of capitals of old columns; and the streets, in places, are paved with fragments of carved stones—the relics of the ancient city.

From Thyatira, some thirty miles to the southward, we come to *Sardis*, at the foot of Mount Tmolus, on the banks of a rivulet famous for its golden sands. Here the wealthy Crœsus lived and reigned. Here the wise Thales, Cleobulus, and Solon had their homes. And on the plains around it once lay the hosts of Xerxes, on their way to find a sepulchre at Marathon. It was a rich and glorious city when Cyrus conquered it; and though subsequently destroyed by an earthquake, it obtained considerable distinction under

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the Romans, in the reign of Tiberias. It is now a scene of melancholy ruins, with a mill and a few shepherds' huts. When Emerson visited it, he says: "There were more varied and vivid remembrances associated with the sight of Sardis, than could possibly be attached to any other spot of earth; but all were mingled with a feeling of disgust at the littleness of human glory: all—all had passed away! There were before me the fanes of a dead religion, the tombs of forgotten monarchs, and the palm-tree that waved in the banquet hall of kings; while the feeling of desolation was doubly heightened by the calm, sweet sky above me, which, in its unfading brightness, shone as purely now as when it beamed upon the golden dreams of Crœsus."

Southeastward, less than forty miles, stood *Philadelphia*, the great wine-market of Phrygia, rocked with oft-recurring earthquakes, and with a population once large and powerful, but never very distinguished. It took its name from the king who founded it. It is still a considerable country town, with a dozen churches or more, but not Christians enough to fill one-fourth of them, and those of a very doubtful sort. In Roman times, it was not of sufficient importance to command law-courts of its own, but belonged to a jurisdiction which had its centre in Sardis. Those who constituted the Church to which John was commanded to write, are supposed to have been poor people, living on the outskirts, and heavily taxed for public purposes.

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Laodicea lay some fifty miles still further to the southeast. It was built, or rather rebuilt, by one of the Seleucid monarchs, and received its name in honor of his wife. It was a place of considerable size, trade and wealth. Both under the Romans and under the Turks, it has been the battle-ground of contending parties in Asia Minor. The remains of theatres, temples and other public edifices, still bear testimony to its former greatness. It does not appear that Paul ever visited it in person; but it was evidently through him that Christianity was there introduced; and to the believers there he once wrote a letter—which has been lost*—and sent his friendly greetings from his prison at Rome. In subsequent times it became a Christian city of eminence, the see of a bishop, and a meeting-place of Church Councils. It was destroyed by the Mahommedan invaders, and is now a scene of utter desolation. There is a small village in the neighborhood, the houses of which are built of its ruins. Emerson says it is even more solitary than Ephesus, for the latter has the prospect of the rolling sea, or of a whitening sail, to enliven its decay; whilst Laodicea sits in widowed loneliness, its walls grass-grown, its temples desolate, its very name perished. He left it in a thunderstorm, preferring to hasten on, through rain and tempest, to delay in that melancholy

* Col. 4:16. It is thought by some that the epistle here referred to has not been lost, but is the same as the Epistle to Philemon, or the First Epistle to Timothy.

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spot, where everything whispered desolation, and where the very wind that swept impetuously through the valley sounded like the fiendish laugh of Time, exulting over the destruction of man and his proudest monuments.

So much, then, for the *locations* of these seven Churches. We pass to the more important matter of their *significance*. This is indicated in the number seven. The earliest commentator on the Apocalypse, whose work has come down to us, was Victorinus, Bishop of Pettau, or Petavium, who died a martyr in the year 303. He was the contemporary of Irenæus, and a man of piety, diligence in setting forth the teachings of the Scriptures, and vigorous in his perceptions of the meaning of the sacred writers. Most of his writings have been lost, except some fragments. His comments on the Apocalypse survive, in a text less pure than we could wish, but sufficiently giving the substance of his views. In his *Scholia in Apocalypsin*, he says that what John addresses to one Church he addresses to all; that Paul was the first to teach us that *there are seven Churches in the whole world*, and that *the seven Churches named mean the Church Catholic;* and that John, to observe the same method, has not exceeded the number seven.*

* The passage, as it stands in Migne's *Patrologiæ* (tom. 5, col. 320), reads thus: "Istæ septem stellæ sunt septem Ecclesiæ quas nominat in vocabulis suis, et vocat eas ad quas fecit epistolas. Non quia ipsæ solæ sunt Ecclesiæ, aut principes; sed quod uni dicit, omnibus dicit. Nihil enim differunt, ut

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What Victorinus means, is that Paul, in writing to *seven* Churches, and to seven only, intended to have it understood that all the Churches of all time are comprehended in seven; and that, in the same way, the seven Churches in the Apocalypse are meant to comprise all the Churches in the world: that is, the Church Catholic of all ages. This was also the view of Tichænius, of the fourth century; Arethas of Cappadocia, and Primasius of Adrumetum, in the sixth; and Vitringa, Mede, More, Girdlestone, and a large body of divines, of later periods.*

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ex illa ratione quis paucorum similium majori numero anteponat. *In toto orbe septennatim Ecclesias omnes, septem esse nominatas, et unam esse Catholicam Paulus docuit.* Et primum quidem ut servaret et ipse typum septem Ecclesiarum, non excessit numerum. Sed Scripsit ad Romanos, ad Corinthios, ad Galatas, ad Ephesios, ad Thessalonicenses, ad Philippenses, ad Colossenses. . . . *In his ergo septem Ecclesiis, unius Ecclesiæ Catholicæ, fideles sunt, quia una in septem qualitatem fidei et electionis est.*"

* This view has, indeed, been pronounced "egregious trifling"—"a mere castle in the air"—"the offspring of nothing but imagination"—"mere gratuitous assumption." And if blustering words make it so, there is no doubt that we must so regard it. But the murderers of Victorinus got no credit, in the judgment of truth and heaven, for their work; and those who seek to overturn his opinion in this particular, may yet find themselves with quite as little for theirs. The author whose language I have just given has so stultified himself by his rejection of the natural and necessary conclusion announced by Victorinus, that, after two large and ponderous volumes on the Apocalypse, he has left it wholly unexplained why seven Churches, and only seven, and these particular seven, were chosen to be the subjects and recipients of these

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There is a sacred significance in numbers: not cabalistic, not fanciful; but proceeding from the very nature of things, well settled in the Scriptures, and universally acknowledged in all the highest and deepest systems of human thought and religion.

The unit, *one*, is the source and parent of all numbers. It therefore stands for God, in the most hidden absoluteness of His being, in which the whole Godhead, and all things, stand. "There is one God, and there is none other but He." (Mark 12 : 32.) *One* expresses commencement, and God is the commencement. The unit underlies all continuation, and by God all things consist. And nothing can so well express the absolute First Cause, as the number ONE. It stands for the absolute Unity in heaven, and the abstract individual on earth.

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seven epistles. Nay, when he comes to his elaborate exposition of the significance of numbers, he gives the data for his own confutation, and, in effect, establishes what he elsewhere ridicules. "Seven," he says, "is the designation of that which is perfect"—"the perfect number by way of eminence"—"often employed in the sense of a complete, adequate, perfect number"—"the number nearly everywhere employed throughout the book in a symbolic way"—"a number which may stand, as it were, in the place of a representative of all other numbers." Take these conclusions, and apply them to the seven Churches, and to what other result are we brought but exactly that announced by Victorinus—that the seven Churches stand for the entire Church, the complete society of professing Christians, *the Church universal*, in the whole of its membership and the entireness of its earthly condition and career?

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But Godhead, as let forth to the contemplation of rational beings, is a *Trinity*—a One Three and a Three One. Nearly all the leading nations of antiquity, in harmony with revelation, have so represented Him. In this Trinity, the Son is the second. *Two*, therefore, stands for Christ, and is significant of incompletion, or something wanting. It is the first from the one, and reposes on the one, and is necessary to the making up of the first complete complex number, but is not complete in itself. It is the productive number, but it is only complete when the product is added. The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Man and wife are two-one, but the product of dual unity is needed to complete the family.

Three is the number of individual completion. It is composed of three numbers, each of which is in itself *one*, and which multiplied together still make only *one*. Three, therefore, represents the Trinity, each number of which is God, and yet the Three together are still only One. It is the simplest composite unity, and forms the simplest compound figure in geometry—the equal-sided triangle, which is indivisible, and unresolvable into anything else. It is the first and fixed compound unit of mathematical science. It therefore properly stands for the Trinity and individual completeness. As such, it has been also wrought into all God's works. Man is body, soul, and spirit—three-one. The family is man,

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and wife, and offspring—three-one. Religion is knowledge, action, and experience—three-one.

"Matter, and breath, and instinct, unite in all the beasts of the field;
Substance, coherence, and weight, fashion the fabrics of the earth;
The will, the doing, and the deed, combine to form a fact;
The stem, the leaf, and the flower—beginning, middle, and end;
Cause, circumstance, consequent: and every three is one.
Yea, the very breath of man's life consisteth of a trinity of vapors,
And the noonday light is a compound—the triune shadow of Jehovah."

Four is the worldly number. It proceeds from three, and includes three. And as three represents the Trinity—the highest, and the perfect—four designates that which proceeds from the Trinity, and is dependent thereon: the creation, the universe. Hence, the world resolves itself into four elements: fire, air, earth, and water. The points of the compass are four: north, east, south, west. There are four seasons, four winds, four grand divisions of the earth. The great world-powers of history and prophecy are four. The living beings, supposed to represent the forces of providence, are four. Ezekiel's vision of God's providence in the world revealed four cherubim, four wheels with four sides, four faces, and four wings. The waters in Eden were four. The fourth commandment, and the fourth clause in the Lord's Prayer, refer to the earth. The

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square and the cube, those important ground-forms of common geometric relations, are fours. And to the Oriental philosophers, four is always the figure of the universe, especially of the world. There is therefore no mistaking of this number.

Five represents progress, but incompleteness. It is the perfect three, with the imperfect two. On the fifth day life was created in the sea, but there was yet no life on land. Five toes, or five fingers, are but half of what pertain to a complete man. Under the fifth seal the martyrs are impatient, but are told to wait yet a season. They are enjoying some of the fruits of their faith, but their crowns are deferred. The fifth vial is poured upon the seat of the beast, but does not destroy it utterly. The virgins were five wise and five foolish, showing that the one class does not include all the saved, nor the other all that fail to enter into the marriage of the Lamb.

Six is the Satanic number. As the darkest hour immediately precedes the dawn, and the darkest years are the last before the millennial Sabbath, so the number immediately preceding the complete seven is the worst of all. The sixth body in the solar system is a shattered one. The sixth epistle to the Churches tells of an hour of universal trial and suffering; the sixth seal brings destruction and death; the sixth trumpet destroys the third part of men; and the sixth vial introduces the unclean spirits who gather

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the kings of the earth and of the whole world to the war of the great day of God Almighty. Antichrist's number is three sixes: six units, six tens, and six hundreds—666—the individual completion of everything evil. And Christ was crucified on the sixth day, which is still the common execution day, and is popularly regarded as the most unlucky of the seven.

Seven is the number of dispensational fulness. It is the complete in that which is temporary—not the finally complete. It carries with it the idea of sacredness in that which relates to this world. It is the Trinity and the created in contact—the divine Three with the worldly four. Hence, it is always connected with whatever touches the covenant between man and God, worship, and the coming together of the Creator and the creature. Hence the sacred number. "The evidences of this reach back to the very beginning. We meet them first in the hallowing of the seventh day, in pledge and token of the covenant of God with man, as indeed in the binding up of seven in the very word Sabbath."* They are also traceable in the nature and confirmative power of an oath, which is signified by a Hebrew word embracing this number. It is a number which, somehow, occurs in cases of union between God and man; in representations of the holy in the earthly; in all expressions of the completeness of any specific sacred

* Trench on the Seven Epistles.

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order or time. The instances, at any rate, are too numerous to mention. The Bible is full of them. And the Apocalypse, which is the book of the consummation of all God's dispensational dealings with mankind, is, above all, *a book of sevens.* It consists of seven visions, with the sevenfold ascription of glory to God and to the Lamb, and discloses to us the seven Spirits of God, the seven candlesticks, the seven stars, seven lamps of fire, seven seals, seven horns and seven eyes of the Lamb, seven angels with seven trumpets, seven thunders, seven heads of the beast and seven crowns upon those heads, the seven plagues, seven vials, seven mountains, and seven regencies. And it is this book of sevens because it is the book of the fulness of everything of which it treats—the Trinity's consummation of all divine dispensations. It is therefore the number of dispensational fulness. And whatever bears this number, in the divine reckoning, is full, complete, with nothing left out, and nothing of its own kind to be added.

Eight is the number of new beginning and resurrection. The eighth day is the beginning of a new week. The Jewish child was circumcised the eighth day, which was its birth into covenant relations. Noah was "the eighth person," and his family consisted of eight, and they started the new world after the flood. Christ rose from the dead on the eighth day. David was the eighth son of Jesse, and he established a new order for Israel. In the eighth year, the Jews were to sow

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the ground again as the fresh beginning of a new septenary. The eighth head of the beast was the revival of the seventh. Our Sunday, which celebrates the new creation which began in the Saviour's resurrection, is the eighth day, the first of the new week. And the eternal order of blessedness is to begin with the eighth thousand years from Adam.

Ten is the number of worldly completion, especially in the line of worldly evil. The great beast of worldly power, in its final form, has ten horns. The body of man, in earthly completeness, has ten fingers and ten toes. The moral law, as applicable to man in this world, has ten precepts. The earthly manifestations of Christ after His resurrection were ten. The tribulation spoken of to the Church in Smyrna was for ten days. The lost tribes of Israel are ten. The Church, in its mixed earthly condition and slumbering, is represented by ten virgins. It is the union of the worldly four and the Satanic six; of the new eight and the incomplete two; of the individually perfect three and the dispensationally full seven.

Twelve is the number of *final completeness.* Hence the twelve months in the year, the twelve signs in the zodiac, the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve apostles of the Lamb, the twelve stars in the crown of the woman clothed with the sun, the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem, the twelve fruits of the Tree of Life, &c.

But I will not linger among these numbers. I have said enough to show that they have an im-

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portant significance, rooted in the nature of things, and acknowledged in the Scriptures and in the common language and thinking of the great mass of mankind. They are not inventions of men, but expressions of God and His works. They also furnish new and forcible evidence of the truthfulness of the estimate of this book which I have given—to wit: that it is the book of the consummation—a divine picture of the fulness and winding up of all God's dispensations in this world. I have given more than was necessary for my purpose, but I thought it best to give the connected list. The text contains but one of these numbers. That number is *seven*. These Churches are *seven*. And if this number has the significance which I have assigned it, and which seems to be admitted by all who have looked into the subject, it gives us the key to the true significance of these Churches. It assigns to them the unmistakable character of *completeness*. As "the seven Spirits which are before the throne" are the *one Holy Spirit*, in all the fulness and completeness of His offices and powers in this dispensation, so "the seven Churches" are the *one Holy Catholic Church*, in all the amplitude and completeness of its being and history, from the time of the vision to the end.

Nor does this conflict with the fact that these were literal historic Churches, existing, at the time the apostle wrote, at the places which I have described. They were Churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, &c., as really as our St. John's

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is a Church of this present Philadelphia. But there were other Churches then existing, at Collosse, Antioch, Alexandria, Corinth, Rome, and elsewhere, some of them larger and more powerful than some of those named. Why, then, were these not taken into the account? Did they not need instruction, and rebuke, and encouragement, and warning, as well as the favored seven? The only explanation is, that they were somehow included in the seven. They were not specifically and locally addressed, because what concerned their estate, and the mind of Christ with reference to it, are embraced and expressed in the seven. In other words, these seven Churches, in their names, in their graces, in their defects, in their relations to Christ, and in His promises and threatenings to them severally, comprehend everything found in the entire Church, as it then existed, or was to exist. Seven, by common consent, is just the number to express this idea. That it is a mere accident in the composition—a mere grace of rhetoric, the more to interest the reader by the artistic method by which these momentous matters are handled, I cannot admit. That a man with the zeal and fire of the apostle John, standing in the midst of the most stupendous and overwhelming scenes ever to be enacted on earth, should, amid it all, coolly set to work to elaborate a style, and round up his message into graceful sections and harmonious divisions, merely to entertain the taste and please the imagination of his readers, is to me incomprehensible.

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The idea carries absurdity on its face. And it so sinks the apostle into the poet, and the inspired man of God into the rhetorician, and the direct words of Christ into the fancies of men, that it strips the Apocalypse of that sacredness which it claims for itself; transmutes it into a mere religious Iliad, or Paradise Lost, or Paradise Regained, and places it before us as a book for æsthetic criticism and rhetorical study, rather than, as it was meant to be, a message from Jesus to regulate our faith, and hope, and life, with reference to the judgment to come, every word and feature of which is from God, and much in the very language of God. I must, therefore, insist that this doctrine of numbers, if we had nothing else, settles upon these seven Churches a representative comprehensiveness which embraces the entire fulness of the Church of all time.*

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* "The seven must be regarded as constituting a complex whole—as possessing an ideal completeness. Christ, we feel sure, could not have placed Himself in the relation which He does to them,—as holding in His hand the seven stars, walking among the seven golden candlesticks, these stars being the angels of the Churches, and the candlesticks the Churches themselves,—unless they ideally represented and set forth, in some way or other, the universal Church militant here upon earth." —*Trench on the Seven Epistles*, p. 44.

"The number seven is used throughout the Apocalypse in a symbolic sense, and is admitted to be expressive of completeness or perfection. Why should 'the seven Churches' be an exception to the rule? Were the seven local Churches, the names of which are given, the only light-bearers or candlesticks? Did the light entirely cease to shine when these Asiatic Churches ceased to exist? Let these seven Churches.

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There are, however, other considerations to corroborate this view. One is found in the seven times repeated admonition: "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.*" Such language, seven times underlined, as if printed in the largest capitals, has in it an intensity of universality and urgency beyond anything in all the volume of Scripture. Why is this? The whole Apocalypse is encircled with a special promise of blessing to him that reads and keeps it. We find it in the first verses, and among the last; and we argue from it that there is something special in this book, calling for our particular attention. And when we find this sevenfold additional admonition affixed to the seven epistles, and in each place made to refer to the whole seven, what are we to gather from it but that, in the mind of Jesus, there is much more in these seven epistles than we find on the surface of them, and that they apply to Christians universally, and concern every man, throughout all Gospel times, in a way which turns the peculiarities of these seven particular Churches into types

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or candlesticks, be regarded as a sevenfold or perfect representative of the one Church, in its responsibility to Christ as His light-bearer or witness before the world, and we have an interpretation at once consistent with the entire character of the book, and sufficient to account for the selection of seven local Churches, the divers states of which furnish what was needed for this sevenfold or perfect view of the whole professing body."—*Plain Papers*, p. 418.

"The number seven in the Scriptures denotes something universal and complete."—*Luther* (*see Walch's Luther*, ix. 2063).

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and images of the Church general in its entireness of membership and history? Admit that these epistles contain a panoramic outline of the whole visible Church, as that Church and her deeds appear in the light of the throne of God, and this vehemency, the scope and intensity of which cannot be exaggerated, is at once explained. If, in dealing with these epistles, every man, of every age, has a divine thermometer whereby to tell exactly where he or his Church stands in Christ's judgment, and one constructed and delivered to him from Christ himself for this specific purpose, then this fulness and unlimitedness of urgency is comprehensible and fitting; but on any other assumption, it degenerates into mere poetry and rhetoric. And as I am bound to believe that Christ's words, so solemnly and significantly given, are entitled to all the fulness of meaning of which they are capable, I must conclude, from this sevenfold charge concerning these seven epistles, that these seven Churches of Asia, as here described, were meant to be paradigmatic of the whole Church, every Church, and every member of the Church, and Christ's judgment of them, then and thereafter, up to and inclusive of His final apportionment of rewards and punishments to each.

The same may be argued from the word *mystery*, as applied to these Churches and their angels. It intimates, from the start, that there is something more intended than is seen upon the surface; and what that something is, we find in

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the view I have given. And, indeed, the nature of the vision in which John received these epistles, assumes that not these seven Churches alone, but in them the entire Church, is to be contemplated. The angels of other Churches, and other ages, are as much stars in Christ's right hand as these seven, and why should we think to leave them out of the solemn representation?

These seven Churches, then, besides being literal historical Churches, stand for the entire Christian body, in all periods of its history. But how, or in what respects? Upon this point, let me add a word or two before I close.

In the first place, the seven Churches represent seven phases or periods in the Church's history, stretching from the time of the apostles to the coming again of Christ, the characteristics of which are set forth partly in the names of these Churches, but more fully in the epistles addressed to them. There has been an *Ephesian* period—a period of warmth and love and labor for Christ, dating directly from the apostles, in which defection began by the gradual cooling of the love of some, the false professions of others, and the incoming of undue exaltations of the clergy and Church offices. Then came the *Smyrna* period—the era of martyrdom, and of the sweet savor unto God of faithfulness unto death, but marked with further developments of defection in the establishment of castes and orders, the license of Judaizing propensities, and consequent departures from the true simplicities of the Gospel.

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Then followed the *Pergamite* period, in which true faith more and more disappeared from view, and clericalism gradually formed itself into a system, and the Church united with the world, and Babylon began to rear itself aloft. Then came the *Thyatiran* period—the age of purple and glory for the corrupt priesthood, and of darkness for the truth; the age of effeminacy and clerical domination, when the Church usurped the place of Christ, and the witnesses of Jesus were given to dungeons, stakes and inquisitions; the age of the enthronement of the false prophetess, reaching to the days of Luther and the Reformation. Then came the *Sardian* period—the age of separation and return to the rule of Christ; the age of comparative freedom from Baalam and his doctrines, from the Nicolaitans and their tenets, from Jezebel and her fornications; an age of many worthy names, but marked with deadness withal, and having much of which to repent; an age covering the spiritual lethargy of the Protestant centuries before the great evangelical movements of the last hundred years, which brought us the *Philadelphian* era, marked by a closer adherence to the written word, and more fraternity among Christians, but now rapidly giving place to *Laodicean* lukewarmness, self-sufficiency, empty profession, and false peace, in which the day of judgment is to find the unthinking multitude who suppose they are Christians and are not.

The details in these outlines I leave till we

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come to the more direct exposition of the epistles themselves, but will yet observe, on this point, that everything which marks one of these periods pertains also, in a lower degree, to every period. It is simply the predominance, and greater or less vigor, of one element at one time, which distinguishes the seven eras from each other. The seven periods, in other words, coexist in every period, as well as in succession, only that in one period the one is predominant, and in another the other.

In the next place, the seven Churches represent seven varieties of Christians, both true and false. Every professor of Christianity is either an Ephesian in his religious qualities, a Smyrnaote, a Pergamite, a Thyatiran, a Sardian, a Philadelphian, or a Laodicean. It is of these seven sorts that the whole Church is made up, the several marks and characteristics of each of which will be brought out hereafter.

Nor are we to look for one sort in one period, or in one denomination, only. Every age, every denomination, and nearly every congregation, contains specimens of each. As all the elements of the ocean are to be found, in more or less distinctness, in every drop from the ocean, so every community of Christian professors has some of all the varied classes which make up Christendom at large. One may abound most in Ephesians, another in Smyrnaotes, another in Thyatirans, and others in other kinds; but we shall hardly be at a loss to find all in all. There are Protest-

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ant Papists, and Papistical Protestants; sectarian anti-sectarians, and partyists who are not schismatics; holy ones in the midst of abounding defection and apostasy, and unholy ones in the midst of the most earnest and active faith; light in dark places, and darkness in the midst of light.

I thus find the seven Churches in every Church, giving to these Epistles a directness of application to ourselves, and to professing Christians of every age, of the utmost solemnity and importance. They tell what Christ's judgment of each of us is, and what we each may expect in the great day of His coming. In every age, and in every congregation, Christ is walking among His Churches, with open, flaming eyes; and these epistles give us His opinion of what His all-revealing glance discovers. And as we would know where we stand, and what we may expect when this Apocalypse is fulfilled, let us carefully examine, and pray God to help us to the true understanding of, these special summaries of what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.

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LECTURE SIXTH.

THE SEVEN EPISTLES—A DISTINCT AND INVITING DEPARTMENT OF SACRED LITERATURE—STRANGELY NEGLECTED BY THE CHURCH—EACH EMBRACES SEVEN PARTS—THEIR TEACHINGS IN RELATION TO THE PARTICULAR CHURCHES ADDRESSED—CHRIST REMEMBERS HIS PEOPLE—SPEAKS TO THEM THROUGH THEIR MINISTERS—THE MORAL STATE OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCHES—THE IMPORTANCE ASSIGNED TO THE PRACTICAL IN RELIGION—CHRIST'S USE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE SECOND ADVENT—THE FUTURE OF THE REDEEMED.

REV. CHAPS. 2–3. (Revised Text.)—To the angel of the Church in Ephesus write: These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven candlesticks of gold: I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy endurance, and that thou canst not bear those who are evil, and hast tried those who say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them false, and hast endurance, and didst bear for my name, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless, I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love. Remember, therefore, whence thou hast fallen, and repent, and do the first works; otherwise I am coming unto thee, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, if thou dost not repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of my God.

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, who became dead and revived: I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty (nevertheless thou art rich), and [I know] thy reproach from those who say they are Jews and are not, but [are] Satan's synagogue. Fear not the things which thou art

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about to suffer; behold, indeed, the devil is about to cast [some] of you into prison, that ye may be tried, and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be faithful unto [the endurance of] death, and I will give thee the crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

And to the angel of the Church in Pergamos write: These things saith He which hath the sharp sword with two edges: I know where thou dwellest, [even] where Satan's throne [is], and thou holdest fast my name, and didst not deny the faith of me, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. Nevertheless, I have against thee a few things, [that] thou hast there those who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling-block (an occasion of sin) before the sons of Israel, to eat things offered to idols, and to commit fornication. So thou thyself also hast those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes in like manner. Repent, therefore, otherwise I am coming to thee quickly, and will make war with them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches. To him that overcometh will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give to him a white stone [a bright gem], and on the stone a new name written [engraved], which no one knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

And to the angel of the Church in Thyatira write: These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet like unto fine brass: I know thy works, and charity, and faith, and service, and thy endurance, and thy last works [to be] more than the first. Notwithstanding, I have against thee that thou sufferest thy wife Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess, and teacheth and leadeth astray my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her time that she should repent, and she is not minded to repent of her fornication. Behold, I cast her into a bed [of sickness, torment or perdition], and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, if they do not repent of her works. And her children will I slay with death; and all the Churches shall know that I am He who searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give to every one of you according to your works. But unto you who are the remnant in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, who have not known the depths, as they speak, ([depths] of Satan), I put not upon you any other burden; only that which ye have hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod [sceptre] of iron; as the vessels of earthen

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ware shall they be broken to shivers; as I also received from my Father; and I will give to him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.

And to the angel of the Church in Sardis write: These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, that were about to die; for I have not found thy works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heardest, and observe and repent. If, therefore, thou dost not watch, I will arrive over thee as a thief, and thou shalt not by any means know at what hour I will arrive over thee. Nevertheless, thou hast a few names in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. He that overcometh thus, shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not by any means wipe out his name out of the book of life, and will confess his name in the presence of my Father and in the presence of His angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.

And to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia write: These things saith the Holy [One], the True, He that hath the key of David [of Hades? comp. 1: 18], Who openeth and no one shall shut, Who shutteth and no one shall open: I know thy works; behold, I have given before thee a door opened, which no one is able to shut; because thou hast a little strength, didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name. Behold, I give [those] of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but do lie, behold, I will make them that they shall come and shall do homage before thy feet, and that they may know that I loved thee. Because thou didst keep my word of patient endurance, I also will keep thee out of the hour of temptation [the appointed season of sore trial] which is about to come upon the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown. He that overcometh, him will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out of it; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which cometh down out of the heaven from my God, and mine own new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.

And to the angel of the Church of Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning [Head Prince] of the creation of God: I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spue thee

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out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need in nothing, and knowest not that thou art the wretched and the pitiable [one], and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy from me gold refined out of the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and [that] the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and eye-salve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hear my voice, and open the door, I will enter in to him, and will sup with him, and he shall sup with me. To him that overcometh will I give to sit with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne.

IN the second and third chapters of the Apocalypse, upon which we now enter, we find a distinct and unique section of sacred literature, which the learned and devout Dr. Bengel used to commend, above everything, to the study especially of young ministers. We call the contents of these chapters *Epistles;* but they are not so much messages from an absent Lord as sentences of a present Judge, engaged in the solemn act of inspection and decision.

There is much pertaining to these sentences to recommend them to the particular attention of Christians. They are a prominent and vital part of the Apocalypse, which pronounces special benedictions upon its attentive readers and hearers. Like the parables, they consist exclusively of Christ's own words, and are the very last which we have directly from Him. They are, perhaps, the only unabridged records of His addresses in our possession. They are most impressively introduced, and so directly addressed as to beget

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the idea that they are something of unusual solemnity and importance. They are also accompanied with a seven times repeated entreaty and command to hear what is said in them. And yet there is not another portion of Scripture, of equal extent and conspicuity, to which so little attention has been paid. Strange to say, the Church has nowhere included these Epistles in the lessons prescribed to be read in the public services, except in a secondary and very remote manner. In the Church of England, Archbishop Trench remarks that it is impossible, if the canons of the Church be followed, for these Epistles ever to be read in the public services.* Though so specifically and urgently addressed to the Churches, it would seem as if there had been some general concert to prevent them from being seen or heard.

Exposition is also remarkably barren with respect to these Epistles. Though in every way marked as of equal account with the parables, they have not received a tithe of the attention. We have hundreds of disquisitions on other special discourses of the Saviour, where it would be

* "It is very much to be regretted, that while every chapter of every other book of the New Testament is set forth to be read in the Church, and, wherever there is daily service, is read in the Church, three times in the year, and some, or portions of some, oftener, while even of the Apocalypse itself two chapters and portions of others have been admitted into the service, *under no circumstances whatever can the second and third chapters ever be heard in the congregation.*"—*Epist. to the Seven Churches*, p. 10.

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difficult to find *tens* devoted to these, His last and most solemn, dictated from heaven, superscribed with His own marvellous attestations, and urged upon all by the sevenfold admonition to hear and ponder what they contain. Even writers on the Apocalypse itself, in very many instances, have passed these Epistles with hardly a word of remark. Erroneously assigning to them nothing but what concerned the particular Churches named, and mistakenly commencing the Apocalypse proper only with the fourth or sixth chapter, writers on prophecy have thought they had no occasion to deal with these divine letters, and have generally passed them by, to the utter discomfiture of their attempts, without them, to understand or expound this book.

I have already indicated the manner in which the seven Churches are to be viewed. They were literal historical Churches, existing at the time John wrote, but, at the same time, representative and comprehensive of all other Churches of all nations, places and ages—a complete sample of the whole body, in the entirety of its character and career. And it is the same with reference to these seven Epistles. They are neither exactly nor only prophetic. They were really messages to these particular Churches, in view of their several conditions, to stir them up to hold fast what was right, and to amend what was wrong, as also all other Churches in like conditions. But as the seven Churches were representative and inclusive of the entire Church.

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these Epistles also give Christ's judgment of the entire Church, and are necessarily anticipative of its entire history. In other words, they give us, from the beginning, the exact picture of the whole history of the Church, as that history, when finished, shall present itself to the mind of Christ as he contemplates it from the judgment seat, which is really the point from which everything presented in the Apocalypse is viewed. We may therefore read in them what was in the beginning, and what the career of the Church has been since, and will be to the end.

The number of these Epistles is *seven*, corresponding with the number of the Churches. Each one also embraces seven distinct parts: first, an address; second, a citation of some one or more of the sublime attributes of the Speaker; third, an assertion of His complete knowledge of the sphere, duties and doings of the persons addressed; fourth, a description of the state of each, with such interspersions of praise and promise, or censure and admonition, as the case required; fifth, an allusion to His promised coming, and the character it will assume to the persons described; sixth, a universal command to hear; and seventh, a special promise to the ultimate victor. In the last four, the order of succession is varied from the first three, and the call to attention is there put *after* the promise "to him that overcometh;" but in each these seven parts may be distinguished, showing that there is a completeness and fulness about the whole,

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which will not admit of their being confined in their signification to the few particular congregations to which they were originally addressed.

But without descending into all the particulars, I propose to note briefly some of the teachings of these Epistles, considered—

I. In relation to the particular Churches addressed.

II. In relation to the entire Church represented.

1. The first Churches were very obscure assemblies, without badges save their common adherence to Christ and obedience to his Gospel, and their congregation in quiet, if not in secrecy, around the altars of a simple worship. They were unnoticed by the great world, in the midst of which they were planted, or were observed only to be despised. But, neglected or persecuted on earth, we see from these Epistles that they were considered in heaven, and had the very first place in the blessed Saviour's regard. Wonderful doings among the potencies of this world were about to take place. Seals were to be opened, at which the heavens should shake, the sun be darkened, the stars fall, and mountains and islands move from their places. Trumpets were to be blown, which should turn the very rains to hail, fire and blood, open the pit, and fill the earth with woe. Battles were to be fought, in heaven and on earth, and vials of wrath emptied, and scenes enacted over which heaven

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should shout hallelujah. But in advance of all, and above all, the mind of the great Judge was on His little companies of believers, and to them He gave His first attention. "Write," said He, "and send to the seven Churches."

2. But when we come to inspect what is written, we find all addressed to the ministers in charge of these Churches. Each Epistle is written to "*the angel* of the Church." What is written we know to be meant not for him alone, for the command is to every one to hear "what the Spirit saith *to the Churches;*" but we thus encounter an item of ecclesiastical order, binding up these congregations very closely with their pastors, and their pastors with them. This is important. It shows that there is a ministry—an official order—in the Christian Church, which assigns one angel to one congregation, and makes him its representative and head. The method by which these officers succeeded to their places, or the precise extent of their functions and authority, is not defined. Neither is it denied, that what pertained preëminently to them also belonged subordinately to the whole company of believers. But a special ministerial appointment is recognized, as part of the sacred economy, the proper life, and the wholesome ongoing of the Church, and which no power on earth may disturb without insurrection against God, and invasion of the dignity of our Lord. This is a doctrine from which, indeed, many deplorable abuses

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have sprung (of which we will have occasion to take notice), and on account of which some have rejected it as not of God. But it is a true doctrine of our holy religion, and, in its legitimate relations, enters essentially into the system which Christ has himself ordained for the bringing of souls to eternal life.

3. From this peculiarity in these Epistles, we may also trace something of the nature and responsibility of the ministerial office. It is not a lordship, but a service; not a service to be commanded of man, but of God. It is the business of the angel to hear for the Church, receive for the Church, and to answer for the Church, which has been committed to his care. He is its chief, its guardian, its watchman, the under-shepherd of the flock. He is to receive the word at the mouth of the Lord, and at the hands of His inspired servants, and to present it faithfully to his people, and to see that it is accepted, observed and obeyed according to the true intent of its divine Author. Christ sends His Revelation to these angels above all, and looks to them for the right ordering of His Churches. To them He addresses His judgments, His rebukes, and His directions, as if the whole estate of the Churches were wrapped up in them, and they alone responsible for that estate. And so far as they keep themselves to their true sphere and work, whosoever heareth them heareth Him, and he that despiseth them despiseth Him.

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4. But these Epistles show us more particularly what was the moral condition of the primitive Churches. Nor is the exhibition what we would perhaps have expected. Churches founded and instructed by apostles, and ministered unto by those who were the pupils of the apostles, appointed under apostolic supervision, we would think to find models of every excellence, and pure and free from the evils, heresies and defections of later periods. But these Epistles show that the Churches then were much like the Churches now, and of all ages: that is, interminglings of good and bad, and as full of the workings of depravity as of the fruits of a true faith. There was much to commend, but quite as much to censure. There were worthy sons and daughters of the Most High, whose conversation was in heaven; but many more whose love had cooled, whose hearts were in the world, who had a name to live but were dead, and esteemed themselves rich, and increased with goods, and needing nothing, not knowing that they were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. With five out of the seven, Christ finds serious fault; and in one of these five, He finds nothing whatever to commend. Two alone pass the solemn inspection, and they in contact with elements which He quite condemns.

The first and most distinguished was that of Ephesus. This Church was characterized by strong impulse toward God, earnestness, and zeal, and yet with a giving way in these qualities

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from what they were at first. This is signified in the word εφεσις, which thus exactly fits to the description. He who holds the seven stars, and walks in the midst of the candlesticks, found in Ephesus works, labor, endurance, steadfast opposition to evil, faithfulness and firmness in discipline, cheerfulness in bearing any burden for Christ's sake, and a just hatred of deeds and practices which Christ also hates. But He found there also this defect, which called for repentance and return to first works, if they would not be unchurched entirely: namely, that they had left their first love. There is such a thing as having and exercising a sharp penetration into the true and the false, a correctness of judgment in sacred things, a zealous and self-sacrificing devotion to the right and true, and an earnest-minded severance from false apostles and all evil-doers, and yet being without that warmth and purity of love which is the first impulse in the breast of young disciples, and without which, well cherished and kept in vigorous life, there is unfitness to meet the judgment or to stand in it And this was the sorry fault of the Church of Ephesus. Of course, it was not the estate of every particular member that is thus described. There were Smyrnaotes and Philadelphians in Ephesus also; but their number was few, and the prevailing characteristic of the whole together was great zeal for truth and right, with a love in fatal decline.

Smyrna is a word three times translated in the

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New Testament. (Matt. 2 : 11; Mark 15 : 23; John 19 : 39.) It signifies *myrrh*, an aromatic exudation from a thorny tree, which furnished one of the ingredients of the holy ointment, and was used by the ancients in embalming the dead. It had associated with it the idea of something grateful to God, and connected also with death and resurrection. It well describes a Church persecuted unto death, and lying embalmed in the precious spices of its sufferings, such as the Church of Smyrna was. It was the Church of Myrrh, or bitterness, and yet agreeable and precious unto the Lord, holy in the midst of its tribulations, and full of blessed hopes for the world to which the resurrection is to bring the saints. Nothing of complaint is said of this Church; but neither are any special works or achievements enumerated to its praise, whilst the presence of an evil synagogue is affirmed. A poor Church, in the midst of persecution and suffering, cannot be expected to do much. To endure steadfastly is, then, all that can be looked for, and is worthy of highest commendation. From two sources did these troubles spring: from blaspheming Jews, and from intolerant Pagans; both actuated by the devil. When Polycarp was tried and martyred (whom some regard as the angel of the Church here addressed), we are told that the Jews joined with the heathen in clamoring for the good bishop's destruction, and were the most forward in bringing the fuel for the fire which consumed him. These Jews were blasphemers,

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in the enmity and contempt which they felt and enacted against Christ and His people; and they were false Jews, and a mere Satanic synagogue, because of that blasphemy. "For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly." It was thus a two-horned Antichrist by which this little Church was gored, bereft, oppressed and trampled; a Church destitute, powerless, crushed, but rich in divine grace, pleasing to God, and comforted with joyous hopes for the world to come, though having nothing but suffering to expect in this.

Pergamos carries in its etymology the idea of a tower, and also of marriage.* It well describes a Church in close proximity to the centre of the kingdom of evil, and yielding itself to sensual alliances. And such was the Church at Pergamos. There was Satan's throne, the darkest centre of Pagan abominations. It had faith, and courage, and endurance, and faithful witnesses to Christ; but it had also some of the worst of elements. It had those who held to a system of ideas answering to the treacherous teachings of Balaam, by which Israel was seduced to fornication and idolatry. It had also those who held to another system of ideas involving tyrannical lordship over the Church: Nicolaitanes, or people-conquerors. It was a Church with a tower of unrighteous assumption in it, and indulgently com-

* Donegan gives πυργος, a tower; γαμος, marriage; τα πυργαμα signifies things lofty or high.

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pliant with the adulterous solicitations and embraces of worldliness. With all its saintship and fidelity, it had need to repent if it would have the approbation of the Lord. It was a Church of much praiseworthy fidelity, but with wicked pretences to loftiness and power on the part of some, and base alliances with what was earthly and Satanic, on the part of others.

The Church in Thyatira had some of the same excellencies, but conjoined with even worse defects. It was active in services and charities, patient in reliance upon God's promises, and increasingly vigorous in its endeavors; but it was lacking in proper zeal for the maintenance of godly discipline and doctrine, and was so indulgent toward errors and errorists that falsehood and idolatry permeated, overlaid and modified the whole character of the Church, obscuring the faith, deceiving the saints, and setting up in its very midst the infamous school of Satan himself. With all that is said commendatory of this Church, the idea of effeminacy connects with its whole history and character. The first Christian in Thyatira was a woman. The name, Thyatira, some take as equivalent to *thygatira*, a daughter. If we take it as a compound of θυγατης and τειρω, we get the idea of feminine oppression. The false prophets who first enticed the members of this Church into apostasy were women. And the great fault which Christ finds with these Christians is their toleration of the false pretences, the miserable domination, and the abomi-

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nable doings, of one whom He designates as "that woman Jezebel," who, like her namesake of old, seems to have borne down what should have been the governing will, set aside the true prophets of God with her falsities, and entirely taken possession of the Church for her own impurities. It was a Church with much activity of faith and love, but lying in the embraces of an adulteress, and, for the most part, completely in her power.

The name of the fifth of these Churches has been variously derived. Some connect it with the precious stone, called *sarda*, which was found about Sardis, and sometimes used as an amulet to drive away fear, give boldness, inspire cheerfulness, sharpen wit, and protect against witchcraft and sorceries. Others have derived it from the Hebrew, and have assigned it the signification of *remnant*, or *an escaped few*. Ebrard finds for it an etymological derivation denoting something new, or renewed. And there is a further explanation which derives it from a word which denotes a builder's rule, or measuring line. These several explanations, though different, are not antagonistic, as applied to the condition of a Church. They can be very well combined in one picture. Courage and boldness imply great conflict and danger. In a great contest, many would be vanquished, but a remnant would escape. Those surviving and escaping would necessarily involve new features of life and *régime*. And in this process of renewal there would appropriately

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come in the use of the carpenter's rule in fashioning the new edifice. We accordingly see in this Church comparative freedom from the sorceries of the domineering prophetess of Thyatira, and an account of things remaining as though they had with difficulty been saved from some far-reaching and crippling danger, and of some names which had clean escaped from the abounding defilements. The ideas of newness from old degeneracies, and of the true rule re-given for the new order, run through the entire description. But with all, the boasted new life was in many things but name, and not reality. These Sardians had heard and received that which was right and good; but they did not properly hold or improve what had been given them, and became dead in the very forms and attirements of the new life. Having defied and escaped the sorceress, they suffered their garments to drag in other defilements. There were some noble exceptions, whom Christ pronounces worthy, and who are to walk with Him in white, and whose names He will confess before the Father and His angels, because they were not ashamed to confess Him, and to stand true to His pure Gospel in its spirit and life; but in a large part, the Church of Sardis was but a drooping plant and a dead carcass. It started fresh and new; it had heard and received that to which it is the true life of saints to hold; but it soon had more profession than vitality, and more boastfulness than purity or fruit.

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The Church in Philadelphia shows no interminglings of evil, but is addressed as if embracing only a small exceptional company of acknowledged ones in the midst of a larger body who are no longer recognized as strictly a part of Christ's Church. They are spoken of as having kept His word, and not denied His name: as though many had failed in these particulars, and so lost their place in the acknowledged Christian body. These Philadelphians were but a little flock, poor in worldly goods, and of small account in the eyes of men. They had but little strength, and were greatly oppressed by heretical teachers and pretenders; but they held fast to the word of Christ, in patient waiting for His promise. They were an exceptional band, joined by cords of loving fraternity, as the meaning of the word is, and they had promises given them of special exemptions and special triumphs.

Very different was the Church of Laodicea. Here was nothing to commend, though having in it a few suffering ones whom Christ loves and chastens. Its name* designates it as the Church of mob rule, *the democratic Church*, in which everything is swayed and decided by popular opinion, clamor and voting; and hence a self-righteous and self-sufficient Church. It is described as thinking itself the perfection of Churches. It said in its heart, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need in nothing;"

* Λαοδικεια, from λαος, people, and δικη, judgment, or justice.

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but never was a body of people so wofully self-deluded. With all this boastfulness, the faithful and true Witness found nothing which He could abide, and pronounces them wretched, and pitiable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and about to be vomited up and cast out.

We thus find all sorts and shades of intermingled or coexistent good and evil in the Church of that day. Some were priestridden, and on that account condemned; and some were mob-ridden, and hence unsatisfactory to Christ. Some had great zeal for pure doctrine and godly discipline, whilst they failed in the important element of love and charity; and others, with much faith and beneficence, yet permitted the manlier things of doctrine, and the ruling out of impurity, to be overlaid by the false pretences and dominations of lewd effeminacy. Some in their sufferings were faultless, but feeble; and others in their prosperity were strong, but dead and corrupt. There was true faith, and false faith, and sometimes no faith. There were schisms, and heresies, and sects, as well as devout works, and noble self-sacrifices, and instances of fidelity unto death. There were children of the kingdom and children of the wicked one, wheat and tares, truths and errors, sins and sanctities, then as now, and as in all intervening ages. The leaven of evil was even then already working in the woman's meal, and the birds of impurity finding lodgment in the branches of the springing tree.

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5. We may also notice, in this connection, the stress which our blessed Lord lays upon the practical features of religion. It is upon these that His commendations and censures turn. What He praises in the Ephesians is their labor, their endurance, their resistance of evil, their patience, their courageous perseverance in well doing; and what He proposed as the remedy for their defects, was that they should return to first *works*. Love, ministries, patience, labors, works: these are the things to which He refers with most delight, as the marks of the true election, and the proper badges of approved saintship. It is in vain to boast of a correct creed, of right theories, of sound doctrine, if there be no practical godliness, no good works, no positive virtues and active charities and labors. Orthodoxy is important, but orthodoxy alone will not do The most orthodox in this list is depictured as the deadest. Mere ecstacies, pleasant frames joyous feelings, loud professions, or dreams that we are rich in grace and in the divine favor, will not do; for the most ecstatic and the best pleased with itself, among these Churches, was the worst. There must be faith, and a true faith; but also a living, working, bearing, self-denying faith—a faith which shows its life and power by love, by charities, by gracious ministries, by active services and sacrifices for God. Persecutions and sufferings may cut off opportunity for such displays, as winter overlies and locks up the germs and life-powers of nature, and hides them from

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our view; but, as spring-time and summer bring those hidden germs to light, and cause them to put forth and fill the face of heaven with joyous freshness, beauty and fruit, so must true piety in the soul show itself in the life, in good deeds, in devoted endeavors, in a loving spirit, and in faithful standing to the truth, whatever might be the cost or storms.

There are, indeed, such things as "dead works;" works that have no life-connection with piety; works put on from without, and not brought forth from within; fruits tied upon the tree, and not the product of its life; which are not at all characteristics of true religion. There may be prayers, vigils, fasts, temples, altars, priests, rites, ceremonies, worship, and still be no true piety. Heathenism has all these. There may be Christian profession, connection with the Church, observance of the sacraments, where saving religion has never taken root. None of these things alone characterize a Christian. That which distinguishes him, where all other tests fail, is his living, active love to God and man—his CHARITY. If this be lacking, the defect is fatal. All knowledge, all faith, all mastery of tongues, all miraculous powers, cannot atone for such a deficiency. For "pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep unspotted from the world."

6. These Epistles further set before us Christ's

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use of the great doctrine of His return, and the very high place it occupies among the motives to penitence, hope, steadfastness and godly fear. In this respect, the language of the blessed Lord harmonizes exactly with that of His inspired servants. Finding the Ephesians cooling in their love, He enjoined on them a speedy repentance and return to their first works, lest His coming should suddenly overtake them. The suffering Smyrnaotes, though taught to look for naught but tribulation in this world, were exhorted to be faithful in view of the crowns which it is assigned to that day to bring. The Pergamites were plied with it as an object of just dread to them, in consequence of their Balaamite and Nicolaitane doctrines, and as the great incentive to immediate repentance. The believers of Thyatira were referred to it as the motive for holding fast to the faith, and as an event which was to end their struggles and temptations. The Sardians are commanded to remember how they had received and heard, and to hold fast, and repent, and watch, on pain of having their Lord and Judge come upon them as a thief, which is contemplated as the worst of calamities. To the Philadelphians it is announced, as a subject of comfort and hope, that Christ shall quickly come. And to the Laodiceans He is represented as already present, knocking at the door, prepared to bless those ready to receive Him, but about to eject with loathing the lukewarm masses who fail in fervency and timely repentance.

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Some tell us that *death* is, to all intents and purposes, the coming of Christ to the individual, and that we are to comfort and exhort men with reference to their mortality. But that is not the method of Christ in these Epistles. With the exception of the one to Smyrna, there is no hint that there was any such thing as death for any of those who really believed. I have my doubts whether the Scriptures warrant any Christian in expecting to die at all. Paul, in several places, has taught us most specifically that there are Christians who shall never die. Such of Christ's waiting and watching people as shall be alive and remaining at the time of Christ's coming, are not to sleep, not to die, but to be suddenly transfigured and caught up to the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Thess. 4 : 17.) And as Christ may come in any of these passing generations, I cannot see how true Christians of any generation can reconcile it to the Scriptures to count upon dying. Death, to the saint, is not that certainty which it is sometimes represented; nor is it of a character to impress and comfort as the doctrine of Christ's coming, in power and glory, to give deliverance to His sighing and dying creation, and dominion to His saints. It is to that coming, therefore, and the translation of the watching and faithful without tasting of death, and of the glorious honors into which it is to induct the patient waiters for it, and the fearful disasters which it is to bring upon the unprepared, that the Scriptures everywhere refer us, and upon which the Saviour

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Himself relies in all His exhortations to the seven Churches.

And if this was the proper method eighteen hundred years ago, when that coming of the coming One was yet so many centuries in the future, how much more is it the proper method now that threescore generations have passed, and that we have come to the very margin of the great occurrence! People may call it idiosyncrasy in us, that we persist in preaching the near and speedy coming of Christ; but, after all, we only preach as He did when it would seem to have been less in place than now, and as all His inspired apostles also preached when they were yet eighteen centuries further from the event than we are. And if some will have it a sort of amiable hallucination under which we are laboring, it is sufficient for our consolation that the blessed Saviour has trod this path, "leaving us an example that we should follow His steps."

7. There are also important and most interesting hints in these Epistles, respecting the future life and honors which the coming of Christ is to bring to the redeemed. Each Epistle has a promise to a particular victor. These several promises unitedly give us at least a seven-sided view of the future possessions of the saints. To the Ephesian victor Christ awards "to eat from off the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God." To him who abides faithful amid the Smyrna trials, is awarded "the crown of life,

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and exemption from the second death." To the victor of Pergamos is awarded "the hidden manna, and a white pebble engraved with a new name which no one knoweth saving he that receiveth it." The victor of Thyatira is to have "authority over the nations, to rule them with a sceptre of iron," and to receive "the morning star." The victor of Sardis is to be "clothed with white raiment, and walk with Christ in white," and have his name continued upon the book of life, and confessed in the presence of the Father and of the holy angels. The victor of Philadelphia is to be made a pillar in the temple of God, never again to go out, and to have the name of God written upon him, and the name of the new Jerusalem, the city of God, and the new name of Christ himself. And to the victor of Laodicea is the highest promise of all,—even to sit with Christ on His throne, as Christ overcame and sitteth with the Father on His throne.

Have we here seven orders of rewards, to seven orders of Christians, succeeding in their triumph through seven orders of surroundings? Or have we here seven steps or degrees in the rewards of the saints, unto which each one attains? Or have we really both? They rise in degree from the first to the last, as do the evils and the adversities over which the victories are achieved. They also seem to have been framed in the light of the whole sweep of God's varied dispensations, from the days of Adam onward, until Christ shall have reinstated His saints in the fruition of all that

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Adam lost. The first refers to a readmission to a paradise and a tree of life, answering to, if not the very same from which Adam was excluded. The next proclaims a triumph over the afflictions, and an exemption from the death, which pertain to the state of expulsion from paradise and the tree of life. The third throws open the same or like storehouses out of which the pilgrim Hebrews were sustained in the wilderness, and imparts the engraved and shining jewel, as on Aaron's breastplate, which admits as a priest into the presence-chamber of the Lord. The fourth promises authority and judicial administrations upon nations, which find their type in Joshua's and David's and Solomon's victories and reigns, with an addition the exact nature of which I have not been able to penetrate.* And having thus exhausted the range of the dispensations of the past, the next three move forward to things predicted of the future. The promise to the victor of Sardis links itself with the solemnities which are to end this world: with the resurrection, the opening of the books, and the official acknowledgment of those whose names are in the registry of the faithful. The next takes its elements from the setting up of a new kingdom, and a new city, and rights of celestial citizenship, and a temple, not made with hands, eternal in

* I have since thought the promise to refer to the exalted position of those saints who are joined with Christ in the judgment of the world, which heralds and brings the final consummation as the morning-star the day.

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the heavens. Whilst the last conducts to a point of settlement and dominion beyond which there is nothing higher to be imagined or desired: even session with Christ upon His everlasting throne.

But in whatever way we take these promises, they set before us a body of honor, and privilege, and power, and blessedness, greater than eye hath seen, or ear heard, or the heart of man conceived. It has been well observed that these seven promises together, in their twofold aspect, form by far the completest description to be found in all the Word of God, of what good things they are which God has prepared for them that love Him.* They set before us a destiny to which the faithful shall attain, at which the lean, meagre, shallow, shadowy, flimsy thing some present as heaven, sinks into insipidity and contempt. They present us with something fitting and competent to brace up the courage of the Church, to carry her to the pitch of bearing the cross, and crucifying herself with Christ, and actualizing her professed expatriation from this world. They open to us prospects which put upon the commonplaces of heavenly anticipation the disgrace and shame of scarcely having caught the first syllables of what is laid up for the true saints of God. But we have not time to dwell here, or even to touch sundry other topics suggested by these Epistles, in their relation to the particular Churches

* Rev. Wm. Lincoln, "Javelin of Phineas," p. 149.

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addressed. The consideration of these Churches, in their representative and prophetic character, we therefore necessarily must defer to another occasion. Meanwhile, let us think of the standard which the Saviour has here set up for His people, and seek to animate ourselves to the zeal, self-sacrifice and devotion which alone can secure the prize here held out for our attainment.

Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for every one,
And there's a cross for me.

How happy are the saints above,
Who once were sorrowing here!
They ever taste unmingled love,
And joy without a tear.

The consecrated cross I'll bear,
Till Christ shall set me free,
And then go home, my crown to wear,
For THERE'S A CROWN FOR ME.

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LECTURE SEVENTH.

THE SEVEN EPISTLES PROPHETIC—THE CHURCH TO BE NEVER OTHER THAN A MIXED SOCIETY—THE CONSTANT CUMULATIVENESS OF ECCLESIASTICAL EVIL—CHRIST'S OPINION OF THE PROFESSED CHURCH IN ITS VARIOUS PHASES—NICOLAITANISM—BALAAMISM—MARRIAGE OF THE CHURCH WITH THE WORLD—JEZEBEL—THE REFORMATION—THE REVIVALS OF THE PAST CENTURY—CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHURCH IN OUR DAY—THE EXCEEDING VALUE OF THESE EPISTLES PROPHETICALLY VIEWED.

Rev. 3 : 21.—He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.

WE have glanced over the contents of these Epistles, considered in relation to the particular Churches addressed. But this is not the only nor the chief aspect in which they are to be viewed. As I have repeatedly affirmed, these particular Churches have a representative character, comprehending the entire Church of all places and ages. It is impossible to find an adequate reason why only these seven were written to in this manner, except upon this assumption. The number is that significant of dispensational fulness, entire completeness. The Saviour speaks of them as involving some sort of "mystery,"

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having significance beyond what appears upon the surface. The command to hear and consider what is said is given with such urgency and universality, as to argue something peculiarly significant to all people of all time. Much of the language is symbolically applied, and fits and receives a comprehensive lucidness, in a prophetic acceptation, which it is not otherwise found to possess. These seven Epistles are also a very prominent and vital part of a book which is specifically described as a book of *prophecy*. (Chap. 1:3; 22:18.) There is also an evident historical consecutiveness in the several pictures, as well as contemporaneousness; and such a complete successive realization of them can be traced in the subsequent history of the Church, even down to the present, that it seems to me impossible fairly to get rid of the conclusion, that these seven Churches were selected as affording, in their respective names, states, wants, and messages, a prefiguration of the entire Church in its successive phases from the time John wrote to the end of its history. Joseph Mede has well presented the case, where he says: "If we consider their number, being seven (which is the number of revolution of times, and therefore in this book the seals, trumpets and vials also are seven); or if we consider the choice of the Holy Ghost, in that He taketh neither all, no, nor the most famous Churches then in the world, as Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, and many others, and such, no doubt, as had need of instruction as well as those here

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named; if these things be well considered, it will seem that these seven Churches, besides their literal respect, were intended to be as patterns and types of the several ages of the Catholic Church from the beginning thereof unto the end of the world; that so these seven Churches should prophetically sample unto us a sevenfold successive temper and condition of the whole visible Church, according to the several ages thereof, answering the pattern of the seven Churches here."*

Receiving this, then, as the truth in the case, I now take up the topic deferred when we last had this subject before us, and proceed to note some of the teachings of these Epistles, considered—

II. In relation to the entire Church represented.

And so important and far-reaching is the subject, that it becomes us to approach it with solemn hearts, and to pray God to aid us with His enlightening grace, that we may indeed hear, mark, learn and inwardly digest what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.

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* Mede's Works, Book V, chap. 10, p. 90. So also Andreas, one of the earliest writers on the Apocalypse: *διὰ τοῦ ἑβδοματικοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τὸ μυστικὸν ἁπανταχῆ ἐκκλησιῶν σημαίνων.* So also Vitringa (*Anac. Apoc.* p. 32): Omnino igitur existimo Spiritum S. sub typo et emblemate septem Ecclesiarum Asiæ nobis mystice et prophetice voluisse depingere septem variantes status Ecclesiæ Christianæ, quibus successive conspiceretur, etc. See also Augustine, (*Epist.* 49: 2,) and Cocceius.

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1. Viewing these Epistles, then, as descriptive of the entire Church, I find in them this item of fact: that the professed Church, as pronounced upon by Christ himself, is a mixed society, embracing interminglings of good and evil from its beginning to the end. Whether we take the seven Churches as significant of seven successive or as seven coexisting phases, they must needs reach to the end, and so depicture the entire Church. And as there is not one of these Epistles in which the presence of evil is not recognized, so there can be no period in the earthly history of the Church in which it is without bad admixtures. Whether the Ephesian Church extends, as in some sense it must, from the apostolic era to the consummation, or whether it relates mainly to the first period alone, and the Laodicean the last, we still have a vast deal which the Lord and Judge of the Church condemns, stretching its dark image from the commencement to the close. There were fallen ones, and some whose love had cooled, and some whose first works had been abandoned, and some giving place to the base deeds of the Nicolaitanes, and some false ones claiming to be apostles and were not, even among the warm, patient, fervent, enduring and faithful Ephesians. In Smyrna were faithless blasphemers, and those of Satan's synagogue, as well as faithful, suffering ones, and those whom Christ is to crown in heaven. In Pergamos were those who denied the faith, and followed the treacherous teachings of Balaam,

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and the doctrines of the detested Nicolaitanes, as well as those who held fast the name of Jesus, and witnessed for Him unto death. In Thyatira, we find a debauching and idolatrous Jezebel and her death-worthy children, and multitudes of spiritual adulterers, as well as those whose works, and faith, and charity, and patience are noted with favor, and who had not been drawn into Satan's depths. In Sardis there was incompleteness, deadness, defalcation, need for repentance, and threatened judgment, as well as names of those who had not defiled their garments. In Philadelphia we discover "the synagogue of Satan," falsifiers, those who had settled themselves upon the earth, and such as had not kept Christ's word, as well as such as should be kept from the sifting trial, and advanced to celestial crowns. And in Laodicea there was found disgusting lukewarmness, empty profession, and base self-conceit, with Christ himself excluded.

Never, indeed, has there been a sowing of God on earth, but it has been oversown by Satan; or a growth for Christ, which the plantings of the wicked one did not mingle with and hinder. God sowed good seed in Paradise; but when it came to the harvest, the principal product was tares. At earth's first altar appeared the murderer with the saint—Cain with Abel. God had His sons before the flood; but more numerous were the children of the wicked one. And in all ages and dispensations, the plants of grace have ever found the weeds upspringing by their sides, their roots

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intertwining, and their stalks and leaves and fruits putting forth together. The Church is not an exception, and never will be, as long as the present dispensation lasts. Even in its first and purest periods, as the Scriptural accounts attest, it was intermixed with what pertained not to it. There was a Judas among its apostles; an Ananias and a Simon Magus among its first converts; a Demas and a Diotrephes among its first public servants. And as long as it continues in this world, Christ will have His Antichrist, and the temple of God its men of sin. He who sets out to find a perfect Church, in which there are no unworthy elements and no disfigurations, proposes to himself a hopeless search. Go where he will, worship where he may, in any country, in any age, he will soon find tares among the wheat, sin mixing in with all earthly holiness; self-deceivers, hypocrites and unchristians in every assembly of saints; Satan insinuating himself into every gathering of the sons of God to present themselves before the Lord. No preaching, however pure; no discipline, however strict or prudent; no watchfulness, however searching and faithful, can ever make it different. Paul told the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord should not come until there came a falling away first, and an extraordinary manifestation of sin and guilt in the Church itself; and assured them that that embodied apostasy was to live and work on until the Lord himself should come and destroy it by the manifestation of His own personal

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presence. The Saviour himself has taught us, that in the Gospel field wheat and tares are to be found; that it is forbidden to pluck up the bad, lest the good also be damaged; and that both are to "grow together until the harvest," which is the end of the economy—the winding up of the present order of things — "the end of this world."

2. But I further ascertain from these Epistles, that, in Christ's judgment of the Church, the evil that is in it is constantly cumulative and growing. The first of nearly everything in the Scriptures is mostly considered the best; and so the Church was purest at its beginning. As Hegisippus has said, "The virgin purity of the Church was confined to the days of the apostles." The further centuries carry it from its first years, the more of its original excellence does it lose, and the more apostate does it become. It was so before the flood. It was so in the Jewish economy. And it is so in our dispensation. If these seven Churches represent so many phases or states of the Church general, those phases or states must also be successive, as well as coexistent. And if successive, then they must succeed each other in the order in which Christ has put them: the first first, and the last last. The Church in Ephesus thus becomes descriptive of the first phase or period; that in Smyrna of the second; that in Pergamos of a third; that in Thyatira of a fourth; and so to the end. View-

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ing them, then, in this order, we can readily identify the growth of evil, from its first incoming, through its various stages, to its final culmination. Indeed, these seven Epistles are so many photographs of apostasy, taken at different periods of its life, from its infancy to its maturity.

In the first Epistle, the Lord puts his finger upon the origin of the mischief. Here is depictured a first and model estate, which is described as that of "*first love.*" From that "first love" the Saviour notes a decline. This is the first picture. It was in the very hearts of Christ's own people that all corruptions of Christianity and apostasy began. "*Thou hast left thy first love.*" It is to the heart that Christ traces all evils. And it is according to the estate of the heart that He judges of us. Where love declines, bad practices soon creep in. The Ephesians waned in original fervor, and soon were troubled with those who departed from the simplicities of the Gospel, betook themselves to Jewish and Pagan intermixtures, and began to put forward the ministry as a sort of priestly class, depreciating and setting aside the laity. Of these were Diotrephes, who coveted preëminence; and those of whom Peter disapproved, as undertaking to be "lords over God's heritage;" and those whom Paul resisted, as seeking to transfer to Christianity what pertained to the Jewish ritualism and Pagan philosophy. These were the "Nicolaitanes,"* whose "*deeds*" are

* From νικαω, to vanquish, and λαος, people, or laity.

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singled out for reprehension. But so long as the apostles lived, their influence was inconsiderable. At first, they had but few followers and small success. It was not long, however, as Church history shows,* until they gained adherents and force, and laid the foundations of all subsequent defections and troubles. What in the first picture was feeble, and vigorously resisted, and found only in isolated cases, in the second picture has already grown to be a distinguished and influential party, whose utterances are heard and felt, and which is now characterized as a "synagogue of Satan." And in the third picture, what were only "*deeds*" have come to be taken up as *doctrine*. The false practices now appear in the shape of an article of faith. What had previously been kept pretty well at bay, is now found nestled in the very heart of the Church. What in the first picture was hated and withstood, is now tolerated, and seemingly cherished. And to it is added another feature, equally condemned by the Saviour, and equally favored by many of these Pergamites. To the Nicolaitanes are added Balaamites: *destroyers of the people*, as well as vanquishers of them, as the meaning of the word Balaam is.† The sin of that prophet was, that he counselled with the enemies of Israel, and advised the drawing of them into forbidden friendships and adulterous and idolatrous alliances, by means of which "twenty and four thousand"

* See Mosheim's Ecc. Hist., Cent. I, Part II, chap. 5.

† From בלע, destruction, and עם, people.

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were destroyed. (Numb. 25 : 9.) The Pergamite Church had those who counselled like unlawful unions between the Church and its powerful enemies, thus repeating the apostate prophet, who taught Balak to seduce Israel to sin. And whatever interpretation of the matter we accept, it bears the condemnation of Christ, and in His view so unfavorably characterizes the Pergamites as to furnish a picture of most fearful advances in the inroads of evil.

And the next view gives us a still further advance in the same disastrous tendencies. Here is a heathen, impure and bloody woman, exalted to queenly dominion over God's people, governing them, and domineering over them, and drawing them away into spiritual harlotry and abomination. She is even taken to the bosom of the very angel of the Church, and suffered to assume the prerogatives of a prophetess to the people, though in reality another Jezebel. Have we not here the plain and indubitable evidences of continuity and growth in evil, defection, and apostasy? From the gradual decline of first love we have one steady and onward march, till that line of development reaches its climax in the scarlet woman.

But now comes a new and reactionary movement. The pure Gospel is reproduced, once more heard, and largely received The old and corrupt order of things is not overthrown or superseded, but a remnant escapes from it, and starts out upon a career of fresh life in a new

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order. But notwithstanding the re-announcement of the Gospel, and the many noble names whom God enabled to clear their skirts of the abounding and terrific abominations, the growth of evil, though it took another direction, was not stopped. The renewal was hindered, and the works of the Sardians did not come to perfection. Christ does not find them complete before God. What was "received and heard" was not properly remembered and held. The things which were preserved were left to droop, ready to fall into the embrace of death. The new life that had been engendered was soon enfeebled and brought to languishment. And under the name and boast of life, there was death. The old was not changed, and the new which had escaped out of it was stagnant and lifeless. Evil had gained a new victory on a new field. Christendom had completed a new phase, and was one step further in its process of ripening for ultimate rejection.

Another is described, in which the work of God is revived and thriving in many hearts, who are drawn together in united efforts and brotherly affection. An open door of usefulness in the spread of the truth is set before them, which no one can shut. They show a little strength, and in poverty and self-denial hold fast to the word and the name of Christ. But they are an exceptional band of brothers in the Lord. About them are the great multitudes of nominal Christians, dwelling upon the earth, and comfortably settled down in its good things, who require the

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sifting of great trial to bring them to even a tolerable Christianity. And besides, there is a great nerd of errorists and liars, who wear the profession of Christians, but are really "the synagogue of Satan."

One other picture is added, and it is the worst. In the first four, the progress of mischief is in the line of consolidation and concentration of power, with all its abuses. In the last three, the reverse obtains, and the evil runs in the line of disintegration, separation, and individualism, until finally each man comes to be pretty much his own Church. The Laodicean Church is not the Church in Laodicea, as in the other cases, but "the Church *of Laodiceans.*"* It would seem as if the Church, in its proper character of an elect company, had quite faded from view, and the world itself had now become the Church. The confessing body is hardly any longer distinguishable from any other body. It is neither one thing nor the other—"neither cold nor hot." And yet, in pride and boastfulness, hypocrisy and self-deception, there never has been its like. It claims to be rich, and increased with goods, and having need in nothing, and yet is the wretched and pitiable, and poor, and blind, and naked. It thinks itself all it ought to be, and appropriates to itself all divine favor and blessedness; and yet, the very Lord in whom it professes to

* Ἐκκλησίας Λαοδικέων. Some of the MSS., however, have τῶν Λαοδίκια, the same as in the other instances.

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trust is denied a place in it, and is represented as barred out, where He stands and knocks as His last gracious appeal before giving over the infamous Babylon to the judgments which are ready to sweep it from the earth. That which started as a little band of loving, self-sacrificing and persecuted saints, redeemed out of the world, and no longer of it, comes to be a vast, wide-spread, characterless, Christless, conceited *thing*, to which Jehovah says, "*I am about to spue thee out of my mouth.*"

We may trace this continuous growth of ecclesiastical evil, also, in the varying attitude and conduct of the Saviour toward these several Churches. To the first, He utters himself in the utmost gentleness. He first commends with great satisfaction, and then rebukes with great mildness and reluctance. Much the same tone is maintained in the second Epistle, with a stronger insinuation with reference to the closer and more potent presence of a body of Judaizers, whom He denounces as blasphemers. But in the third, His words gather sharpness, and the angel of the Church of Pergamos is reproved with an intensity of displeasure and condemnation for the first time seen, and which heightens with the next. "Thou hast there those who hold the teaching of Balaam. . . . Thou thyself also hast those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes." And in the fourth Epistle, besides the sweeping severity of His complaints and threatenings, He makes a change in the position of the admonition of the

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Spirit to hear. Up to this point, that admonition precedes the promise; here, and in the subsequent Epistles, it is put *after* the promise. In the first three instances, it would seem to be the address of the Spirit from within the professing body, calling to the world without; but in the last four, it would seem that the Spirit itself is without, and that the call is considered now as having the same relation to the body of the professed Church as to the world. It is thus intensely significant of prevailing apostasy, which has so Paganized the professing Church as to make true Christians as exceptional in the Church as in the world. As the pillar of cloud went up from before the camp of Israel, and took its place behind it, to sever the Lord's people from the Egyptians, so this change intimates that the Church, as a body, has become so blended with the world, that a separation needs to be drawn between Christ's true people and it, the same as *its* calling was meant to sever it from the world. Hence, in all the Epistles in which the Spirit's warning takes its place *after* the promise, the great body of the professed Church, as such, is treated as apostate, and hopelessly corrupt, whilst at the end the fearful announcement is made that Christ is about to cast it loathingly from Him.

And in still another respect does Christ successively alter His attitude toward these Churches, indicative of growing displeasure on His part, and gradual ripening for judgment on their part. He required of the Ephesians to repent of their

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decline of love, simply referring to the fact that He "will come." He enjoined upon the Pergamites to repent of their still worse defections, by the sharper announcement: "Otherwise I am coming to thee quickly." Concerning the Thyatirans, he gives a still more fearful picture of His coming to judgment, and declares that He will cast Jezebel and her paramours into perdition, and slay her children with death. Upon the Sardians he threatens the disaster of arriving over them as a thief, at a moment of supposed security. The liars and errorists of Philadelphia He says He will humble in the utmost degree, and bring upon those settled down in the world an hour of dreadful trial, the same as shall befall the world itself; and that He is coming quickly, as already in the very act of it. And with reference to the loathsome Laodiceans, He represents himself as already present, appealing to them for the last time, and ready now to spue them out of His mouth.

What, then, does all this mean, but that the Church, as a professing body, pure and excellent as it was at the beginning, and with all the partial revivals that mark different periods of its career, and with all the myriads of saints it has embraced, is yet, in the judgment of the Son of God himself, a subject of gradual and ever-increasing decline and decay, first in one direction, then in another, until it becomes completely apostate, and, as such, is finally and forever rejected? This will be for many a very sad and startling

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doctrine. It is a paradox. It crosses many a fond dream. It carries dismay to certain humanitarian theories, which are much preached up. It strikes the death-blow to the doctrine of a temporal millennium, and to the hope of an ecclesiastical renovation of the world. Contrary to much of the thinking which prevails, it shows the professed Church in process of conversion to the world, instead of the world in process of conversion, by its means, to Christ. But I am sure that it is the truth of God. Be the logical consequences what they may, I stand here upon the solid rock of Christ's own presentation of the case, as viewed from the judgment seat.

3. But I further learn from these Epistles, considered in their representative relations, what is equally, if not more, important. They give Christ's own judgment and decision concerning many very grave matters which have agitated, divided, distracted and despoiled the Church in various ages, and some of which are still of the most intense practical moment. In this respect, they differ greatly from most other portions of Scripture. We elsewhere find what, if rightly applied, would give us the same results. But here we have, not only principles, which we in our weakness are to take and apply as facts and circumstances may require, but the facts themselves, under Christ's own eye, and directly and authoritatively pronounced upon by Him; not only the materials out of which to form our

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judgment of what Christ is likely to think of particular systems, tendencies or measures in the Church, but those systems, tendencies, and measures themselves, brought before the judgment seat, reviewed by His all-searching intelligence, and their true character declared direct from His own lips.

In the view of these Epistles which I have been endeavoring to bring out, we can be at no great loss to know what Nicolaitanism is. If they relate to successive phases of the Church general, there can be no disagreement as to the identity of the Smyrna period with the era of the Pagan persecutions. Smyrna was to have a tribulation of "*ten days;*" and all ecclesiastical writers agree in enumerating "*ten*" of these persecutions, raging most fearfully during *ten years*, from the decree of Dioclesian in A. D. 303, to the Constantinian edict of Milan in A. D. 313. Even the opponents of the prophetic view of these Epistles agree, that "Smyrna represents excellently well the *ecclesia pressa* in its last and most terrible struggles with heathen Rome."* *The distinctive Pergamite period did not therefore commence before the fourth century.* And as we find these Nicolaitanes in full sway in this period, and giving character to it, it follows unmistakably that they were *not* a primitive sect, of which some have spoken, but of which no one knows anything. Existing already in the Ephesian era, we

* See Trench on the Sev. Epist., p. 309.

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find Nicolaitanism stretching through centuries, and exerting an influence so marked, that it is not possible that history should be entirely silent with reference to it, although not known by this name. The truth is, that it figures largely in all Church annals; and we have only to look at the signification of the name which Christ gives it, and at the characteristic tendencies of the period succeeding the Pagan persecutions, to identify it. We know that it was a thing which started in practice, and afterwards embodied itself in theory, and became a feature of doctrine. We know that it was something which put down the people, superseded them in their rights, and set them aside; for this is the plain import of the name which Christ gives it, and the names which are divinely given are always exactly descriptive of the things or persons that receive them. We also know, from the Scriptures, and from the common representations of all ecclesiastical historians, that the Church was hardly founded until it began to be troubled with the lordly pretensions and doings of arrogant men, in violation of the common priesthood of believers, and settling upon ministers the attributes and prerogatives of a magisterial order, against which Peter, Paul and John were moved to declare their apostolic condemnation, but which grew nevertheless, and presently became fixed upon the Church as part of its essential system. We know that there is to this day a certain teaching, and claim, and practice, in the largest part of the professed Church, ac-

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cording to which a certain order severs itself entirely from the laity, assumes the rights and titles of priesthood, asserts superiority and authority over the rest in spiritual matters, denies the right of any one, whatever his gifts or graces, to teach or preach in the Church who has not been regularly initiated into the mysterious puissance of its own self-constituted circle, and puts forward its creatures, however glaringly deficient in those heavenly gifts which really make the minister, as Christ's only authorized heralds, before whom every one else must be mute and passive, and whose words and administrations every one must receive, on pain of exclusion from the hope of salvation. We also know that this system of priestly clericalism and prelatical hierarchism claims to have come down from the earliest periods of the Church, and traces for itself a regular succession through the Christian centuries, and appeals to patristic practice as its chief basis, vindication and boast. We know that it first came into effective sway in the period immediately succeeding the Pagan persecutions,* reaching its fullest embodiment in Popery, and has perpetuated itself in the same, and in Laudism, tractarianism, and high-Churchism, even to our day, and to our very doors. And if we would know what the Lord Jesus thinks of it,

* Even Archbishop Cranmer testifies that "the bishops and priests were at one time, and were no two things, but both one office, in the beginning of the Christian religion."—*Burnet's Reform.*, App., Book III.

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we have only to recur to these Epistles, in which He lays His hand right on it, and says: "THIS THING I HATE."

Contemporaneous with the flowering of Nicolaitanism, was another influential and characterizing feature manifested in the Church, of which the name of Pergamos itself is significant—a certain *marriage with worldly power*, which the Saviour pronounces adulterous, idolatrous and Balaamitic. Nor can we be in doubt respecting this, any more than the other. Its development is located in the period immediately succeeding the Pagan persecutions, when the Church, according to all historians, sacred and secular, did consent to one of the most marked and marvellous alliances that has occurred in all its history. We know that there was then formed a union between the Church and the empire, which the fall of that empire hardly dissolved, and which has been perpetuated in the union of Church and State, in the greater part of Christendom, down to this very hour. It was an alliance cried up at the time, and by many since, as the realization of the millennium itself, and the great consummating victory of the cross. But Christ here gives His verdict upon it, pronouncing it an idolatrous uncleanness; Israel joining himself to Baal-peor; a fearful and disastrous compromise of Christianity with the world, which disfigured and debauched the Church, and destroyed myriads of souls. Nor can any one dispute the appropriateness of the imagery, or the justness of

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the sentence. (See also Heb. 12 : 6; James 4 : 4; 1 John 2 : 15; Rev. 18 : 3–9.)

And by means of Nicolaitanism and affiliation with worldly power, by which all sorts of corrupting elements were taken up, the Church soon put on another phase, the distinguishing features of which are most graphically sketched. "For such Protestant expositors," says Trench, "as see the Papacy in the scarlet woman of Babylon, the Jezebel of Thyatira appears exactly at the right time, coincides with the Papacy at its height, yet at the same time with judgment at the door in the great revolt which was even then preparing."* Systematized prelacy, and Balaamism, made the emperor president of the Church Councils and the confirmer of their decrees, brought the community of saints into conjunction with "Satan's throne," and so gave being to that mongrel but mighty thing in which Pagan life was transferred to Christian veins, heathen pomp and ceremony commingled with Christian rites and sacraments, and the professed Bride of Christ transformed into a queenly adulteress, the harlot mother of a harlot household. And in all history there is not another character which so completely represents the Papal system—its character, works and worship—as the unclean wife of Ahab, the Jezebel of these Epistles. She was a heathen, married to a Jew; and such is the character of the Papal system in its main elements—Paganism joined to

* On the Seven Epistles, p. 310.

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an obsolete Judaism. She is described as calling herself a prophetess, and as undertaking to be the teacher of God's servants; and Popery claims and professes to be heaven's only infallible teacher of God's truth. She is described as having a set of "works," emphatically "*her works*," as distinguished from others which are called *Christ's* "*works;*" and Popery is a system of works—a religion of ceremonies, penances, fasts, masses, prayers, vigils, abnegations, bodily macerations, purgatory, and supererogatory and meritorious holiness of saints, by which it proposes to save its devotees. She was an adulteress; and Popery, above all, has been characterized by her unclean dealings with the kings and powers of the earth, lending herself to serve their pleasure, to bring them under her sway, and teaching God's people to accept worldly conformity as a means of Christian victory. She was a persecutor and murderess of God's prophets and witnesses; and the Papacy is marked by nothing more than its severity toward such as stood out against its impious pretences, and its public and secret tortures and butcheries of the saints. "For in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth." According to the most credible reading of these Epistles, this Jezebel is represented as the angel's wife; and it is characteristic of Popery to enforce celibacy upon the clergy, holding them to be married to the Church, and hence teaching all her sons and daughters to call them "fathers." This Jezebel

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is also described as having "children," alike with her unsatisfactory to Christ; and whence but from that unclean source have we those semi-Papal national religious establishments, by which the Church of Jesus is befouled, hindered and disgraced, even in many Protestant countries? We thus obtain from these Epistles Christ's own direct verdict upon Romanism, both in its more offensive features in the old mother, and in its more modified forms in the daughters.

And so, if we would know how the Reformation stands in the Saviour's estimation, we also find it here. As to the great spiritual leaders in it, His comforting declaration is, that their garments were undefiled; that their names are held in honor; and that they shall walk with Him in white; "for they are worthy." As to the character of the doctrines on which it was based, His command is to remember them, observe them, and watch, as the means of being ready for Him when He comes. And as to the final outcome of the blessed movement, His plain and unmistakable word, on the other side, is, that it was *not complete;* that its works have not been found perfect in the sight of God; that the new phase of the Church which resulted from it had not the vitality which it professed; and that the things which it had taken in hand to conserve, it did too much neglect and leave to droop and wither. Its agents were pure and noble, its principles were right and true; but its fruits were incomplete, its results were marred, and its

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achievements fell short of the mark at which it aimed. The Saviour almost names the great-souled men who led in that glorious work, and seems almost to sign with His own hand the Protest of Spire and the Confession of Augsburg, and to reiterate from heaven the great foundation doctrines:

AN OPEN BIBLE MAN'S ONLY LAW OF FAITH;

TRUST IN A CRUCIFIED SAVIOUR MAN'S ONLY JUSTIFICATION;

THE GLORIFIED JESUS THE ONLY LORD AND MASTER OF THE CHURCH.

But the working out of these principles in what followed, He as clearly pronounces defective; and the embodying of them in the life developed upon them, He adjudges to be a thing of "name" more than reality.

Two centuries passed and the Protestant Churches assumed another phase. The times of the Pietists, and the Puritans, and the Methodists came on, and there was a new stir in dead Christendom. Those who had escaped from the dominion of Jezebel began to remember how they had received, and heard, and to observe, and repent, and wake up to a sense of the common brotherhood of man, and especially of believers. Christians began to see and feel that the Gospel is more than orthodoxy, and that living aggressiveness is one of its fundamental features. The era of revivals, and missions, and united efforts for the general conversion of mankind ensued,

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such as had not been since the primitive ages. Many indeed continued to live on in ease, settled comfortably upon the earth, and but slightly influenced by the new spirit. Great multitudes of false professors, boastful of their claims, and sneering and censorious toward the men of true faith, yet swarmed throughout Christendom. But, upon the whole, there was great revival of life and fraternity among Christians. All this we find depictured in the Sixth Epistle, and verified in the history of the last hundred years. And Christ's estimate of this state of things is also given. The true men of love He declares He loves. As their hearts have been to extend the victories of the cross, He promises them an open door of success which none should be able to shut, notwithstanding the efforts made to silence and hinder them. Because they kept His word in patient waiting on Him and for Him, He promises that they shall be kept out of the sifting trials which He threatens to send upon those dwelling at ease. And as for the rest, they are the "synagogue of Satan," whom He engages to humble at the very feet of His faithful ones.

There is yet one other phase. Shall I say that it is yet future, or that we have already entered it? Here are still some whom Christ loves,—mostly suffering ones, under the rebukes and chastenings of their gracious Lord. But the body of Christendom is quite apostate, with Christ outside, and knocking for admission into his own professed Church. Paul prophesied of the Church

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that in the last period, men would be mere "lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, *having the form of godliness but denying the power thereof.*" (2 Tim. 3:1–5.) This is a fearful picture, almost as dark as that which he gave of the heathen world before Christianity touched it. (See Rom. 1:26–32.) But it answers precisely to the Saviour's portraiture of the characteristics of the Church in its last phase.

It is *Laodicean*,—conformed in everything to the popular judgment and will,—the extreme opposite of Nicolaitane. Instead of a Church of domineering clericals, it is the Church of the domineering mob, in which nothing may be safely preached except what the people are pleased to hear,—in which the teachings of the pulpit are fashioned to the tastes of the pew, and the feelings of the individual override the enactments of legitimate authority.

It is *lukewarm*,—nothing decided,—partly hot and partly cold,—divided between Christ and the world,—not willing to give up pretension and claim to the heavenly, and yet clinging close to the earthy,—having too much conscience to cast off the name of Christ, and too much love for the world to take a firm and honest stand entirely on His side. There is much religiousness, but very

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little religion; much sentiment, but very little of life to correspond; much profession, but very little faith; a joining of the ball-room to the communion-table, of the opera with the worship of God, and of the feasting and riot of the world with pretended charity and Christian benevolence.

And it is self-satisfied, boastful, and empty. Having come down to the world's tastes, and gained the world's praise and patronage, the Laodiceans think they are rich, and increased with goods, and have need in nothing. Such splendid churches, and influential and intelligent congregations, and learned, agreeable preachers! Such admirable worship and music! Such excellently manned and endowed institutions! So many missionaries in the field! So much given for magnificent charities! Such an array in all the attributes of greatness and power! What more can be wanted?

And will it answer to say that all this is not largely and characteristically the state of things at this very hour? Can any man scrutinize narrowly the professed Church of our day, and say that we have not reached the Laodicean age? Is it not the voice of this Christendom of ours which says: "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need in nothing?" And is it not equally the fact that this selfsame Christendom of ours is "the wretched, and the pitiable, and poor, and blind, and naked?" Did the "Mene, mene, tekel upharsin" of Belshazzar's palace better fit the ancient heathen than this modern Christian Ba-

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bylon? Men talk of it as destined to glorious triumph. They proclaim it commissioned of God to convert the world. They point to its onward march as about to take speedy possession of the race for Christ and heaven. But "The Amen" hath spoken. "The faithful and true Witness" hath given His word: "I AM ABOUT TO SPUE IT OUT OF MY MOUTH."

Friends and brethren, I have not *made* these pictures; I have *found* them; and the sevenfold admonition of Almighty God with reference to them is: "He that hath an ear, let him hear." You have listened to my statements; have you taken in their truths? If there is any just apprehension of Holy Scriptures in them, these seven Epistles stand out in transcendent interest and value, as they do in the urgency with which they are pressed upon our attention. They are Christ's own history of His Church. They are Christ's own criticisms upon all its characteristic features and doings for nearly two thousand years. They are Christ's own verdict upon all the great questions which have agitated it, and upon all the great influences and tendencies, from within and from without, which have affected its character or destiny in every period of its career. The touches are few, but the marks of their divinity are in them. They are comprehensive, true, and unmistakable to Him who will rightly approach and fairly deal with them.

And if these Epistles really are what I have represented them to be, then we have in them what

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Christians have so much felt the want of, namely, an authoritative settlement of the great questions between us and prelatists, papists, state-churchists, and false pretenders, errorists and radicals of many sorts. Then also we have in them a final settlement of the question whether the Church, or the returned Saviour, is to carry redemption into successful effect upon earth's depraved and rebellious peoples,—whether there is to be a millennium of peace and universal righteousness wrought by present instrumentalities or not,—whether the tendency of Christendom is toward improvement and perfection, or, like everything else with which fallen man has to do, earthward, deathward, and hellward,—and whether or not the true flock of God is ever to be anything else in this dispensation than a feeble, depressed, and hated minority. All these questions, and many more alike interesting, important, and vital, are put beyond all reasonable disputation in these Epistles if the doctrine of their proper prophetic aspect is to be maintained. And I submit it to you, as you shall answer before the bar of God, whether the truthfulness of this acceptation of them has not been credibly and conclusively made out. The key exactly fits the lock, the impression answers to the stamp, the cast bears the precise outlines of the mould; and it would seem to me like trifling with the truth not to admit that, in the mind of Jesus, they belong together. Let us see to it, then, that we hear as the text commands, and learn to view the Church's errors,

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corruptions, mistakes, and sins, as Christ views them; to love what He loves, to hate what He hates, and to hope only as He has given us authority to hope. And to this may Almighty God grant us His helping grace! Amen.

Help, mighty God!
The strong man bows himself,
The good and wise are few,
The standard-bearers faint
The enemy prevails.
Help, God of might,
In this thy Church's night!

Help, mighty God!
The world is waxing gray,
And charity grows chill,
And faith is at its ebb,
And hope is withering!
Help, God of might,
Appear in glory bright!

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LECTURE EIGHTH.

CONCLUSION OF THE SEVEN EPISTLES—EXPLANATORY OBSERVATIONS—THE GOSPEL NOT A FAILURE—THE CREEDS ON THE SUBJECT—THE SAME AS WITH FORMER DISPENSATIONS—CHRIST HAS HIS TRUE PEOPLE IN EVERY AGE—WHO THEY ARE—WHAT BECOMES OF THEM—THE REMOVAL OF THE SAINTS FROM THE EARTH—THIS TO BE EXPECTED AS THE NEXT GREAT PROPHETIC EVENT.

REV. 4 : 1. (Revised Text.) After these things I saw, and behold, a door set open in the heaven, and the former voice which I heard, as of a trumpet, speaking with me, saying, Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must take place after these things.

THESE words begin a new vision, which constitutes the second grand section of the Apocalypse. It occupies two chapters. It relates not to things on earth, but to things in heaven, and to things subsequent to the period covered by the seven Churches. As the first vision embraces the entire earthly career of the Church on earth, from its organization under the apostles to the coming of Christ, this gives us the state of things intervening between the removal or rapture of the saints, and the letting forth of judgment upon apostate Christendom. In other

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words, it is the Apocalypse of Christ in relation to His elect in heaven, after they have been "taken"—"caught up"—miraculously removed from the world to the pavilion cloud,—and previous to the going forth of His visitations upon those not "accounted worthy to escape all these things," and "left."

But before entering upon this sublime disclosure, there are still some things relating to the Church in its earthly career and fate, which it will be important first to clear up more fully.

In applying the seven Epistles to the successive periods in the history of the Church, a succession of pictures of growing apostasy and defection was exhibited, so contrary to current feelings and ideas, that some, perhaps, might be disposed to question the correctness of the interpretation. Some may perhaps think, that if the tendency of the professed Church is ever downward, then the Church must be considered a failure, and the Gospel regarded as inadequate to its purposes. I had not overlooked these bearings of the subject. It is also due to the truth, and to such as are honestly perplexed in adjusting our expositions to the general scheme of Providence and Revelation, that something more should be said.

Observe, then, in the first place, that so far as regards the history of the Church hitherto, it is a simple matter of fact that its course has always been in the line of deterioration; that mischiefs of different sorts have successively assailed it, and made sad havoc of its faith and life; and that

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from no one of them has it ever recovered, or given signs of its ability or destiny to recover. In a recent course of able Lectures on the Ages of Christendom, I find it announced, as the result of a faithful induction of the facts, that "*Ecclesiastical history is, to a large extent, a history of corruptions.*"* That such is the truth, every one may easily ascertain for himself. The very creeds of the Church are just so many protestations against the consuming errors which have invaded and preyed upon it, and which, once introduced, never entirely disappear. Apart, then, from all prophetic interpretation, it is a stubborn fact, which we must dispose of the best way we can, that the power of deterioration has hitherto held vast sway in the professing Church. History thus accords with prophetic foreshowing, and bears upon its unalterable records what was already foreseen and foretold from the very beginning. And if we do shut our eyes and ears to what the prophets have said, because the picture is unwelcome and embarrassing, the same stands written where we *must* meet it, and where we *must* deal with it, unrelieved by the convenient resort of referring it to some wild and bewildering theories of prophetic interpretation. It is *fact*, and we must admit it, whether it be in the prophecies or not.

It is, moreover, a very foolish thing for us to

* Congregational Lecture for 1855, by John Stoughton, p. 123.

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attempt to marshal the course of God's providence according to our preconceptions and narrow judgments of what is consistent and right. No human philosophy has ever yet been able to cast its boldest guesses half way to the sublimity of the divine plans and purposes. We have justly been compared to children playing on the sea-shore, now and then picking up a few beautiful pebbles or shells, but with the great ocean of God's thoughts lying all undiscovered before us. We may wonder, and question, and debate; but all the fabrics of our wisdom are utterly overwhelmed by the first swell from those mysterious depths. People may ask how it is that the great Author of Christianity has permitted the history of its realization to include so much that is painful and revolting; how it is that He did not keep unpolluted His own sacred institutions—that He did not save the light from being dimmed—that He did not preserve the Church an unblighted garden, a home of unruffled love. We can only answer, that His ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts. The truth is, that God's universe throughout is a very different realm from what man's wisdom would have made it. The human ideal of what a world should be—of what a system of creation should be—of what an order of moral government should be—of what a revelation from heaven should be—is a frail conceit, dashed to atoms the moment it encounters God's actual world, government or word. And the Church is only a more mysterious and

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more miraculous part of a grand system of mysteries and miracles, as wide as space, and stretching through eternity. It is therefore the part of piety and true wisdom to accept God's word as it is, and facts as they are, without interposing barriers to the reception of the truth, by our philosophizing and vain imaginings as to how things should be.

It is also to be remarked that the history of the Church, as we have found it projected in the seven Epistles, accords very well with the history of the universe in general. It is only a smaller circle within a larger of the same sort. "God revealed truth and duty to angels in heaven. He did the same to Adam and Eve on earth. They were all at first perfect, according to their nature. The greater Church above was pure and holy—the lesser Church below had on it no taint. Then a part of the celestial *Ecclesia* apostatized; morning stars fell; sons of God kept not their first estate. The little terrestrial *Ecclesia*, as a whole, was disobedient; as its members multiplied, they corrupted religion, accepted shadows for substances, and went fearfully astray. Here, then, we have examples of responsible creatures having before them divine communications full of holiness and love, while they are either in declared hostility to the gracious message and law, or else keeping hollow peace, and paying hypocritical deference. Infinite power and goodness have not prevented such a collision, nor excluded such an alliance. Evil exists in this world and in

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other worlds. Is it out of harmony with that fact, that evil should be found in Christendom? The analogy between the corruptions of the Christian religion, and the prior corruptions of reason and conscience—between the introduction of sin among angels, and the appearance of sin among Christians—is obvious enough. There is only this difference: that whereas in the earlier case there was apostasy after *perfection*—a departure from the ideal after a full realization of it—in the latter case there has never been full perfection; at the beginning, the ideal was not more than partially realized. The first fall was deeper than the second, and far more wonderful. If nature be corrupted, is it so great a marvel that revelation should be perverted? Amidst the raging of moral disease, is the mystery much increased when we see mortals resisting or misapplying the remedy? How could human sin and folly, prevalent everywhere, be kept out of Christendom, without a miracle very different from, and far greater than, any which the Bible relates?" So Stoughton has well put the case.* Why, then, should we become so disturbed and unsettled at the prophetic portraiture of a continuously corrupting Christendom, down even to the very end of the dispensation? Nay, why should we entertain the idea of an end at all, except upon the underlying assumption, either, as we hold, that it was never meant to be that final and

* "Ages of Christendom," pp. 426–8.

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universally effective thing which some have erroneously conceived it to be, or that there has been some disastrous miscarriage in its aim?

Neither does it compromise the perfection or the divinity of Christianity, that so large a part of its history, even to the end, is a history of corruption and apostasy. The ideal of a thing may be perfect, and the realization of it be very different. Crimes argue nothing against the excellence of the laws by which they are condemned and punished. No more is the Gospel responsible for man's perversions of it, or for the defections which it denounces. Nay, these very apostasies help to evidence its divinity. Having foretold, warned against and condemned them from the commencement, their actual occurrence is proof that it is from Him who knew the end of all things from the beginning. The very announcements of the Gospel, and all its original and authoritative records, predicted "a falling away," the coming of "false prophets in sheep's clothing," a "departing from the faith," the bringing in of "damnable heresies," and all varieties and forms of evil with which the Church has hitherto been marred and disgraced. The darkest pages of its history are just what was foreseen.

> Ere it came,
> Its shadow, stretching far and wide, was known,
> And two who looked beyond the visible sphere
> Gave notice of its coming: he who saw
> The Apocalypse, and he of elder time,
> Who, in awful vision of the night,
> Saw the four kingdoms, distant as they were

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Had it not been so, then these sad disasters might weigh to overturn our faith; but with the whole story of Christendom traced out in advance, in the foretellings of its founders, and the facts in all their details coinciding with the predictions, so contrary to all man's anticipations and ideas, we are assured of the presence of superhuman foresight, and of a wisdom which could only come from God.

Nor does it follow that we must consider the Gospel a failure because of these augmenting defections. If it had been stated in the New Testament that the Gospel was never to be misapprehended or denied by its professors; that the heavenly gift could never be soiled by earthly touch; that the circle of the Church should be forever free from Satanic invasion; that no heresies, schisms, inconsistencies, falsehoods, frauds, hypocrisies or crimes should ever be found in ecclesiastical annals; and that the career of the Church should be like a pure and peaceful river, unobstructed in its flow, unpolluted in its waters, and ever expanding through the centuries, until the world should be covered with the ocean of its outpoured blessings; then, indeed, such obscurations of the sunny picture would necessitate the admission that Christianity has failed. But no such things are written in the New Testament. The very reverse is found in every allusion which it makes to the estate of the Church in this world, or to the nature and object of this dispensation Christ's own miraculous ministry

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gathered around Him but a "little flock," and one of them was a devil. The highest expectation of Paul in his great labors, was that he "might save some." James declared the object of the offer of God's grace to the Gentiles to be, "to take out of them a people for His name," and that "to this agree the words of the prophets." (Acts 15 : 14, 15.) The very designation of the true subjects of divine grace (εκκλησια) singles them out as exceptional to the general mass; as elected and chosen ones, in whose high privileges the great multitudes in every age have no part. And he who looks upon the present Gospel, simply as we now have it, as meant, equipped, and ordained, for the conversion of all mankind, and the recovery of the whole world to holiness, believes what the Scriptures do not teach, and is expecting what God has nowhere promised. There is not a respectable creed in all Christendom that embodies any such doctrine. On the contrary, the fundamental Confession of Protestants condemns, as "Jewish notions," all idea "that, prior to the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall get the sovereignty in the world, and the wicked be brought under in every place."*

* John Conrad Goebel, in his sermons on the Augsburg Confession, interprets this article as repudiating the doctrine of the conversion of the world, and declares that "the idea of a golden age in this world, before the resurrection of the dead, is a mere phantasm, not only contrary to the entire Holy Scripture, but especially contrary to the clear and lucid prophecies of the Lord Jesus Christ and His beloved apostles, where they speak of the times immediately preceding the day

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In like manner, the Latter Confession of Helvetia condemns "the Jewish dreams, that before the

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of judgment—Matt. 24:23; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:3; and other places, where more may be seen upon the subject. Nothing is there said or predicted of a golden age, but only crosses and tribulations, which touch all the estates of the world. Concerning ecclesiastical affairs, it was predicted that in the last times many false Christs and false prophets shall arise, and shall do great signs and wonders, and deceive, if it were possible, the very elect. Concerning hearers, it was predicted that love should wax cold in the hearts of many, and faith wane to such a degree that Christ himself asks: 'When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?' Will that be a golden age? Concerning matters of state, it was predicted that unrighteousness shall sway them, and there shall be wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. Will that be a golden age? Concerning the family, it was predicted that the son shall be against the father, the daughter against her mother, and that a man's foes shall be those of his own house. Will that be a golden age? Concerning common life, it was predicted that there shall be distress of people on earth, and trembling, and fainting for fear, and for looking after the things that are to come upon the earth, and tribulation such as was not from the beginning and never shall be again. Will that be a golden age? And if we will only consider this matter a little in the fear of God, it will be seen that this fanatical notion contradicts all Scripture, as it is contrary to this article of our common Christianity. . . . Here on earth, while the world lasts, we are in the militant Church, and have to suffer as God wills, waiting patiently for the true golden age, and the kingdom of the adorable Trinity—not in this world here on earth, but in the future kingdom of eternal glory and blessedness."—*Die XXI Art. Aug. Conf. in Predigen Erklärt*, pp. 1256–59.

A recent writer (*Das Tausend järige Reich gehört nicht der Vergangenheit, sondern der Zukunft an: Gütersloh*, 1860) also maintains that this article of the Confession condemns the

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judgment there shall be a golden world in the earth, and that the godly shall possess the kingdoms of the world, their wicked enemies being trodden under foot; for the Evangelical truth (Matt. 24 and 25, and Luke 21) and the apostolic doctrine (in the Second Epistle to Timothy, 3 and 4) are found to teach far otherwise."* Luther says: "This is not true, and is really a trick of the devil, that people are led to believe that the whole world shall become Christian. It is the devil's doing, in order to darken sound doctrine, and to prevent it from being rightly understood. . . . Therefore, it is not to be admitted that the whole world and all mankind shall believe on Christ; for we must perpetually bear the sacred cross, that they are the majority who persecute the saints."† Melancthon also puts it forth, as part of the essential faith, that the Church in this life is never to attain a position of universal triumph and prosperity, but is to remain depressed, and subject to afflictions and adversities, until the period of the resurrection

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modern ideas of the universal conversion of the world in the present order of things.

* See Hall's Protestant Confessions, pp. 88, 106.

† "Das ist nicht wahr, und hats eigentlich der Teufel zugerichtet, das man gläubt, die ganze Welt werde Christen werden. Der Teufel hats darum gethan, das er die rechtschaffene Lehre verdunkelte, das man sie nimmer recht verstünde. Darum hüte eich dafür. . . . Darum müst ihr es nicht also verstehen, das die ganze Welt und alle Menchen an Christum werden glaüben; denn wir müssen immer das heilige creuz haben, dass ihr das mehrere Theil sind, die die Christen verfolgen."—*Walch's Luther*, vol. xi, cols. 1082-83.

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of the dead.* All that God has promised concerning His Church in this dispensation, is, that by it the offer of salvation shall be made to mankind in general; that the preaching of the Gospel shall be effective to the taking out of an elect people for His name; and that Christ shall have His acknowledged representatives in every generation. No one pretends that there has been any failure in these respects. And as the great apostasies of the past argue no deficiency or miscarriage in these particulars, so, in all time to come, if but here and there a few faithful ones be found, it will be enough to vindicate every promise which the Church has on this side of the day of judgment.

We do not regard the Mosaic dispensation as a failure because the Jews as a body perverted it by their traditions, and crucified Him for whose kingdom it was given as the means of their preparation. It was never intended to supersede voluntary obedience on their part. They had opportunity to become the Lord's ransomed ones, and to attain the highest honors of the kingdom. There was not a promise but was yea and amen, if they had been willing to comply with the conditions of it. But, as a people, they would not hearken; apostatized, and were rejected. But the purposes of the dispensation did not fail. It was competent to do all that it proposed, and did prepare a people for the Lord, and effectually

* "Scimus item, quod Ecclesia in hoc vita subjecta sit cruci," etc.—*Mel. Op. Corp. Ref.*, vol. xxvi, p. 361.

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filled its place in the ongoing of the history of God's vast plans of mercy. And what the former dispensation was to the Jewish nation, the Gospel is to Christendom. The Christian Church is only a graft upon the same original stem. It has characteristics of its own, but its aim and underlying substance are essentially the same. Its promises are all conditioned after the same manner as the covenant with the natural posterity of Abraham. The breaking off of the graft cannot therefore be considered any more disastrous to the efficiency of the Gospel, than the breaking off of the "natural branches." The cases are precisely parallel, and the argument can only apply in one case as in the other. The Church of the old covenant apostatized, and was cast away; but it accomplished God's purposes, which still went on as effectually as if no such defection had occurred. The Church of the new covenant may prove equally faithless, as all the prophecies show that it will; and God may fulfil His threat also not to spare it; and still no hindrance come to the progress of His great redemptive administrations. Man's perverseness surely cannot unmake God's purposes, or disarrange the divine plans. The Church will still fill out its place in the chain of the economies of His grace.

It is also distinctly told us, that the devil is the prince and god of this age; that Christ's ministers in this dispensation are never anything but ambassadors at a foreign court; that the saints are always mere pilgrims and strangers on the

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earth; that the Gospel is ever to be preached only as a witness to the nations; that when the Son of Man cometh, he shall hardly find faith on the earth; that the days in which He shall come will be evil days, like the days of Noah before the flood; and that the judgment will find mankind banded together in grand confederations of unparalleled rebellion and wickedness. And how thinking people can take in these unmistakable statements, and still cling to a theory of Providence which would make the plainly predicted apostasy of Christendom equivalent to a failure of the plans and promises of God, I cannot understand.

But I may not dwell longer upon this topic now. Whatever defections or judgments befall the nominal Church in any age, this is true, and clearly foreshown in these Epistles: that *God is never without His witnesses upon the earth.* With all the waning love, and false apostles, and Nicolaitane practices of Ephesus, there were some who could not bear those who were evil; and who endured, labored and suffered for the name of Jesus, and whose fidelity is to be rewarded with the joys of Paradise. With all the poverty and tribulation and reproach of the Smyrnaotes, and the false ones of Satan's synagogue by whom they were afflicted, there were some rich in grace, faithful to the last, and destined to wear the crown of life, unhurt of the second death. With the proximity of the Church of Pergamos to Satan's throne, and the presence in it of the advocates

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of adulterous alliances, and systematizers of usurpation and evil, it had members who held fast to the Saviour's name, and kept the faith steadfast unto death, who are to receive of the hidden manna, and feast on heavenly bread, and wear the engraved gem of celestial privilege and honor. Even in Thyatira, where Jezebel herself enacted her damning uncleannesses, there was a remnant who kept aloof from Satan's depths, and wrought the deeds of faith and charity, and made good their title to share in the judgment of nations, and to receive the morning star. The deadness of Sardis was not so pervading, but a few names were left which had not defiled their garments, which had received the truth, and taught it, and lived it, and which are to walk with Christ in white, and to be confessed in heaven. The Philadelphians, though but a handful in the midst of false ones, and dwellers among those too much at ease in worldly comfort, are still a band of earnest brothers, on whom the doors cannot be shut, at whose feet Satan's synagogue shall be humbled, and who are to be kept out of the trying hour, transferred to the celestial temple, and adorned with the name of God, and the new Jerusalem, and the new name of Christ himself. And in among the sickening lukewarmness, pride, boasting and emptiness of the Laodiceans, there are some chastened ones whom Jesus loves, and some who hear His voice, and open unto Him, and sup with Him, and whose destiny is to sit with Him on His everlasting throne.

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And if in these seven pictures the whole length of the Church's history is embraced, the fact stands out, in noonday clearness, that God has His saints in every age.

When we survey the characteristics of our times,—the unrighteousness, the avarice, the lustfulness, the untruthfulness, the hypocrisy, the impiety, the crime, the hollow-heartedness, and the untold hidden iniquities which prevail in all circles of Church, business and State; when we consider the wickednesses which are perpetrated by people who call themselves Christians, and the shameless worldliness of professors of religion, and the wreck of all distinctive doctrinal belief, and the prostitutions of the house of God and the sacred desk itself to vanity, politics, selfishness, sensuality, and base trickery in the name of Jesus; when we look at the insubordination which is left to run riot in the great majority of so-called Christian families, and the secret vices and concealed blood-guilty crimes of so-called Christian husbands and wives, and of the utter moral emptiness, headiness and incontinence of the mass of the busiest and noisiest modern religionists; when we contemplate the goings forth of sin in these days, like Death on the pale horse, with hell following in its train, and come to count up the names of those in our congregations whom we can confidently set down as true and thorough saints of God,—we are sometimes tempted, with the Psalmist, to say, "All men are liars," and to doubt whether God has not resigned His domin-

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ion over mankind, and abandoned them to be drifted, by the whirlwinds of their own passions, to irremediable ruin. But, with all the hard things which we are in honesty and fairness compelled to write against the present population of Christendom, God has not left Himself without witnesses, and still has His true people, who have not kissed their hands nor bowed their knees to the reigning idolatry of the times. Earthy and vile as the congest may be, there is gold in it, as there was an Enoch and a Noah in the generation before the flood, and a Lot even in Sodom itself. Amid all Christianity's corruptions, there has always been some standing out against them. The pure ideal has never failed to produce some proximate realization of itself. Dreary as the annals of the Church appear, both in prophetic and historic records, the student of them still finds his path skirted with spiritual verdure; and in the distant scenery, examples of faith, purity, love, heroism, devotion and obedience, are never once entirely out of view, the loveliest often being found in the by-paths, and encountered where they would be least expected. Even in the darkest eras, imbedded in neglected chronicles, noble names are to be found, sparkling with the radiance of every Christian grace. And by a sort of system of compensation, in nearly every instance, while darkness and death reigned in one place, light and life were vigorous at another. "Contemporary with the waning of piety in Antioch, was its waxing in Milan. When the

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Churches of Alexandria and Carthage were sinking in the decrepitude of formalism, the Churches of Gaul were battling the vices of imperial civilization, and the rudeness and disorder of barbarism. The era of the early growth of Rome's impious pretensions was the era of Ireland's light and life, holiness and beauty. While Mahomet was God's avenger on Syria and Egypt, the monks of Iona were studying their Bible, and Scotch missionaries were crossing the Anglo-Saxon border and entering the heart of Germany. As Gregory IV was encouraging the sons of the Emperor Lewis in parricidal wars, Claude was preaching the truth at Turin, and adorning it with a holy life. When the pontifical court at Avignon was disgracing the name of religion by luxury and vice, pious men were writing books, and preaching sermons, and practising godly virtue, in Teutonic cities. When the night of superstition and despotism was getting blacker than ever in France, the morning star of the Reformation rose on England. When Italian fields were covered with rotten stubble, Bohemia was whitening to the harvest."* And so, in all the ages, there have never failed some blessed offsets to the ever downward tendency of things. Nor will it ever be, in the darkest and dreadest days of Christendom's apostasy, that there will be none to stand up for God and His pure truth, or that His true people shall fail from the earth.

* Stoughton's Ages of Christendom, p. 431.

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Who, then, are they? And what are their characteristics? Nowhere in the Scriptures may we find a more direct and satisfactory answer to these inquiries, than is furnished us in these Epistles. Christ himself here looks down with flaming eyes upon His people, and with a certainty infallible points His finger to those whom He acknowledges, and for whom His everlasting rewards are in reserve. The field which thus opens to our survey is full of inviting riches of instruction and Evangelic truth, in which it would be well for us to linger, and to wander back and forth to note each word, and hint, and incident. The merest glance is all that we can now attempt; but even that will be enough to reveal, in vivid outline, who and what are the saints, and the partakers in the honors of transforming grace.

First of all, they are *Ephesians*—people of warm and kindled hearts, glowing with the impulses of ardent love and zeal toward Christ, as the "chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely."

> Talk they of morals, O thou bleeding Lamb!
> The best morality is love to Thee.

Love to Jesus is the root of all true Christianity. It is the perfection of faith, and it is the fulfilling of the law. The heart that takes fire at the mention of the Saviour's name,—that swells with sympathetic ardor at the story of His life, and deeds, and death, and triumph; that looks to Him in His hidden home as the Lord of its affections and the chief joy of its life; that is bound

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and drawn, by sweet constraints of living gratitude, to untiring devotion and obedience; that is not content but in leaning with John upon His breast, or clinging with Mary to His blessed feet; that thrills with the contemplation of seeing Him as He is, and being with Him forever; and that pines, and sighs, and ever prays in His absence, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly,"—is the heart most surely in harmony with heaven, and on which the favor of the Lord of the Church is most unmistakably set. The primal source of all defective saintship, and of all that the Divine Judge censures in any of His professed people, is the wane of love. Let a man be alive in love to God, and make it his joy to give his whole heart to Jesus, and his title is clear, and his acceptance sure.

And as the fruit of their affection, Christ's true people are further characterized by unswerving and uncompromising devotion to their profession. They have taken Christ for their Lord, and they will know no obedience but obedience to Him. For Him they labor, for Him they endure, and His they count themselves to be, to the full extent of all they have and are. Pledged to stand out unshaken against whatsoever is wrong, they will have no communion with evil ones, and will not fellowship with such as say they are apostles and are not, and hate and loathe the deeds of tyranny which would tread down any in whom God's image is, and are not afraid to speak their condemnation of wrongdoers, whatever may be

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their pretensions or their place. There is a tendency, in these days, to account that the purest Christianity which has the largest "*charity*," as it is called, and toleration for everybody and everything, and which disdains social differences for opinion's sake, or separations and controversies on account of the faith. But that is not the sort of Christianity which our Lord and Judge commends in these Epistles. Those whom He here approves as His true people, are such as cannot bear those who are evil, such as test men's claims to apostolicity, and expose their falsities, and hate the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, and stand to the truth as they have received it from the Lord, earnestly contending for the faith.

Another characteristic is, that they are poor, and reproached, and tried, and often persecuted unto death. Smyrnaotes, to a greater or less extent, are all the true saints of God. It seems to be one of the unvarying laws of this dispensation, that the absence of censure from heaven conducts through affliction on earth. The richest and most independent man, if he be a true Christian, is quite convinced that he is one of the very poorest and most helpless of God's creatures. He is poor in spirit, and his earthly possessions are no riches to him. And if any would live godly in Christ Jesus, it is useless to think of exemption from trials, reproaches and persecutions. People may serve the devil all their lives; and if they only manage to do it decently, not a word from the world shall ever be said against them, and not a

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frown need they fear. But let them start in earnest, honest Christianity, and they are snubbed, and sneered at, and put out of the synagogue, and made to hear of it and feel it at many points. Pious people, somehow, have ever been afflicted people. It seems to be God's plan to make his children ill at ease in this world, that they may the more earnestly long for that which is to come. The mass of them have been martyrs, living martyr lives, if not dying martyr deaths. The holiest men are always suffering men. There is no saintship which is exempt from trial, sorrow, and this world's frowns. Nor may any one be a Christian of the purer and better sort, with whom the world is satisfied, on whom earthly fortune ever smiles, and of whom no spiteful ill is ever said. Woe unto you, when all speak well of you, is the word of Christ himself.

But along with this, we find another feature. Afflicted, poor and persecuted, God's true people cheerfully bear whatever He appoints, and keep Christ's word of patient endurance. The saints of Ephesus did bear for the Saviour's name, and fainted not. Those of Smyrna were faithful to the last, as illustrated in the case of Polycarp, who preferred burning to a compromise of his faith, and found place for songs and thanksgivings amid the flames that consumed him. Those of Pergamos held fast Christ's name, and did not deny the faith of Him, and stood out in glad adherence to the truth, under the very sword of the executioner. Those of Thyatira and Philadelphia

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are specially commended for their endurance in the midst of falsity and suffering, and held fast in joyous prospect of the speedy coming of their Divine Deliverer. And so it is ever the character of God's saints to choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures in Egypt.

And if there is yet another mark of saintship singled out in these Epistles, it is the profound regard which true believers have for the recompense of the reward at the coming and revelation of Jesus Christ. There is a Paradise of God on which their hopes are set. There is a crown of life at which they aim. There is a heavenly sustenance and gem of celestial privilege and honor, and a sceptre of holy dominion, and an inheritance of the morning star, and an acknowledgment before God and angels, and an enrolment among principalities in the eternal empire, and a session with Jesus on His everlasting throne, on which their hearts are set. They believe that these things exist, and that they are meant for them, and that it is the merciful will of God that they should have them; and they wait for them, looking not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. Seeing that Christ has given these promises, they embrace them, and confess that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, "looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of God our Saviour."

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What, then, is to become of these people? Many of them have fallen asleep; and daily one and another of them, in every age, has been consigned to the tomb. Scattered over all the world their wasting ashes lie, whilst the places that once knew them know them no more. But these Epistles take very little account of death. The most that they say of it is that Christ has passed through it and revived, and that He has the keys of both it and Hades. Since then, it is hardly any more accounted death. The addresses to the Churches are given as if those same Churches were to continue through all the ages, and to meet the scenes of the great consummation just as they were living at the time. Hence, the resurrection also is but inferentially embraced. It is, indeed, presupposed in all the seven promises; but the short hiatus in the lives of individual saints is treated as hardly worth being embraced among the greater things of this vision. The return of Jesus and His Apocalypse to His Church is the master theme; and the preparation for that, and the rewards then to come to the saints, absorbs everything. And when Christ comes, it will be the same with those faithful ones of His that sleep, as with those who may be still alive and waiting for Him. There will be no advantage to the one class above the other as respects what is to follow. When the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, first of all, the saints that sleep in Him shall rise.

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This is plainly taught us in the apostolic messages. And when they have been thus recalled, whatever is further said is the same with regard to them as to those living saints who shall not have died at all.

One very striking statement concerning them, is that they are to be kept out of the hour of temptation—out of that season of trial which is then to come upon the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth instead of cherishing a heavenly citizenship. (See chap. 3 : 10.) How this deliverance is to be wrought, St. Paul explains. The saints, both living and resurrected, are to be miraculously snatched away from earth to heaven, suddenly, and in the twinkling of an eye. His own unmistakable words are: "Then we who are living, who remain, shall be caught up together with them (the resurrected ones) in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." (1 Thess. 4 : 17.) The Saviour himself has also given assurances to the same effect, where He says: "I tell you, in that night there shall be two in one bed: the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together: the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two shall be in the field: the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they answered and said unto him, Where [or Whither], Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the Body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together." (Luke 17 : 34–37.) And to this same marvellous occurrence, which Paul speaks

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of as one of the great mysteries (1 Cor. 15 : 51), do the words at the head of this discourse refer. "I saw," says John, "and behold, a door set open in the heaven, and the former voice which I heard as of a trumpet, speaking with me, saying, *Come up hither.*" That door opened in heaven is the door of the ascension of the saints. That trumpet voice is the same which Paul describes as recalling the sleepers in Jesus, and to which the Saviour refers as the signal by which His elect are gathered from the four winds, but which we have no reason to suppose shall be heard or understood except by those whom it is meant to summon to the skies. And that "COME UP HITHER" is for every one in John's estate, even the gracious and mighty word of the returning Lord himself, by virtue of which they that wait for Him shall renew their strength, and mount up with wings as eagles. (Is. 40 : 31.) And thus, as the Psalmist sung, the Lord will hide them in the secret place of His presence from the vexation of man, and screen them in a tabernacle from the contradiction of tongues. (Ps. 31 : 19, 20.)

Such, then, is the termination of the earthly career of God's elect, for which the saints of every age have waited, longed and prayed.*

* "At the voice of the archangel, the dead saints rise from the dust; the living saints, in a moment—in the twinkling of an eye—are changed; and both together are rapt up far above the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, long before He is seen

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And such is the next great scene which may now be any day expected. I know of nothing in the prophecies of God, unless it should be the mere deepening of the signs that have already appeared, which yet remains to be fulfilled before this sudden summons from the skies: "Come, my people,

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by the inhabitants of the earth."—*Cunningham on Apocalypse*, 3d ed., p. 491.

"The being taken up to meet the Lord before the time of trial and judgment, would seem to be the manifest import of the promise to the faithful, in the Epistle to the Church at Philadelphia, as also that of our Lord's exhortation in Luke 21: 36."—*Richard Chester, Vicar of Ballyclough, Mallow.*

"Ere judgment comes on Christendom, the true Church will have been, like Enoch, translated to heaven. . . . . We are not comforted by the assurance of our being gathered to the grave in peace, but by the hope of being gathered to meet the Lord in the air, so that, when the judgments come, we shall not be amid the scene on which they are poured, but in the heavens whence they issue."—*Plain Papers*, pp. 94–96.

"It is evident, from 2 Cor. 5: 4, that we are not to conceive of the transfiguration of the body as taking place at the end and in the general resurrection, for the apostle wishes it for his own person instead of death."—*Auberlen on Dan. and Rev.*, p. 332.

"Daniel appears to be a type of those kept out of the hour of temptation. When all nations, kindreds and people are required to worship the image of the plain of Dura, he is not there."—*Apocalypse Expounded*, vol. i, p. 207.

"John 14: 1-3, doth absolutely require an assumption from the earth of all the saints, after the same manner as Christ was taken up. And to this great head of doctrine, all those legends of the Catholic Church, concerning the assumption of the blessed Virgin, and other saints, do point. By being taken up, to be clothed upon by our house which is from heaven, I believe that Christ's people will be delivered out of their tribulation."—*Irving on the Apoc.*, vol. ii, p. 1024.

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enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were a little moment, until the indignation be overpast; for, behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity." (Is. 26 : 20, 21.) Any one of these days or nights, and certainly before many more years have passed, all this shall be accomplished. Some of these days or nights,—while men are busy with the common pursuits and cares of life, and everything is rolling on in its accustomed course,—unheralded, unbelieved, and unknown to the gay world, here one, and there another, shall secretly disappear, "*caught up*" like Enoch, who "was not found because God had translated him." Invisibly, noiselessly, miraculously, they shall vanish from the company and fellowship of those about them, and ascend to their returning Lord. Strange announcements shall be in the morning papers of missing ones. Strange accounts shall be whispered around in the circles of business and society. And for the first time will apostate Christendom, and the slow in heart to believe *all* that the prophets have written, have the truth brought home, that no such half-Christianity as theirs is sufficient to put men among the favorites of the Lord.

Brethren and friends, these are neither dreams nor fables. They are realities, set forth in the infallible truth of God, and as literally true as anything else in the inspired Word. And as you value the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus,

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and take this holy book as an unfailing guide, be not faithless, but believing. And if you feel yourself unready for such events, do not think of setting them aside by scoffs and sneers. If they are in the purpose of God, as He so plainly says they are, and as I conscientiously believe they are, your unbelief cannot alter them. Better bestir yourself to be prepared, with your loins girded and your lamp trimmed and burning. There is chance for you yet to be among these favored ones whom God has engaged thus to keep out of the judgment plagues and sorrows; but that this opportunity shall remain to you for another year, or month, or week, or day, or hour, no living man or angel of heaven is authorized to promise. What you do must be done quickly. To your knees, then, to your Bibles, and to the mercy seat of your God, O man, O woman! "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God." Let not another day pass leaving you still in your sins; "for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of man cometh." And may God in mercy grant us each the grace and diligence to be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

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LECTURE NINTH.

THE MIRACULOUS TRANSLATION—A HEAVENLY SCENE—RELATES TO A TIME SUBSEQUENT TO THE PRESENT CHURCH-PERIOD—COMES BEFORE THE JUDGMENT OF THE WORLD—IS TRULY PROPHETIC—THE THRONE OF JUDGMENT—THE RAINBOW ENCIRCLING IT—THE SEVEN TORCHES—THE GLASSY SEA—THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS—SUCCESSION IN THE GATHERING OF THE SAINTS—THE FOUR LIVING ONES—THE BANNERS OF ISRAEL—THE CHERUBIM—THE HEAVENLY ADMINISTRATORS OF THE NEW ORDER—THE DIGNITIES PROPOSED BY THE GOSPEL—AN APPEAL TO EMBRACE THEM.

REV. 4 : 1–11. (Revised Text.) After these things I saw, and behold, a door set open in the heaven, and the former voice which I heard, as of a trumpet, speaking with me, saying, Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must take place after these things.

Immediately I became in the Spirit, and, behold, a throne was set in the heaven, and upon the throne one sitting; and he that was sitting [was] like in appearance to a jasper and a sardine stone, and a rainbow encircled the throne, in appearance like to an emerald; and around the throne twenty-four thrones, and upon the twenty-four thrones elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and on their heads golden crowns. And out of the throne go forth lightnings, and voices, and thunders; and seven torches of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God: and before [or, the prospect from] the throne as it were a glassy sea, like unto crystal; and amidst the throne, and around the throne, four living ones, full of eyes before and behind; and the living one the first like a lion, and the second living one like a young ox, and the third living one having the face like a man, the fourth living one like a flying eagle. And the four living ones, each one of them had around them six wings apiece, and within they are full of eyes; and they have not rest day

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and night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy [repeated eight times in Codex Sinaiticus], Lord God the Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come.

And whensoever the living ones give glory, and honor, and thanks to Him that sitteth on the throne, to Him that liveth for the ages of the ages, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him that sitteth on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for the ages of the ages, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: Thou art worthy, O Lord and our God, to receive the glory, and honor, and the power, because Thou didst create all things, and by Thy will they were, and were created.

I HAVE said that this open door in heaven, and this calling up of the Apocalyptic seer through that door into heaven, indicate to us the manner in which Christ intends to fulfil His promise to keep certain of His saints "out of the hour of temptation;" and by what means it is that those who "watch and pray always" shall "escape" the dreadful sorrows with which the present world, in its last years, will be visited. Those of them that sleep in their graves, shall be recalled from among the dead; and those of them who shall be found living at the time, "shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye;" and both classes "shall be caught up together in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." The same voice which John heard, even "the voice as of a trumpet," whether dead or living, they shall hear, saying to them, "COME UP HITHER." And there shall attend it a change and transfer as sudden and miraculous as in his case. And as the seven Epistles show us these faithful ones in their sufferings, conflicts, virtues, and victories on earth, the chapter before us carries us up to the contempla-

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tion of their estate and dignities in heaven. It is high and peculiarly holy ground that here rises to our view, and it becomes us to venture upon it with measured and reverent steps. It would seem, indeed, as if it were rather a subject for angels than for men; but God hath caused it to be written for us, and has pronounced special blessing upon them that read, hear, and keep what has been thus recorded for our learning. "Secret things belong unto the Lord," and we may not trespass on that reserved, mysterious realm; "but those things which are revealed, belong unto us, and to our children forever;" and it is our duty, as well as our privilege, humbly to inquire, and to search diligently into what has been prophesied of the grace and the glory which is to come to the saints.

Discarding, then, that false humility, which is the offspring or the cloak of spiritual sloth, let us, in the fear of God, go forward with our investigations, and stir ourselves up to the effort to obtain some distinct ideas of what the blessed Saviour has thought it so important to show to His Church. Happy shall we be if the sublime King but admit us into His court, though He may not now take us into His counsel. We notice:

I. SOME OF THE SURROUNDINGS AND RELATIONS OF THE VISION.

II. THE PARTICULARS BROUGHT TO VIEW IN IT.

And may Almighty God open our hearts to the subject, and the subject to our hearts!

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The scene of this vision is *in heaven*;—not in the temple, as some have represented. The door which John saw, was an opening "in the heaven." The voice that he heard came from above. It commanded him to "Come up." And it was potent; for "immediately" he "became in the Spirit." It wrought an instantaneous rapture, so that the next opening of his eyes disclosed his presence in a supernal region. There is no allusion to Jerusalem or to its temple. The whole scene is heavenly, and relates only to what is heavenly. It belongs to a realm above the earth, and above all the sanctuaries of the earth.

The Rabbins dreamed of seven heavens. Paul speaks of three, in the highest of which he "heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." But as John was commanded to write what he saw, and to communicate it to the Churches, and Paul was forbidden to describe what he saw and heard, this would seem to be a different heaven from that called "the third." The truth is, that anything above the earth—the upper air, the region of the clouds, as well as the region of the stars, and beyond the stars—the scriptures call "heaven." Other circumstances connected with this subject indicate, that what is here referred to, is simply *the sky*. "The sign of the Son of Man" is to be displayed in the empyrean, no further off from the earth than to be visible to men, yet it is to appear "in heaven." The place where the returning Saviour is to meet His resurrected and translated saints, is, "in the air"—"in the clouds."

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The heaven of this vision would therefore seem to be, indefinitely, the regions above us—the firmament—the higher portions of the atmosphere which envelops the earth. This, however, I take to be certain, that the location of what John beheld, was not earth, but above the earth, and quite unconnected with the earth.

Whether there was a literal, bodily transportation of the seer from the earth to the regions of space, is not stated, nor inferable from the description. Perhaps the apostle himself was not able to perceive how it was. Paul could not tell whether he was "in the body, or out of the body," when he "was caught up." This only he knew, that he was somehow present in "the third heaven," and that that presence was the same to him as a bodily transportation, equally real, and equally effective. It was the same in John's case. He tells us that he was called by a mighty voice to come up into heaven, and straightway "became *in the Spirit*"—in some mysterious, miraculous, ecstatic state, wrought by the power of God—which was, to all intents and purposes, a complete translation from Patmos to the hidden sky. He was not dead; he was not in a mere swoon; he had all his senses entire; his ears heard; his eyes saw; his heart felt; his capacity to weep and to speak continued with him; and the thing was, in all respects, the same as a bodily carrying up to the heavenly sphere, where he found what he was commanded to describe.

We notice also, that this vision sets forth what

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is to be *after* the fulfilment of the vision and letters concerning the Churches. The links of consecutiveness are distinctly expressed, and are by no means to be overlooked. The declared object for which the apostle was called up into the sky, was to be shown—not what existed in heaven at the time, as some have mistakenly thought—but "*the things which must take place* AFTER" what he had already seen and described. The seven Churches, in all the amplitude of their representative significance, were first to run their course, and the order of things to which they belonged was to touch upon its end, before one jot of what is here portrayed was to be realized.* As John was called up just to be shown "the things which must take place *after these things*," of course, all that he saw and heard consequent upon that rapture, can only be referred to the period next following the things of the first vision. That vision, as we have been led to conclude, and as we think must be admitted, embraces the whole continuity of the dispensation under which we are now living, and takes in the entire earthly Church-state, from the time of the apostles to the end of the age; which is at Christ's coming again to receive His people to himself. That "*end*" we regard as very

* "From the expression, 'I will show thee what shall be after these things,' we gather, that the facts set out under this vision are subsequent to the facts set out under the former vision; that all in the former vision which cometh within the condition of time, is anterior to all in this vision which comes within the same condition."—*Irving in loc.*

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near; but so long as it is yet future, the time to which this vision refers is also future. It relates to things which do not exist as yet, and which cannot become reality till that to which they are specifically said to be subsequent is fulfilled. It is therefore a picture of things in the sky, immediately upon the first movement of the Saviour in His coming to judgment, marked by the miraculous seizing away of the saints from their associates on earth to the clouds of heaven.

It is also to be observed, that the things foreshown in this vision, whilst they come after the first interference with the present order, still *precede* the great tribulation, and the scenes of judicial visitation upon the apostate Church and the guilty world. Indeed, it is from what is here depictured, that those inflictions proceed. What John sees, is permanent. It continues through all that comes after, the same as seen at the first. The throne, the Elders, the Living ones, retain their places unchanged, and have direct connection with all that subsequently transpires. Nay, the action of the seals, in chapters six and seven, which brings the great tribulation upon the world, and the still remoter action of the trumpets and vials, and the whole catena of judgments described in the afterpart of this book, proceed from, and depend more or less on, the scene of glory and power represented in these two chapters. The realization of what they describe must, therefore, fall intermediately between the first removal of saints from earth, and the forthcoming

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of the great troubles, and the destruction of Babylon and Antichrist. In other words, it is a scene of things to be manifested in heaven, immediately succeeding the beginning of the judgment of the Church, and preceding the judgment of the world of apostates and sinners. It is a picture of the results of the former, and of the source and instrument of the latter.

There have been writers, I will not call them interpreters, who regard the contents of these two chapters as a mere scenic exordium to the revelations that follow, intended to impress the writer or the reader's mind with the divinity and solemnity of what was to be communicated. Some have even fallen so low as to affirm that it is simply the creation of the writer's own fancy, meant to set forth how deeply he was impressed and pervaded with a sense of God's power and glory, and hence, in how fit a state he was to take in and express the mysteries of the divine purposes. For such bald rationalism I have neither sympathy nor respect. If there is anything divine in the book, and everything in it proves to me that it is divine, the announcement of the object for which John was taken up to heaven to see these sights, must also be divine. It was a trumpet-voice from heaven that made it; and its effect was instantaneously miraculous, carrying the prophet by some mysterious unlocking of his inner nature, quite away from earth. And that voice declared that John was thus called and transported to see, not what was to beget serious-

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ness in him, or merely to persuade the reader that there was something of moment to be told, but WHAT MUST TAKE PLACE after the fulfilment of the things pertaining to the Churches. What he was to be shown was not *to prepare for* the prophecy, but was itself the head and front of the prophecy. What he was to see was to become reality; it was to come to pass; it was in due time to be history and fact. And to apply this divine affirmation only to what follows these chapters, and not to what these chapters themselves contain, is like undertaking to render the play of Hamlet, with the part of Hamlet left out. No, if there is any sacred prediction in the case, these chapters are a most vital element of it, without which, indeed, the remainder is but imperfectly intelligible. And upon evidences as solid as those which prove the inspiration of this book, I hold, that these two chapters are as substantially prophetic as any other part. They do not relate directly to the earth, but they compass a very grand part of the results of God's gracious doings in the earth for all these ages past, and a very grand part of what is to affect the earth for all the recurring ages of the future.

With these points settled, we are now prepared to look at the particulars which the magnificent picture brings to our contemplation.

The first thing named, and that which is at once the central object of the vision, and of all that follows it, is A THRONE. The Scriptures continually speak of *thrones*, in connection with the

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sovereignty and majesty of God. They tell us that "the Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom ruleth over all." (Ps. 103 : 19.) Among the last words of the preceding chapter, Christ refers to His throne, and the Father's throne. And here the apostle sees "*a throne in the heaven.*" No intimations are given of the form of the magnificent object. The throne on which Isaiah saw the Lord, was "high and lifted up;" and in another vision John saw a throne, "great and white;" but everywhere we are left to think of the power and authority of which the throne is a symbol, rather than of any particular form or material structure. A visible image was presented to the eye of the seer, but he does not stop to tell us what it was like. It was simply an undescribed, and perhaps indescribable, seat of grandeur, greatness, majesty, and dominion.

Nor was it the eternal throne of the Father, at least not in the position and relations which it occupies anterior to the time to which this vision relates. John sees it, not as long since fixed and settled in this locality and form, but just as it was taking up its rest in this place. It was *being set* as he was looking; ἰδοὺ, ἔκειτο. The expression is in a tense which denotes unfinished action, reaching its completion at the time of the seeing. Dean Alford objects to the phrase "*was set,*" as giving too much the idea that the *placing* of the throne formed part of the vision. But this is just exactly what the original expresses; and it is im-

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portant, as showing that this vision refers to a new order of things, which first comes into being at the time to which the vision refers. The apostle's language implies, that the act of the placing of the throne where he saw it, was only being completed at the moment of his looking. That moment was the moment of his being called up from earth into heaven. The rapture of the saints, then, is the point of transition, where the present dispensation begins to end, and another, of which this throne is the centre, takes its commencement. The passage is an exact parallel, both as to subject and phraseology, to Daniel 7 : 9, where the prophet says: "I beheld till the thrones were *set* (not *cast down*, as our version has it), and the Ancient of days did sit, whose throne was like the fiery flame." The vision embraced *the placing* of the throne, as well as the throne itself, and the locality it occupied.*

"*And upon the throne one sitting.*" There is no name mentioned, and no figure described; but we can be at no loss to distinguish who is meant. John was manifestly filled with mysterious awe, and his words sufficiently intimate that he was looking upon "the unnameable, indescribable Godhead," in which Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are consubstantial, and the same. And yet there was visible manifestation.

"*He that was sitting* [*was*] *like in appearance to a*

* So agrees also the author of "The Apocalypse Expounded by Scripture," vol. ii, p. 13.

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jasper and a sardine stone;"—not as to shape, for Deity has no shape, but in color and flashing brilliancy. The scriptural representations of the jasper are, that it is "most precious," crystalline, and purple in hue. The sardine, or sardius, is also described as exceedingly precious, and of a beautiful bright, red, carnation color. It is capable of a particularly high and lasting polish. Uniting the qualities of tint and brilliancy belonging to the purer specimens of these precious gems, we have the appearance of flames, without their smokiness—a pure, purple, fiery, red, crystalline, flashing light. And this was the appearance of the unnameable and indescribable occupant of this equally indescribable throne.

"*And a rainbow encircled the throne, in appearance like to an emerald.*" The rainbow is one of the most beautiful and majestic of earthly appearances. It is the token of God's covenant with all flesh, never again to destroy the earth or its inhabitants, as in the flood. (Gen. 9:11, 17.) Encircling this throne, the intimation is, that, although a throne of judgment, it is not a throne of destruction, but one of conservation, which bears with it the remembrance and the stability of the ancient promise. From what the apostle subsequently saw go forth from this throne, and the shakings and overturnings in heaven and earth of which it was to be the source and means, fears might naturally arise as to the continuity of the earth as an organized structure for the habitation of God's creatures. But this rainbow

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around the throne forever scatters such apprehensions. All these ministrations are under the symbol of the Noachian covenant, which standeth forever. The idea that this world, and its creature inhabitants, are to pass into oblivion, is a foolish notion of poets, against which we have the special pledge and covenant of God, rehearsed in nearly every summer shower, and borne aloft as one of the glorious decorations of the judgment throne itself.

And yet, the intimation is, that the fulfilment of that covenant is not to be always in the course of nature, as we now have it. The true iris is around the throne, but there is a change in it now. Its prevailing hue is light *green*—"in appearance like to an emerald,"—which is an appearance having something additional to nature, or nature modified, with one part of it exalted and strengthened beyond its wont. The jasper and the sardine flash terrible glory, but over them is the soft-beaming emerald of promise and hope—mercy remembered in wrath—salvation overspanning the appearance of consuming fire.

"*And out of the throne go forth lightnings, and voices, and thunders.*" These demonstrate that the throne is one of judgment, and that wrath is about to proceed from it. When God was about to visit Egypt's sins upon her, He "sent thunder [in Heb. 'voices'], and hail, and fire ran along upon the ground." "And Pharaoh sent and said, "Intreat the Lord that there be no more voices of God." (Ex. 9:23, 28.) When He wished

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to show Israel the terribleness of His anger with sin, "there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud." (Ex. 19:16.) When He sent forth His wrath upon the Philistines, "the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them, and they were smitten before Israel." (1 Sam. 7:10.) So also was His displeasure expressed at Israel's demand for a king. Samuel said, "The Lord shall send thunder and rain [in wheat-harvest], that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king. And the Lord sent thunder and rain that day, and all the people greatly feared." (1 Sam. 12:17, 18.) These instances show us, that this is not a throne of grace, but a throne of judgment. These lightnings, thunders, and voices, proceeding from it, tell of justice and wrath to be visited upon transgressors. The river of water of life is gone, and in its place is the terror and fire of judgment and death.

"*And seven torches of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.*" These are not candlesticks or lamps within doors, but torches borne aloft without, speaking preparation for battle. When Gideon went forth in vengeance against the Midianites, his three hundred men took each a burning torch in his left hand, and a trumpet in his right, "and they cried, THE SWORD OF THE LORD, *and of Gideon.*" (Judges 7:16, 20.)

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So in the prophetic announcement of the going forth of God's wrath upon Nineveh, the destroyer is described as displaying "flaming torches in the day of his preparation." (Nahum 2:3, 4.) So the throne which is set for the judgment of the world, hath before it its "torches of fire burning," charged with the fulness of consuming vengeance upon all the enemies of God; for they are "seven." The Spirit of God, in all His plenitude, is these seven torches. That Spirit descended on Jesus as a dove; but here He is the "Spirit of judgment, the Spirit of burning." (Is. 4:4.) It is not peaceful *light*, but flaming indignation, which is betokened, which at last sets the world on fire, producing that day "that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble, and it shall burn them up, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." (Mal. 4:1.) The throne speaks vengeance upon the guilty, and the Spirit of God is the spirit of the throne, the spirit of devouring fire.

"*And before* [or, *the prospect from*] *the throne as it were a glassy sea, like unto crystal.*" When Moses, and Aaron, and Nadab, and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel, went up unto the Lord on Sinai, "they saw the God of Israel; and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in clearness." (Ex. 24:10, 11.) And in the vision of Ezekiel, the floor or plain on which the throne of God rested, was "the likeness of the firmament, as the color of the terrible crystal."

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(Ezek. 1 : 22.) These several descriptions explain each other. This throne, and all surrounding it, or connected with it, had its place upon a plain, which resembled a wide sea, solid, transparent, and full of inexpressible beauty, splendor, and majesty. Though in the air, it was not hung there. It had a base. There is a pavement, like a sapphire stone, like a clear, cerulean, golden *mer de glace*, on which it, as the whole celestial assemblage, rests; as we also read of the street of the heavenly city being "pure gold, as it were transparent glass." (Rev. 21 : 21.) Heaven is not a world of mists and shadows, but of substance and beautiful realities.

"*And around the throne, twenty-four thrones; and upon the twenty-four thrones, Elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and on their heads golden crowns.*" There was more than one throne. In the centre, conspicuous, and majestic beyond description, was the throne of Deity; but in a wide circle around it were twenty-four other thrones, distinct and glorious, but smaller and lower than that which is, by eminence, called "*The Throne.*" Our translators call them "*seats;*" but the original word is the same in the case of the twenty-four in the circle, as in that in the centre. They are all "*seats,*" certainly; but a particular kind of seats, *regal* seats, seats of majesty and dominion, seats of royal assessorship with the enthroned One. Nor can we be much at a loss as to the persons who occupy them.

They are not angels, but human beings. This

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is ascertained by the song they sing, in which they speak of having been gathered out of the tribes and peoples of the earth. (Chap. 5 : 9.)

They are not the patriarchs, Jews, or apostles, only; for they are from "*every* tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation." (Chap. 5 : 9.)

They are not unfallen beings, but ransomed sinners; for they give honor to Christ for redeeming them—"*Thou redeemedst* us *by Thy blood.*"* (Chap. 5 : 9.)

They are not disembodied spirits of the saints, but glorified subjects of grace; for they are enthroned, crowned, and robed in white, which is a fruition of blessedness and honor which is everywhere reserved till after the resurrection and the glorifying rapture. Paul tells us that he was to

* Ἠγόρασας ἡμᾶς. Some critics and expositors have rejected this ἡμᾶς (us), for the reason that it is omitted in the Codex Alexandrinus, and in the Ethiopic verson; though the latter is not much more than a loose paraphrase. The Codex Sinaiticus, however, which was discovered in 1860, and which is of equal antiquity and authority with the Codex Alexandrinus, contains it. The Codex Basilianus, in the Vatican, contains it. The Latin, Coptic or Memphitic, and Arminian, which are of great value, contain it. And so do *all other MSS. and versions.* And to discredit it, simply and only because it does not appear in that one single Codex of Alexandria, is most unreasonable and unjust to the weight of authority for its retention. Dr. Tregelles, on full examination, was firmly convinced of its right to a place in the text, before the Codex Sinaiticus appeared; and the presence of this ἡμᾶς in that MS., ought to settle the question of its genuineness forever. The evidences from the context, also argue powerfully for a construction which necessarily embraces it, whether expressed or not. We regard it as indubitably genuine.

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receive his "crown of righteousness," not at his decease, but "*at that day*"—the day of Christ's coming to awake and gather His saints,—and that the same is true of "*all*" who are to be partakers of that crown. (2 Tim. 4:8.) The entire scriptural doctrine concerning the state of the dead, forbids the idea that disembodied souls are already crowned and enthroned, although at rest in the bosom of God. Such rewards, Christ is to bring with Him (see chap. 22:12; 11:18; Is. 52:11); hence, no one receives them until He comes, recalls the sleepers, and completes that redemption of power for which all things wait. (See Rom. 8:22, 23.) The coronation time, is the resurrection time; and no one can be crowned until he is either resurrected if dead, or translated if living. Any other doctrine overthrows some of the plainest teachings of the Scriptures, and carries confusion into the whole Christian system. And as John beholds certain subjects of redemption, robed, and crowned, and enthroned, as priests and kings in heaven, we here have (let it be noted) positive demonstration, that, at the time to which this vision relates, a resurrection and a translation *have already taken place*. It will not do to say, that the picture is *anticipative* of the position and triumphs of the Church after the seals, trumpets, and vials have run their course. They occupy these thrones, while yet the closed book, which brings forth the seals and trumpets, lies untouched in the hand of Him that sits upon the throne. They see it there, and they vote the Lamb worthy

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to open it. They behold Him taking it up, and fall down and worship as He holds it. They are in their places when heaven receives the accession of the multitude which come "out of the great tribulation." (Chap. 7:11–14.) They have their own distinct positions when the still later company of the hundred and forty-four thousand gather round the Lamb on Mount Sion. And they are spectators of the judgment of great Babylon, and sing Alleluia in glory as they see her fall. (Chap. 19:4.) Instead of *anticipation* of the final result of the great day of the Lord, there is actual *participation* in the processes and administrations by which that result is wrought.

They are "*Elders*," not only with reference to their official places; for that term is expressive of *time*, rather than of office. The *elder*, is the older man; and in the original order of human society, he was the ruling man because he was the older man. These enthroned ones are *elders*, not because they are officers, but they are *officers* because they are elders. They are the older ones of the children of the resurrection. They are the first-born from the dead—the first glorified of all the company of the redeemed—the seniors of the celestial assembly; not indeed with respect to the number of their years on earth, but with respect to the time of their admission into heaven. They have had their resurrection, or their translation, in advance of the judgment-tribulations, and are crowned and officiating as kings and priests in glory, whilst others, less faithful, are still slumber-

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ing in their graves, or suffering on the earth. They do not represent, by any means, the whole body of the redeemed, as some have supposed, but are exactly what their name imports—the seniors of them—the first-born of the household—the oldest of the family,—and hence the honored officials.

There certainly is, as we shall more fully see hereafter, a succession in the order in which the saints are gathered into their final glory. There are some who "*escape*" the tribulation, being taken to heaven before it comes; there are others who suffer it, and are only taken to heaven out of it. Then, there is a peculiar company of sealed ones, who come in at a still later period; and a "harvest of the earth," still subsequent to their appearance with the Lamb on Mount Sion, if not a still remoter bringing in of those under Antichrist, who "had not worshipped the beast, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands," all of whom together make up the fulness of "the first resurrection." And of these successive companies and orders, the enthroned ones of this vision are among the first, if not absolutely the first. They are the seniors—"*the Elders.*"

John saw but *twenty-four* of them; but these were the representatives of many others. There were many priests and Levites under the old economy. The number of those who "were set to forward the work of the house of the Lord, was twenty and four thousand." (1 Chron. 23 : 3, 4.)

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But they were all arranged in courses of twenty-four (1 Chron. 24:3-5), so that never more than twenty-four were found on duty at a time. There were also many prophets appointed to praise God with instruments of song; but they too were arranged in twenty-four courses, each course with its own individual representative. (1 Chron. 25.) These were not human devices, but things specially directed by the Spirit of the Lord (1 Chron. 18: 11-13, 19), and meant to be "figures of the true," and "patterns of things in the heavens." (Heb. 9: 9, 23, 24.) Accordingly, we are to see in these twenty-four royal priests, but one course of as many more courses, all of which together do but represent thousands upon thousands of the same high and privileged class. Heaven is not an empty place, nor is it stinted in the number of its honored dignitaries.

I find, then, in these enthroned Elders, the highest manifested glory of the risen and glorified saints. They are in heaven. They are around the throne of Deity. They are pure and holy, wearing white, "which is the righteousness of the saints." They are partakers of celestial dominion. They are kings of glory, with golden crowns. They are settled, and at home in their exalted dignities; not standing and waiting as servants, but seated as royal counsellors of the Almighty. They are assessors of the great Judge of quick and dead, the spectators of all that transpires in heaven and earth, and participants in the judgment of the world for its sins, the Church for

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its apostasies, Babylon for her impurities, Antichrist for his blasphemies, and that old Serpent and his brood, for their ungodliness and wickednesses during all these weary ages.* They are the Elders of the glorious house of the redeemed, and kings and priests in the temple and palace of the Lord God Almighty, whom all the earth shall obey, and all the ages acknowledge.

And yet, there is another picture in the vision, which some take to be still higher.

"*Amidst the throne and around the throne,*" John saw "*four Living ones,*" unfortunately called "*beasts*" by our translators, "*full of eyes before and behind; the first like a lion, and the second like a young ox, and the third having the face like a man, and the fourth like a flying eagle. And the four Living ones, each one of them, had around them six wings apiece, and within they are full of eyes; and they have not rest day and night, saying,* HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS, AND WHO IS, AND WHO IS TO COME."

What are we to understand by these? They sing precisely the same song (chap. 5:9, 10) which the Elders sing. They give praise to the Lamb for having died for them, and for redeeming them by His blood "out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation." They say to the Lamb, "Thou *redeemedst* US to God by Thy blood." This settles the point that they are also

* "Do ye not know that *the saints shall judge the world?* Know ye not that we *shall judge angels?*" (1 Cor. 6:2, 3.)

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glorified men, not "beasts" at all, nor mere personifications of mute creation or nature's forces. The schoolmen, and some of the later Fathers, took them to be the four Evangelists.* Hence, the lion of St. Mark, the eagle of St. John, &c. But this is fancy, and against the record; for the four Evangelists were Jews, and these Living ones are from all tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations. Some interpret them of the redeemed in general, and as emblematic of the cardinal virtues of the saints; but this also is quite too indefinite to meet the requirements of the vision. Some take them as representing the several dispensations; the lion, the patriarchal; the ox, the Mosaic; the man, the Christian; and the eagle, the Millennial; but we are dealing with living beings, who are all in their places before the Millennial dispensation comes into existence, and actually participating in its introduction. Others explain them as the forces of Providence, which is somewhat nearer the truth, if we understand it, not of Providence in

* So Victorinus, in his *Scholia in Apocalypsin*. And so Adam, of St. Victor, the great hymnologist of the middle ages, taught the Latin Church to sing:

"——Circa thronum magistatis,
Cum spiritibus beatis,
Quatuor diversitatis,
Adstant animalia.
* * * *
Formæ formant figurarum
Formas evangelistarum;
Quorum imber doctrinarum,
Stillat in ecclesia."

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general, but of that economy of things which first comes into being at the resurrection; and of Providence, not as a mere impersonal thing, but in those personal centres whence the power issues.

Perhaps the easiest and shortest way for us to get at the true explanation of this remarkable manifestation, is to go back to the ancient dispensation, so much of which was copied exactly from these heavenly things. The Jewish writers tell us, that the standard of each tribe of Israel took the color of the stone which represented it in the high priest's breastplate, and that there was wrought upon each a particular figure—a lion for Judah, a young ox for Ephraim, a man for Reuben, and an eagle for Dan. These were the representative tribes, and all the rest were marshalled under these four standards (Num. 2);—Judah, on the east, with Issachar and Zebulon; Reuben on the south, with Simeon and Gad; Ephraim on the west, with Manasseh and Benjamin; and Dan on the north, with Asher and Naphtali. In the centre of this quadrangular encampment was the tabernacle of God, with four divisions of Levites forming an inner encampment around it. It was thus that Israel was marched through the wilderness, under the four banners of the lion, the young ox, the man, and the flying eagle. These were their ensigns, their guards, their coverings, the symbols of powers by which they were protected and guided. They were parts of that divine and heavenly administration which led them forth from bondage, pre-

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served them in the wilderness, and finally settled them in the promised land. Such at any rate was the earthly, outward, material aspect of the case. In Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim, we have the same thing in its more interior and heavenly aspects. (Ezek. 1.)*

To cover and guard, is thought to be the proper signification of the word *cherub*. After the expulsion of our first parents from Eden, cherubim were placed at the east of the garden "to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24); and the prince of Tyrus is likened to the cherub that covereth. (Ezek. 28:14.) A vision of the cherubim, then, is a vision of them that cover, protect, guard, and keep. And in this vision of Israel's protectors and keepers, what did Ezekiel see? "Above the firmament was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone, and the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it." This was the throne of God. But under the throne, connected with the throne, and

* Thus rendered by Milton, in Paradise Lost, Book vi:

—— Forth rushed with whirlwind sound
The chariot of paternal Deity,
Flashing thick flames, wheel within wheel undrawn,
Itself instinct with Spirit, but conveyed
By four cherubic shapes; four faces each
Had wondrous; as with stars their bodies all,
And wings were set with eyes, with eyes the wheels
Of beryl, and careering fires between;
Over their heads a crystal firmament,
Whereon a sapphire throne.

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instinct with the life of the throne, was "the likeness of four living creatures," who "ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning," and moved with complicated wheels, with high and dreadful rings, full of eyes. It was through them that the Spirit of the throne went forth, every way, whithersoever it would. And these living creatures, the executors of the will of the Spirit of the throne, had the same forms combined in each, which were borne upon the four banners of the children of Israel, the lion, the man, the ox, and the eagle. (Ezek. 1:10.) These cherubim were not human beings; for they were doing service in the Garden of Eden, when yet there were no human beings but Adam and Eve; and at the time Ezekiel saw them, there were no human beings yet glorified, or, hence, capable of taking such offices. These cherubim were angelic beings. "Of the angels He saith, He maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire." (Heb. 1:7.) "He shall give His angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up." (Matt. 4:6.) And what these cherubim were in the ancient order, these "living ones" are in the order which obtains at the time to which this vision of John refers. They are redeemed men, glorified, and related to the judgment-throne in heaven, and to the interests and affairs of the future kingdom on earth, as the cherubim are related to the throne and kingdom now, and in the former dispensations. They are the cherubim of the new order. They are joined

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directly to the throne of the new order. They are in the midst of it. They are around it. They are expressions of it. And they take the forms of the lion, the man, the young ox, and the flying eagle, for the reason that they are the heavenly powers who guard and cover the camp of the Lord, which, under them, the entire world is to become. Jesus tells us that "they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that αἰῶνος, and the resurrection from among the dead, ... are (ἰσάγγελοι) *equal unto the angels*" (Luke 20:35, 36); and this is the vision of that declaration fulfilled, showing us certain preeminent classes of the eclectic resurrection and translation, not only angelic as to their form of existence, but in the exact positions which angels held in other dispensations.

Ezekiel saw but *four* cherubim. The number was significant of the scene of their ministrations—the world. But these four included and represented many more; for "the chariots of God" are "twenty thousand, even many thousands of angels." (Ps. 68:17.) And for the same reason John saw but four of these "living ones." This is the worldly number, and denotes that their office has reference to God's providence in the world. But in these four are embraced thousands of glorified ones (see Ezek. 7:10), whose high distinction is to share the throne with their Divine Redeemer, as His ministers, and as executors of His will throughout eternal ages.

They have wings, for they are angelic now;

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and more wings than their angelic predecessors, showing how fully they are capacitated for motion, and how much wider is the sphere of their movements. The Israel of old was but one nation, the Israel they do for, is all the nations.

They are full of eyes, before, behind, and within; which is the symbol of intense intelligence, looking backward into the past, and forward into the future, and inward upon themselves and into the nature of things, and able to direct their ways and administrations with unlimited penetration and discretion.

And they never rest, in the fervency and grandeur of their zeal, perpetually expressing the holiness and glory of the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.

Some have taken them to be the same as the Elders, only in other relations, and in other features of their dignities and blessedness. I cannot so understand it. They have, it is true, the same priestly censers as the Elders, and they sing the same song of a common redemption, kinghood, priesthood, and dominion over the earth. But they have, as a class, an individual distinctness, which is never lost sight of, and never confounded with the eldership. Even on earth, "there are diversities of gifts, and differences of administrations;" and much rather will there be varieties of place and function in heaven. The Elders have crowns and thrones distinct from the central throne; but these living ones have for their crown the very throne itself. They are joined to the

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throne; they are in the midst of it, and directly express it.* They also lead the Elders in their adorations; for "whensoever they give glory and honor, and thanks to Him that sitteth on the throne," then it is that "the twenty-four Elders fall down before Him that sitteth on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for the age of the ages, and cast their crowns before the throne," giving glory, honor, and power to the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth. The one class have more the semblance of counsellors, the other, that of executors, and the two together are the closest to God of all the redeemed.

And these, my friends, are the dignities and glories to which you, and I, and all who hear the Gospel of Christ, are called and invited. There is not a prerogative of that celestial eldership—not an office or possession of these living ones—not a song they sing—not an attribute they wear—not a place they fill—which is not this night held out and offered to every one of us. Oh, the grandeur, the blessedness, the sublimity of the overtures of the Gospel of Christ! And with your eye on these heavenly splendors, these celestial princedoms and priesthoods, these eternal royalties with God and with His Son, Jesus Christ, and with your heart warmed with the contemplation of their unfathomed excellency, I ask

* "These four beasts are living emblems and ornaments of the throne, denoting a nearer admission than the twenty-four Elders."—*Bengel's Gnomon in loc.*

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you, whether you are willing to despise and cast away this your golden opportunity to obtain them? I wish to put it to your conscience, O man, O woman, whether, after all this has been put within your reach, you can still hope for clemency, if you wilfully turn a deaf ear, and carelessly let your chance go by! I wish to have your honest, sober, practical decision on the question, whether you are willing to allow this world's fleeting vanities, and damning sins and follies, to occupy and possess you in preference to these immortal regencies, and eternal principalities and powers? Believe me, that I am in earnest in this appeal; for I make it as a messenger of God, ordained to deal with these holy things for your salvation. The Lord fasten it on your soul, and give each of us grace to let go friends, pleasures, comforts, home, country, freedom, life, *everything*, rather than let slip so blessed an opportunity for so great a prize!

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LECTURE TENTH.

THE SEALED BOOK—NOT A BOOK OF REVELATIONS, BUT OF A FORFEITED INHERITANCE—REDEMPTION STILL LARGELY FUTURE—WHENCE THE WORD AND THE IDEA—THE INHERITANCE FORFEITED—TOTALITY OF THE FORFEITURE—MAN'S EFFORTS TO REGAIN IT—THE INCOMPETENCE OF ALL CREATURES—THE SEER'S TEARS—THE GREAT CONSOLATION—THE LAMB—HIS ATTITUDE, HORNS, AND EYES—HIS TAKING OF THE BOOK—MOMENTOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACT—THE UNIVERSAL JOY—THE GOLDEN BOWLS AND HARPS OF THE LIVING ONES AND ELDERS—SAINTS TO REIGN ON THE EARTH.

REV. 5 : 1–14. (Revised Text.) And I saw upon the right hand of Him that sitteth upon the throne, a book [or roll], written on the inside and on the back, fast-sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a great voice: Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals of it? And no one was able, in the heaven, nor on the earth, nor under the earth, to open the book, nor even to look upon it. And I was weeping much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, nor even to look upon it. And one from among the elders saith to me: Weep not; behold the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, overcame [ἐνίκησε, see chap. 3 : 21], to open the book and its seven seals.

And behold, and amidst the throne and the four living ones, and amidst the elders, a Lamb, standing, as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth. And He came and took [the book] from the right hand of Him that sitteth upon the throne.

And when He took the book, the four living ones and the twenty-four elders, fell down before the Lamb, having each a harp and golden bowls full of incenses, which are the prayers of the saints; and they sing a new song, saying: Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals of it; for Thou wert slain, and redeemedst us to

God by thy blood, out of every tribe and tongue, and people, and nation, and Thou madest us* unto our God, kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth.

And I saw and heard a voice of many angels around the throne, and the living ones and the elders, and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb which hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and upon the sea, and all the things in them, heard I saying, To Him that sitteth upon the throne and to the Lamb [be] the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the dominion for the ages of the ages. And the four living ones said, Amen; and the elders fell down and worshipped.

THIS chapter continues the description of the vision last had under consideration. The scene is still in the sky. The throne, the Elders, the Living ones, are still in view, the same as in the preceding chapter. But there is a making ready for great things, and hence a disclosure of new items, which now claim our attention.

Prominent and first among these is a *book*, or *roll*, upon the right hand of Him that sitteth on the throne, written on the inside and on the back, fast-sealed with seven seals. It was doubtless there from the very first glance the seer had of this sublime display; but it was kept out of his notice, at least reserved from the particulars of his description, until this point, at which starts

* Some of the best MSS. read "*them*" in place of *us*; but the sense is not altered by it, or by reading "*they*," as some MSS. do in the next clause, instead of "*we*;" for the subject is settled by the preceding declaration to be the persons uttering the song, namely, by the phrase "*redeemedst* us;" the genuineness of which must be considered established since the discovery of the Codex Synaiticus See note on page 249.

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one of the sublimest scenes in heaven, and the occasion of the most tremendous convulsions and changes on earth. The meaning of it has been differently represented by different expositors. But the outlying facts, that it, and it alone, brings upon the scene the prime mover of the new song in heaven, and the great actor of all the succeeding events of earth; that He appears and deals with this book only in the character of the Lamb which had been slain; and that what He does with it is something from which all creation has shrunk back in unworthiness and inability to perform, ought to be sufficient to set us upon the track of the conclusion, that this book has its primary and most essential reference to redemption. It has been very well observed: "If it concerned *creation*, there were no propriety in the Divine order of the piece, for the creation honor is all ascribed already (chap. 4 : 11), without either the presentation of the book or of the Lamb to our view. Nor, if it concerned creation, were there any fitness in presenting Him as a Lamb, and a Lamb slain; because thus was He not, when He laid the foundation of the earth, and set His compass on the face of the deep. So, likewise, from considerations merely of order, we can perceive that it is *not revelation* [any more than creation], with which this book is concerned; for to reveal, is proper to Him as the Word, as the Prophet, as the Messenger of the covenant, as the Light between the cherubim, as the Apostle of our profession; but it is not proper to Him as the

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one of the sublimest scenes in heaven, and the occasion of the most tremendous convulsions and changes on earth. The meaning of it has been differently represented by different expositors. But the outlying facts, that it, and it alone, brings upon the scene the prime mover of the new song in heaven, and the great actor of all the succeeding events of earth; that He appears and deals with this book only in the character of the Lamb which had been slain; and that what He does with it is something from which all creation has shrunk back in unworthiness and inability to perform, ought to be sufficient to set us upon the track of the conclusion, that this book has its primary and most essential reference to redemption. It has been very well observed: "If it concerned *creation*, there were no propriety in the Divine order of the piece, for the creation honor is all ascribed already (chap. 4 : 11), without either the presentation of the book or of the Lamb to our view. Nor, if it concerned creation, were there any fitness in presenting Him as a Lamb, and a Lamb slain; because thus was He not, when He laid the foundation of the earth, and set His compass on the face of the deep. So, likewise, from considerations merely of order, we can perceive that it is *not revelation* [any more than creation], with which this book is concerned; for to reveal, is proper to Him as the Word, as the Prophet, as the Messenger of the covenant, as the Light between the cherubim, as the Apostle of our profession; but it is not proper to Him as the

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how many-sided and multifariously applicable God's great prophecies are, and demonstrate how the images of the mighty things to come are reflected in the histories which precede them; but as expositions of what is chiefly and properly meant to be foreshown, they are simply mischievous failures. Having myself experienced the unfortunate bewilderment and confusion which they involve, and seen the confessed hesitation and embarrassment which they have ever entailed upon all their authors and adherents, and tested, as I believe, the utter sandiness of the foundations on which they rest, I am satisfied, convinced, and confident, that they are just what I here pronounce them to be, namely, learned blunders, and erudite but by no means harmless mistakes. It is not ecclesiastical history, which this book is introduced to foreshow, but something to which all ecclesiastical history is only the prelude and introduction, and which the Scriptures call "*The redemption of the purchased possession.*"

It may be well here for us to correct a misapprehension which largely obtains in the common conception of what redemption is. When this word is used, most men's minds go back to the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and think of something already accomplished and complete in the blessed facts of the blessed Saviour's history. This is well enough as far as it goes, and touches indeed, the great central particulars on which redemption reposes.

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But, viewed as a whole, redemption is a vastly wider and more wondrous thing. It stretches back through a history of six thousand years, and yet its sublimest part is still future. It includes all past dispensations and theophanies, and the coming and achievements of Christ in the flesh; but it embraces still other dispensations, and more wonderful theophanies, and a more glorious advent of Christ, and vastly more far-reaching achievements, of which His miracles were the symptomatic pre-intimations. There is already much of redemptive power and blessing in the world. The truth is, that everything on earth rests on a mediatorial basis. The world stands, and man exists, only because of Christ and His undertaking to be our Saviour. But for His mediatorship, Adam would have perished the day that he transgressed, and never a human being would have been born. The very ungodliest of the race owe whatever blessings they enjoy to the blood and engagement of Christ. Even the lower animals, and the very grasses of the fields, live and flourish by virtue of the same. Redemption is therefore so far a living force. Like a golden chain, it girdles the world, upholds it from destruction, and sustains, and blesses all the varied and successive generations on its surface. But, all this sea of mediatorial mercies is as nothing, compared with what is yet to come. Redemption has its roots and foundations in the past, but its true realization lies in the future, and connects directly with the period and trans-

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actions to which our text relates. The Scriptures everywhere point forward to Christ's Apocalypse, as the time when first the mystery shall be finished, and the long process reach its proper consummation. Jesus talked to His disciples about the signs which were to precede His coming, and said, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." (Luke 21:28.) In His view, then, redemption proper, or in its true reality, lies far more in the future than in the past; so much more that the past is hardly to be named apart from what is yet to come. And with all Paul's glorying in the cross, he did not hesitate to say: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are, of all men, most miserable;" and that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now; and not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body." (1 Cor. 15:19; Rom. 8:22, 23.) He speaks of Christians as indeed "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise," which he commends greatly, but which he pronounces the mere "earnest" or pledge-penny of something vastly greater—of an "inheritance" still future, which is only to come at a yet unaccomplished "redemption of the purchased possession." (Eph. 1:13, 14.) To him, therefore, redemption is still largely a subject of hope. There is an inheritance pledged, and a possession

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purchased, but it is not yet redeemed. The action of claiming, disencumbering, and taking possession of it is still future. And it is just this action that is brought to our view in the taking up of this book and the breaking of its seals.

The word *redemption* comes to us, and takes its significance from certain laws and customs of the ancient Jews. Under these laws and customs, it was impossible to alienate estates beyond a given time. Whatever disposition one may have been forced to make of his lands, and whoever might be found in possession of them, the year of Jubilee returned them to the lawful representatives of their former owners. Upon this regulation there was founded another, which made it the right of the nearest of kin to one who, through distress or otherwise, had alienated his inheritance to another party, to step in and redeem it; that is, to buy it back, and retake it, at any time, or at such times not falling within certain stipulated intervals. When an inheritance was thus disponed away by its rightful possessor, there were two books, or instruments of writing, made of the transaction, the one open, and the other sealed, specifying price and particulars. These books or mortgage-deeds went into the hands of the one to whom the property was thus made over. A sealed book thus became a standing sign of an alienated inheritance, but so held as to be liable to be recovered on the terms specified. And when any one legally representing the original proprietor, was found competent to lift and

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destroy that sealed instrument, and thus to buy back what had been disponed away, he was called the *goel*, or redeemer, and the inheritance was considered redeemed, so far that he now had full right to dispossess of it whoever might be found on it, and to enter upon its undisturbed fruition.*

From this it will be seen, that the transactions which John witnessed, in regard to this sealed book, accord precisely with this ancient arrangement for the redemption of inheritances. And the coincidence is so complete, and sealed books in Scripture are so much confined to this particular sort of writings,† that I take it as separating this book in God's right hand from all other subjects to the one subject of forfeited inheritances.‡ The idea that it must refer to matters of knowledge, or information to be communicated, is a mere prejudice, derived from modern things, and not at all from any Scriptural allusions to sealed books. It is also incompatible with the intent of God's word, for it to be sealed up, in the literal sense of this passage; for that word is given for opening, not concealing; and for treating it as a sealed book, and not opening it to the people, Isaiah prophesied, and Christ himself confirmed fearful judgment upon the doctors of Jerusalem. And to make this book refer to things to be revealed, is also in disagreement with what follows

* In this connection, see Ruth, chapter 4.

† See Jeremiah 32:6-12. ‡ So also Irving *in loc.*

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the breaking of the seals; which was not for the reading of the book, for no reading followed, but only shouts of praise that a worthy Redeemer was found, and the action of judgment and destruction to dispossess usurpers and aliens.

We also know very well, that there has been an inheritance forfeited and disponed away for these thousands of years, and that for all this time the proper heirs have lain out of it, and had no proper possession of it. That inheritance we know to be just τα παντα—*the all things*—in which man, in his first creation, was installed, and which God made good, and sin made evil. Everything testifies that it was a high, holy, and blessed investiture. But, alas, its original possessor sinned, and it passed out of his hands to the disinheritance of all his seed. The sealed book, the title-deeds of its forfeiture and mortgage, are in the hands of God, and strangers and intruders have overrun and debased it. And from the days of Adam until now, those deeds have lain in the Almighty's hands, with no one to take them up or to dispossess the aliens. And even when the saints are caught up to the sky, they will find it still lying there, awaiting this very scene of the text, when the Goel adjudged worthy shall appear and take it up, and destroy the sad testimonial by breaking its seals forever.

"*Seven seals*" are upon this book, indicative of the completeness of those bonds of forfeit which have all this while debarred Adam's seed from their proper inheritance. The original estate is

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totally gone from man, apart from some competent Redeemer. Just as the final taking of the book, and the breaking of its seals, eventuate in complete redemption, and the full reinstatement of the acknowledged seed into the blessedness which sin forfeited, and the Goel redeemed, so those seals unbroken, set forth the completeness of the alienation, and the thoroughness of the incumbrances which are upon the estate, until that competent Goel has performed his work.

This book was "*written within and on the back.*" This again tends to identify it with these books of forfeited inheritances. Within were the specifications of the forfeiture; without were the names and attestations of the witnesses; for this is the manner in which these documents were attested.*

It is in the right hand of God. No literal hand is described; but, so to speak, it was on the right hand of the undescribed and indescribable One who occupied the throne. This is significant of His high and supreme right to what the sealed instrument binds. Failing from man, it reverted to the original Giver. Sin cannot vitiate any of the rights of God. Satan's possession is a mere usurpation, permitted for the time, but in no way det-

* "For the manner of writing the contract, he who was to buy the ground wrote two instruments; the one to be sealed with his own signet, the other he showed unclosed to the witnesses, that they might subscribe and bear witness of that which was written. *This, the witnesses did subscribe* UPON THE BACK *of the inclosed instrument.*"—*Weemse on the Judicial Law of Moses*, chapter 30.

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rimental to the proprietorship of the Almighty. The true right still lives in the hand of God, until the proper Goel comes to redeem it, by paying the price, and ejecting the alien and his seed. The same is significant of the fact that this matter of the book and its seals is the principal subject of the transaction displayed; and furthermore, that the intensest holiness and sublimest power are required to be able or worthy to approach and take possession of the record; for to come to the right hand of God, is to come to the highest place of exaltation and authority in the universe.

But, along with the sealed book, appeared a mighty angel, asking with a great voice, if any one was prepared to take the book and break its seals. This further accords with our interpretation of the nature of this book, and shows that the forfeited inheritance was now open for redemption. The description is not as if the privilege to redeem was now first opened. For all that John saw and heard, the proclamation may have been sounding long. But the time had come, when, if a competent Goel was to be found, he should come forward and exercise his right. The way was open before; but, no one having appeared till now, the great, universal, final call is made, that, if any one is worthy, he should now exercise his power.

The result of the call was, that "*no one was able, in the heaven, nor on the earth, nor under the earth, to open the book, nor even to look upon it.*" Angels shrunk back from it as beyond their

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qualifications. Heavenly principalities and powers stood mute and downcast as they surveyed the requirements for the work. And yet, it would seem as if somewhere there had been efforts making to achieve it. And what, indeed, have been all the endeavors of unsanctified men, in politics, in science, and in all the arts of civilization, improvement, philosophy, and even religion, but to work out this problem of successful repossession of what was lost in Adam, to attain to that forfeited perfection and supreme good which has ever danced before their imaginations. What, indeed, has been the spring of the activity of the under world, in these ages of seductive effort with mortals, but to persuade men that they can make good the lying promise, "Ye shall be as God," and in spite of the Almighty, and without Him, to realize through human expansion and demoniacal guidance, the dream of a better destiny for the world and the race. It has also been in the plan of God so far, to drop the reins to His rebellious creatures, to permit the experiment to be carried to its utmost, and to give scope for its most conspicuous failure at the last. Varied, and many, and complicated, have been the attempts, all of which, as they always must, have resulted in disastrous failure. Egypt attempted to play the goel for the world, and cringed to the bloodiest tyrannies, bowed to the worship of the basest of creatures, and went down in ignominious ruin. Babylon tried it, and became the world's great symbol of all that is

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blasphemous in power, impure in life, besotted in affection, and terrible in desolation. Greece tried it, and only consummated her destruction in the marriage of the intellect of heaven with the vices of hell. Rome tried it, and became the iron arm which threshed the world in blood, and then dissolved in the putrefaction which itself had wrought. The spirit of liberty, democratic confederation, and universal communism and enlightenment, uniting largely with elements of infernal origin, is now trying it, and will perpetuate its efforts to the most gigantic and bewitching consummation that the world shall ever have seen, but only to work out the most dreadful failure that has yet occurred. For, as in heaven, so on earth, and under the earth, the ultimate record will be, what is here written: "*no one was able to open the book, nor even to look upon it.*" The lost estate of man, by man, or angel, or spirits of the under world, can never be recovered.

It is a sad and melancholy contemplation. Heaven, itself, seems to grow silent and breathless under it. And the tender and loving heart of John overflows as the picture opens before him. "*I was weeping much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, nor even to look upon it.*"

Some speak of these tears as mere tears of disappointed curiosity. This, indeed, is the common explanation. We are told that the book had unknown revelations in it, which John was very impatient to understand; and that his much weeping was caused by the prospect of having his

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personal desire to obtain a knowledge of the future, ungratified. Poor John! what a silly mortal, to be troubling himself about unrevealed prophecy, and to keep up this crying in heaven because there was no one to open the book for him! The thing is absurd. It is beneath criticism. And if we cannot get through our interpretations without such left-handed compliments to the "natural emotion" of men "in the Spirit," it seems to me that it would be the part of fairness and honor, to confess frankly that the subject is beyond our comprehension. I am very certain that if John had looked upon these solemn and mighty transactions as some of his commentators have represented them, we would not only never have heard of these tears, but they never would have been shed. What a picture of inspiration, that it should thus strip a venerable and disciplined servant of God of all manly dignity, and make of him a silly and peevish child! No, no; John knew by that Spirit in which he was, what that sealed book meant. He knew that if no one was found worthy and able to take it from the hand of God, and to break its seals, that all the promises of the prophets, and all the hopes of the saints, and all the preintimations of a redeemed world, must fail. He understood the office of the Goel, and that if there was failure at this point, "the redemption of the purchased possession" must fail. Could it be possible that this should be? Had he all this while been hoping, and preaching, and prophesying what should,

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after all, not be accomplished? Was the promised inheritance, now at the ripened moment for its recovery, to go by default into eternal alienation? How could he bear the thought? Yet such were some of the suggestions of this interval of blankness and awful pause in heaven. And in this view of the case, well might an earnest prophet weep without damage to his meekness or his honor. But in this chief mourner over the unopened book, we may see the state of the Church up to that time,—a widowhood household, weeping before the Lord over the spoliation of its inheritance. Do not His own elect "cry day and night unto Him," to avenge them in this particular? Do not the sons of the bride-chamber continually weep and fast because the Bridegroom is taken from them, and His house oppressed by the children of the alien? That book, unlifted and unopened, is the Church's grief and distress. It bespeaks the inheritance unredeemed—the children still estranged from their purchased possession. But that book opened, is the Church's joy and glory. It is the assertion of her reinstatement into what Adam lost—the recovery to her of all of which she has been so long and cruelly deprived by sin. Until, therefore, that book is opened, and its seals broken, the people of God must remain in privation, sorrow, and tears.

But, blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Such anxious and tearful longing for the "better country" and the ran-

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somed inheritance, is noticed in heaven, and has many precious assurances from thence. One of the Elders said unto John: "*Weep not; behold the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, overcame to open the book and its seven seals.*" And this is what the Church has been hearing from her elders, and prophets, and apostles, and ministers, in all the ages. It is the very essence of the Gospel, which has been sounding ever since the promise in Eden, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. It is what all the ancient types prefigured, what the songs of the prophets foretold, and what the first Christians and their successors went heralding over all the earth. It has been the only comfort of God's children in all these ages of their disinheritance, a comfort which has cheered their pilgrim steps through life, illumined their passage to the grave, and will be the joy of their souls as they stand waiting in heaven for the consummating victory of Him who has thus far been so uniformly triumphant on so many trying fields. Jesus is the Lion sprung from Judah. He is this Root of David—the foundation on which the Davidic hopes repose. He overcame, in the trials of life, in the temptations in the wilderness, in the agonies of the garden, in the terrors of death, and in the bonds of the grave. He hath gone up, leading captivity captive. He is Victor now over law, and sin, and death, and hell. He hath paid the redemption price of the forfeited inheritance. He is the true Goel, who, having so far triumphed

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and been accepted, will also prove ready and worthy to complete His work, by lifting those long-standing deeds of forfeiture, and breaking their debarring seals. Such is our faith, and hope, and comfort, here re-confirmed to us from heaven. And what we find in the further particulars of this vision, is simply the picture of its accomplishment.

"*And behold, and amidst the throne, and the four Living ones, and amidst the Elders, a Lamb, standing, as it had been slain.*" The description of the location of this Lamb, is of the same sort with that of the Living ones. They were "amidst the throne, and around the throne;" that is, they were seen everywhere within the bounds of the throne, from centre to circumference, as if the life and being of it, present in every part. And so this Lamb was amidst the throne, the Living ones, and the Elders—visibly omnipresent within these bounds, as if the animating soul of all—the Life of the life of the throne, and of the forms of being and dignity about it.

He who appears here as a Lamb, is the same whom the Elder had just described as a Lion. The two titles might seem to be incongruous. What more opposite than the monarch of the forest, in strength and majesty, inflicting terror and death, and the lamb, in its uncomplaining meekness, in the hands of the sacrificer. But the two pictures do not conflict. They supplement each other, and combine to bring out what could not be otherwise so well portrayed, and yet what

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the nature of the case required. The opening of the seals, is an act of strength—an exploit of war —a going forth of power to take possession of a kingdom. As one after another is broken, out flies a strong One in fierce assault upon the enemies and usurpers who occupy the earth. There is terror and destruction at every successive movement. And in the accomplishment of this, Christ is a Lion, clothed with power, and majesty, and terribleness. But the character in which He overcame, and became in that respect qualified for this work, and that in which He presents Himself before the throne as a candidate to be adjudged worthy to do it, is that of the sacrificial Lamb, who had innocently and meekly suffered, bearing our sins in His own body, and vanquishing all legal disabilities by His atoning blood. It is in this character of a Lamb that was slain, who overcame by His perfect obedience unto death, and who paid the price of redemption in His meek sufferings, that He is adjudged "worthy to take the book, and to open the seals of it." It is by His sacrifice as a Lamb slain, that He comes to the qualifications for the further office of a Lion, to assert and enforce His supremacy. Both these characters are essential, hence, both appear in the description. "He was led as a *Lamb to the slaughter*, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth" (Is. 53:7); but He is yet to "send forth judgment unto victory" (Matt. 12:20). As the Lamb, He hath "borne our sorrows and carried our iniquities,"

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and stands before the throne in passive humiliation and loyal suffering; but it is reserved for Him, as Judah's Lion, "in righteousness to judge and make war," and to enforce the indignation of that throne against all who stand out in rebellion against it.

He is here described, not by the ordinary word (αμνος) used to signify a lamb, but by another (αρνιος) more intensely significant of gentleness and domesticity—*a pet lamb*—in sharp contrast with the *wild beasts*, in opposition to whom He is arrayed. This, the more fully brings out His particular mildness and familiar identification with His people, and the utter inexcusableness and guilt of those savage and untamable ones who persist in rejecting, persecuting, and warring against Him. They wrong and injure the gentlest and most inoffensive of beings—they murder the pet Lamb of the family of God.*

* There is a passage in Isaiah (16), with which this description seems also directly to identify itself, and which the more helps to confirm our whole interpretation of this vision. In our version it reads: "Send ye the lamb *to* the ruler of the land from Sela, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion." But neither the original, nor any of the other versions, so give it. The true rendering of the words, in conformity with the Vulgate, Luther, and some other translations, would be: "*Send ye* [*or I will send*] *the Lamb, the Ruler of the land*, from Sela of the wilderness unto the mount of the daughter of Zion." It falls in with Hab. 2:3. It identifies the Lambhood with future Rulership of the earth. And as He appears in this vision as the Goel, to recover and repossess the inheritance, it is in exact accordance with the character in which He was anciently prophesied of, that He should make His appearance as the Lamb advancing to take the Rulership of the world.

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You will notice the attitude of this Lamb—"*standing.*" Though He had all the appearances of recent slaughter, He is alive, upon His feet. The resurrection of Christ is not a myth, but a *fact.* The same John who saw Him dead on Calvary, here sees Him alive in heaven—alive in the body, with the marks of slaughter upon Him. We believe not in a dead Christ only. Our faith does not terminate with a sepulchre. It takes in a living Redeemer, who is as much upon His feet as if He never had been dead, and qualified by His having died for what He never could have done, had he not surrendered His life and gone down among the dead. And with these tokens of His slaughter, as the once dead but now living Lamb, He stands before the throne—stands accepted and approved—stands for those who accept Him as their Redeemer—stands for the maintenance of their cause and the fulfilment of their hopes.

"*Having seven horns.*" Here is the intimation that something more than sacrifice and intercession is now to be His business. The horn is the symbol of strength and aggressive power. Moses, in blessing Joseph, says: "His glory is like the firstling of His bullock, and His horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them He shall push the people together to the ends of the earth." (Deut. 33:17.) We find the same imagery in Psalms (89:17, 24), applied both to Christ and His people, and in both instances connected with strength and conquest. Zechariah (1:18, 19),

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says: "I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns. And I said unto the angel that talked with me: What be these? And he answered me: These are the horns [that is, the powers], which have scattered Judah, and Israel, and Jerusalem." The horn thus stands for imperial, kingly, and aggressive power. *Seven* is the number of completeness. So that whilst Christ appears here as the sacrificial Lamb, He is at the same time possessed of the fulness of imperial strength and mighty force. He has ability for invincible conquest, as well as meekness for patient suffering.

And with the "seven horns" are "*seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.*" When Isaiah prophesied of the Rod out of the stem of Jesse, he said: "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon [have its home in] Him." And he enumerated seven in the blessed fulness of the holy endowment: First, "the spirit of wisdom;" second, "the spirit of understanding;" third, "the spirit of counsel;" fourth, "the spirit of might;" fifth, "the spirit of knowledge;" sixth, "the spirit of the fear of the Lord;" and seventh, "the spirit of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord." (Is. 11: 1–3.) Thus has inspired prophecy identified, and described in advance, these very "seven Spirits of God," which here come to view as the "seven eyes" of the Lamb. His horns show His fulness of *imperial* power; His eyes show His fulness of *intellectual and spiritual* power. His is not a blind force, but

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an almightiness directed by perfect and all-searching intelligence, and divine understanding. Upon that BRANCH which God was to lay as the chief corner-stone of the mystic temple, were also "seven eyes—eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Zech. 3:8, 9; 4:10.) And this Lamb is that selfsame Branch and Corner-stone; and these are the selfsame eyes of all-penetrating vision and completeness of spiritual and universal wisdom.

Three grand qualities of the Goel are thus brought to view;—*first*, sacrificial virtue, to take away sin; *second*, aggressive strength to conquer and to overcome all foes; and *third*, perfect and universal intelligence, direct from the indwelling Spirit of God in all its fulness. Such were the qualifications with which He appeared amidst the throne, the Living ones, and the Elders, and advanced to take the book and break its seals. And when it is considered, that no qualifications less than these would answer, we need not wonder that no one else in heaven, earth, or under the earth, was found worthy to open the book, or even to look upon it. Who among the angels of God could show such spotless innocence, maintained amid such trials—such meek and meritorious submission—such victory over the inexorable demands of a violated law—such triumph over the unmutilated power of death—such perfection of aggressive might—such intensity of spirituality, intelligence, wisdom, and Godly comprehension! Well might the mightiest messenger of God, with

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the greatest voice, send out through the universe, and all heaven pause in mute and solemn waiting, and not find such another. Brethren, there is but one sun in our system, and there is but one Christ in the universe.

"*And He came and took* [*the book*] *from the right hand of Him that sitteth upon the throne.*" This is the sublimest individual act recorded in the Apocalypse. It is the act which includes all that suffering creation, and the disinherited saints of God have been sighing, and crying, and waiting for, for all these long ages—for six thousand years of grief and sorrow. It is the act which carries with it all else that is written in the succeeding part of this glorious revelation. It is the act by virtue of which the world is subdued, Babylon judged, Antichrist destroyed, the dragon vanquished, death overthrown, the curse expunged, the earth made new, and the reign of everlasting blessedness and peace made to cover its hills and illuminate its valleys, and transform it into an unfading paradise of God. It was the lifting of the title-deeds of the alienated inheritance—the legal act of repossession of all that was lost in Adam, and paid for by the blood and tears of the Son of God. Heaven looks on in solemn silence as that act is being performed. The universe is stricken with awe, and grows breathless as it views it. And the Living ones, and Elders, and all the hosts of angels, are filled with adoring wonder and joy, as if another FIAT had gone forth from God for a new creation.

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"*And when He took the book*," there went a thrill through the universal heart of living things. "*The four Living ones, and the twenty-four Elders fell down before the Lamb.*" A song which was never sung before, broke from their lips. John hears the lofty anthem rolling sublime through heaven: "THOU ART WORTHY TO TAKE THE BOOK, AND TO OPEN THE SEALS OF IT; *for Thou wert slain, and redeemedst us to God by Thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and Thou madest us unto our God, kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth.*" Nor they alone were moved to new and intenser adoration; but "around the throne, and the Living ones, and the Elders," and afar in the depths of space, he "*heard the voice of many angels, and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice:* WORTHY IS THE LAMB WHICH HATH BEEN SLAIN TO RECEIVE THE POWER, AND RICHES, AND WISDOM, AND MIGHT, AND HONOR, AND GLORY, AND BLESSING." And wider, and still wider spread the sympathetic response of adoring rapture. There was not a holy heart unmoved, nor a holy tongue that did not lift up its song. "*Every creature which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and upon the sea, and all things in them*," John "*heard saying*, TO HIM THAT SITTETH UPON THE THRONE, AND TO THE LAMB, [BE] THE BLESSING, AND THE HONOR, AND THE GLORY, AND THE DOMINION FOR THE AGES OF THE AGES. *And the four Living ones said*, AMEN; *and the Elders fell down and worshipped.*"

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Now, to take all this sacred pomp, and universal thrill of adoration, as the mere *Proem* to a few chapters of dim and often untraceable outline of the Church's history in this world, I confess to you, looks to me as little less than blasphemy. Not for my right arm, not for my right eye, could I consent so to regard it. Where, in all the revelations of eternity, is there another such a scene? Where, in all the disclosures of God, and His awful administrations, is there another such a picture, or another such a crisis? Search the book of inspiration from end to end, and you will find no parallel to it. Even the great voice of the mighty angel would inquire for the like in vain. I must therefore take this act of the Lamb, so far from being the mere fancy work of John, or even of the Holy Ghost, as involving the heading up and highest consummation of the highest things of our faith, and of all the contents of the revelation of God. And as the view which I have given of it, *and that only*, assigns to it a significance commensurate with such awful and universal solemnities, I feel that I am planted on the rock of immutable truth in teaching you so to accept it.

And strikingly confirmative is still another particular in the description, which does not appear until after the Lamb has taken the book. In the preceding chapter, when the Living ones and Elders paid their adoration, it was unto Him that sitteth upon the throne; and their cry of WORTHY, was to Him who created all things, and

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by whose will they were, and were created. But here they fall down before the Lamb, and cry their WORTHY, unto Him that was slain, and had redeemed them with His blood. And in connection with their new song to Him who holds the book, they are described as "*having each a harp and golden bowls full of incenses, which are the prayers of the saints.*" I find here nothing of that saint mediatorship with which the Church in some sections and ages has been so much debauched, and the glory of her true Intercessor so much obscured. Christ has just now been acknowledged as the possessor of the ability and the right to enter, with His redeemed ones, upon their inheritance. It is therefore the time for all the prayers of all the saints of all the ages to come into remembrance, that that which has ever been their chief burden may now be answered and fulfilled. "THY KINGDOM COME. THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN." So have all Christians ever prayed. Such is the theme of all true supplication, as it looks out over futurity, and utters the spirit of faith and hope. And who can reckon up the volumes and oceans of such entreaties, which remain to this day unanswered? But, not one of them is lost. They are all carefully treasured in golden bowls. They are as sweet incenses before God and before the Lamb. And when we come to take our places with our Lord, and He takes the book of forfeiture to break its debarring seals, then will those supplications come into play; and blessed he who has his

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bowl full of them. The picture is not that of saints in heaven officiating for saints on earth; but of saints in heaven holding up to Christ their own prayers, and the prayers of one another, and the prayers of all saints, that now they may be fulfilled to the making of things on earth as they are in heaven—that now the answer which has been so long delayed may be speedily accomplished. And the *harps* bear upon the subject in the same direction. As the incense connects with the priest's office, so the harp connects with the prophet's. Samuel said to Saul: "Thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place, with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, *and a harp before them*, and they shall prophesy." (1 Sam. 10 : 5.) We read of six sons of Jeduthun, "*who prophesied with a harp.*" (1 Chron. 25 : 3.) David says, of his prophetic utterances, "I will open my dark sayings upon the harp." (Ps. 49 : 4.) And the holding up of these incense prayers and prophetic harps together before the Lamb as He takes the book, is that He may now remember and fulfil what all His holy prophets have spoken and sung, as well as what all His saints have prayed. Both combine to assure us, that it is the very summit and consummation of all pious desire, and all sacred prediction and song, that is involved in this taking of the book.

And to the like end is the hopeful and joyous exclamation at the conclusion of the lofty anthem which these Living ones and Elders sing to Him

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who holds the lifted book. "*And we shall reign on the earth.*" Why express themselves thus, just at this point? Because this taking up of the book was the pledge and proof that now He was fully invested and ready to redeem the inheritance, and to carry into effect the blessed promises, that "the meek shall inherit the earth," and that "the kingdom, and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High." (Matt. 5:5; Dan. 7:27.) It was now certain *to sight* that all was about to be literally fulfilled, and that their golden crowns and dignities were not mere empty things, but carrying with them all that such marks import.

Some people tell us that it is quite too low and coarse a thing to think of the earth in connection with the final bliss of the saints. They preach that we do but degrade and pervert the exalted things of holy Scripture, when we hint the declaration of the wise man, that "the earth endureth forever," and that over it the glorious and everlasting kingdom of Christ and His saints, is to be established in literal reality. But if the ransomed in heaven, with golden crowns upon their brows, kneeling at the feet of the Lamb, before the very throne of God, and with the prayers of all saints, and the predictions of all prophets in their hands, could sing of it as one of the elements of their loftiest hopes and joys, I beg to turn a deaf ear to the surly cry of "*carnal*"—"*sensual*" — "*unspiritual*" — with which some

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would turn me from "the blessed hope." Shall the saints in glory shout: "*We shall reign on the earth*," and we be accounted heretics for believing that they knew what they were saying? Is it come to this, that to be orthodox we must believe that these approved and crowned ones kneel before the throne of God with a lie upon their lips? Shall they, from thrones in heaven, point to earth as the future theatre of their administrations, and give adoring thanks and praises to the Lamb for it, and we be stigmatized as fanatics and Judaizers, for undertaking to pronounce the blessed fact in mortal hearing? Oh, I wonder, I wonder, how the dear God above us can endure the unbelief with which some men deal with His holy word.

Shall we then keep silence on the subject?—When the Living ones and Elders fail to sing about it in heaven; when inspired apostles no longer admit the subject into their holy writings; then, but not till then, let it be dropped from the discourses of our sanctuaries, and from the inculcations of them that fear God. And woe, woe, to that man who is convinced of its truth, but, for the sake of place or friendship, refrains from confessing it! Well has it been said of him: "He barters away his kingdom for the applause of men. He eclipseth the glory of Christ to enhance his own." He stultifieth the adoring songs of celestial kings, that he may win a little empty favor by base pandering to the pleasure of an ignorant, unbelieving, and godless world.

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LECTURE ELEVENTH.

OPENING OF THE SEALS—TO WHAT IT REFERS—NOT THE EARTHLY HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OR ROMAN EMPIRE—DENOTES A NEW ADMINISTRATION AFTER THE PRESENT—IN SOME SENSE EMBRACES THE PRESENT—SHOWS THE PROCEEDING BY WHICH CHRIST JUDICIALLY TAKES POSSESSION OF THE EARTH—PORTION OF THE APOCALYPSE AND OF TIME EMBRACED—DAY OF JUDGMENT MORE THAN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS—FIRST SEAL—UTTERANCE OF THE LIVING ONES—HORSES, EARTHLY IMAGES OF DIVINE POWER—SPECIFIC WORK OF THE FIRST HORSEMAN—A GREAT REFORMATION AMONG CHRISTIANS AFTER THE JUDGMENT BEGINS.

REV. 6 : 1, 2. (Revised Text.) And I saw when the Lamb opened one from among the seven seals, and I heard one from among the four living ones, saying, as the voice of thunder, Go! [or, *Come!* The words, "*and see*," are doubtful, and generally rejected by critics.]

And I saw, and, behold, a white horse; and he that sat on him having a bow; and a crown was given to him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

A NEW turn of the vision which John began to describe in the fourth chapter, now comes before us. The scene and actors are unchanged, but the manifestations all move earthward. The sealed book has been lifted out of the hand of the Sitter on the throne. It is in the possession of Him found worthy to take it, and able to break its seals. The universal thrill of exultation over the fact has subsided. Everything in the heav-

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enly presence has become quiet with reverent expectancy. And the Lifter of the document now proceeds to destroy its seals. May God help us to a right comprehension of the mysterious transaction!

Two things are to be considered,—

I. THE SUBJECT TO WHICH IT REFERS;
II. THE PARTICULAR OCCURRENCES WHICH IT PORTRAYS.

I. There are many who assume, that what is here treated of under the imagery of the opening of the seven seals, is the continuous fortune of the Christian Church and the Roman world, from the time of John's banishment, or soon thereafter, to the consummation of all things. By this class of interpreters, the opening of the seals was the opening of a prophetic roll, containing an outline of the triumphs of the Gospel, in connection with the great world-powers, down to the coming of Christ, and the introduction of the Millennial reign. That there is truth of some sort underlying this view, we may readily admit; but that it is exactly of the kind which the advocates of this theory usually describe, we may just as readily question.

The amazing pomp, solemnity, and universal demonstration, with which the opening of these seven seals is approached in the two preceding chapters, forbids the assumption, that nothing more is meant than the disclosure to the Church of a dim epitome of its earthly history. God does

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not employ so much parade, nor do all the angels and principalities of eternity become so profoundly enthusiastic, over the letting forth of a few scarcely traceable predictions, touching the earthly successes of the Gospel, the reigns of a few Roman Emperors, and the mere mundane fortunes of Christian confessors.

The several particulars in the preliminary description, also, prove that something transcendently higher is intended, than has transpired since the vision was seen, or that ever will transpire within the limits of the present dispensation. The Elders already have their crowns, the giving of which belongs to the resurrection period. (2 Tim. 4:8.) The throne comes to its place just at the moment in which John beholds it (chap. 4:2), betokening a new administration other than that which had previously been. Christ appears as the Lamb, which is not the character of a Revelator; but it is the character of the predicted "Ruler of the land" about to take possession of the inheritance. (Is. 16:1.)* The question of worthiness and ability, presented a condition wholly unheard of in all the multiplied instances of the giving of sacred predictions. The bringing forward of the prayers of the saints, and the joyous utterances of the prophets, shows that more is embraced than a laying open of the course of this world's history; for prayer and prophecy have quite another burden. The much weeping of John is

* See Lecture X, p. 282, note.

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rendered ridiculous, if referred to a feeling of disappointment at not being able to find out a little more prophecy. The universal and adoring gladness of all the angels, and all holy beings, can find no adequate justification in the mere disclosure to men of the occurrences cited by the historical school as the fulfilment of the seals, trumpets, and vials. The entire absence of any reading of what was written, either on the inside or on the outside of the book, or of any reference to anything supposed to be recorded in it, should lead us to question that the breaking of its seals had reference to the rehearsal of its contents. And the character of the manifestations, along with concurrent explanations, as seal after seal was broken; besides the numerous cross lights from other parts of Scripture; all combine to prove, that something else is signified than the history of the present dispensation.

There is also a link of consecution, given in the record itself, which must not be overlooked. We hold it to be out of the question, in all just exegesis, to give an adequate explanation of the vision of the stars and candlesticks, including the seven Epistles, without making it span the entire earthly church state. The objections that have been urged to the contrary, are futile in the extreme, and can be made to weigh as heavily against any scheme of Apocalyptic interpretation, as against this. And if the scope of the first vision stretches to the period of the consummation, it is settled that everything relating to this

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book and its seals, refers above all, not to things which run parallel with the earthly church state, but to "*the things which must take place* AFTER *these things*" (chap. 4 : 1); that is, to another administration.

But, as the coming administration of power is to be the consummation of the present dispensation, and as all its wonderful actings of sovereignty and judgment move in the same line of God's providence with men and nations now; as a matter of course, an imperfect fulfilment through all the ages of the present order is also embraced. The resurrection of Christ and the distribution of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, was the germ of everything that is to be when the final consummation is complete. The preaching of the Gospel, and its struggles with the world-powers in this dispensation, is the embryo of everything to come. It is the justification of believers, and their anointing to eternal regency and priesthood; and it is the judgment of the world and of Satan, with prelibations of the doom that awaits them. Only, the thing is not yet consummated, actualized, and manifested. Nor will it be, in the present order, until Christ's coming with power, to enforce, by a new administration, what is now realized in part, but is still mainly prospective. Accordingly, the breaking of the seal of the sepulchre, the outpouring of spiritual power upon the apostles, the visitations upon antagonizing potencies, and all the victories of the Gospel in the course of the earthly church state, are really precursory fulfil

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ments of the opening of these seven seals, and are in some sense included in them.

There is, then, a solid basis on which, within certain limitations, the views of the Preterist, who traces the events under the opening of the seals in the course of history since John's time, and the views of the Futurist, who refers them to the period of the judgment hereafter, may be harmonized, and both accepted, without either one impairing the distinctness or truthfulness of the other. The only prerequisite to the entertainment of both is, that the two should be homogeneous, and that the one fulfilment should be regarded as inchoate, and only a sort of preliminary and imperfect rehearsal or earnest of the other. Solid objections may certainly be urged against the doctrine of a double sense of Scripture; at any rate, against a double sense of such sort that one is of a wholly different nature from the other. But it is not to be doubted or denied, that many sacred prophecies have embraced events of the past, which nevertheless still travail with blessing, and await a further and completer fulfilment. Many of the Old Testament predictions of the coming of the Christ, if not the most of them, embraced at the same time, and without distinction, what was partially fulfilled in his first coming, but is to be much more largely fulfilled at his second coming. Who can question that Haggai 2 : 6, 7, has received some partial illustration in the first advent? Yet the Holy Ghost, in Heb. 12 : 26, teaches us still to await its complete

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fulfilment. The inspired Peter informs us that the promise given, in Joel 2:28, has, in part, at least, been accomplished. (Acts 2:47.) And yet, surely, the word is big with blessed things for the future. Enoch's prophecy (Jude 14, 15) may reasonably be supposed to have had some reference to the flood then impending, whilst its language yet directs us forward to the future coming of the Lord.

Bacon has well observed, that there is a "latitude which is agreeable unto Divine prophecies, being of the nature of the Author, with whom a thousand years are but as one day, and therefore they are not fulfilled punctually at once, but have springing and germinant accomplishments throughout many ages, though the height or fulness of them may refer to some one age."* And it is altogether reasonable, and accordant with the nature of the subject, to agree, that something of this sort is to be found in the instance before us, giving us precursively and imperfectly the same things through the course of centuries, which are to be finally and perfectly consummated in the new administrations which the period of the great judgment is to bring forth.

Without questioning, therefore, that these foreshowings embrace the general spirit and tenor of the Church's history in this world, or that an imperfect and germinant fulfilment of the opening of these seals may be traced through the events

* Advancement of Learning, Book 2.

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of the past, I must yet refer their height and fulness altogether to the future, and assign them their complete fulfilment only in that momentous section of time, which intervenes between the termination of the present order, and the full establishment of the everlasting kingdom and reign of Christ and his saints over all the earth. With a very able and eloquent preacher of the early part of this century, I take the opening of these seals as significant of the Lion-Lamb's entry, by successive stages, upon the right and possession of the earth, and his actings of judicial power and sovereignty whereby he asserts and enforces his claim and title as the victorious kinsman of our fallen race, to the end that all its territory, kingdoms, peoples, and tongues may thenceforward be manifestly and in fact his forever. In other words, its sets before us the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ, in his relation to the world, and his administrations toward the nations, after his elect of the Church have been caught up from their trials and their graves to their heavenly thrones. It is the judicial proceeding of the Almighty *Goel*, to rid "the purchased possession" of the dynasties of wickedness, to cast out the rulers of the darkness of this world, to restore the earth to its proper fertility and peace, and to bring in the empire of righteousness and salvation.

The portion of the Apocalypse covered by these seven seals, includes everything between the fifth and twentieth chapters; the seventh seal taking in the seven trumpets, and the seventh trumpet,

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the seven last plagues, with the battle of the great day of God Almighty.

The period of time more directly covered by these seven seals, is that which lies between the assumption of the resurrected and translated saints of the first class, and the full instalment of the millennial order, when Satan is bound, the first resurrection completed, and the blessed and holy who have part in it reign with Christ as his kings and priests.

I have several times explained, that the first thing to be looked for in the great and marvellous transactions embraced in the consummation of all things, is the mysterious coming of the Lord Jesus to take those that wait and watch for him, with such of the dead as have fallen asleep in the same attitude. Good people are apt to be thinking of dying, and of being ready for death. But no true Christian has any right to count on dying. There is something that is more certain than death. There are some who will never die. Those who are alive and waiting for Christ when he comes, shall never taste of death. They shall be "*taken*" as Enoch was taken, as Elijah was taken, as Romanists allege that the Virgin Mary was taken, and as some say the Apostle John was taken. The words of Paul upon this point are too plain to be misunderstood. He says, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, . . . and we which are alive and remain shall be caught up . . . in the clouds, to meet the

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Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4 : 16, 17.) I have no idea that a very large portion of mankind, or even of the professing Church, will be thus taken. The first translation, if I may so speak, will embrace only the select few, who "watch and pray always" that they "may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." (Luke 21 : 36.) "In that night there shall be two in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left." (Luke 17 : 34, 36.) The idea is that the great body of the Church even, will be "left." And this assumption of the saints to immortality, which may occur any of these passing days or nights, and certainly is to be devoutly awaited as very near, is the first signal act by which the great period of the consummation is to be introduced.

But it will not, of itself, materially change the ordinary course of earthly things. The world will still stand, with all its wicked populations, and its apostate churches. Indeed, then only will commence the time when evil shall rush unhindered to its highest bloom of daring and blasphemy. That which hindered, being taken away, "then shall that wicked be revealed, . . . whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because

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they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." (2 Thess. 2: 7–10.)

What immediately follows the translation of the elect saints, has two aspects: one as it relates to things in heaven, the other as it relates to things on earth. What relates to heaven, we have had described to us in the sublime vision of the Throne, the Living ones, and the Elders. What relates to earth, is set forth under the opening of these seven seals.

The exact number of years covered by what is described under these seals, is not specifically given; unless, indeed, this should be the mystic seventieth week of Daniel, as generally supposed by the Fathers, and affirmed by many well-deserving modern interpreters. To the latter portion of this period, there *is* a specific duration assigned. A term of "forty and two months"—"a thousand two hundred and threescore days"—"a time, times, and half a time,"—that is, a period of *three years and a half*,—is several times mentioned; first, in reference to the treading down of the city by the Gentiles; second, in reference to the prophesying of the witnesses; third, in reference to the flight of the woman into the wilderness; and fourth, in reference to the beast's persecuting power. All these appear to be synchronous, and to fall very much, if not entirely, within the same period of time. And as the dominion of the beast ends with the battle of the great day, with which the action of the seals, trumpets, and vials sums up, we have only to date back from

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that consummation, to find at least three and a half years before the end, through which the opening of these seals is to run.

But it is quite manifest that this is not the entire period embraced. It is only under the seventh seal, and the sixth and seventh trumpets, that these three and a half years come in; showing that there must be a period preceding them, of not less than equal length for the foregoing six seals. And when we take into account how Daniel's seventieth week is divided, and that it is only the latter half of it that takes in those consummated impieties which mark the beast's reign, it is rendered almost certain, that three and a half years more are to be added before the last three and a half; thus making full *seven years* in all, as the space covered by these seals, and their included trumpets and vials.

Some have taken these numbers mystically, and so have made out a much longer period. But, I am persuaded, that no such elongation of these dates ever has had, or ever will have, an exact, or anything like a complete fulfilment. They are literal, not symbolic. And when we consider how intensely the number seven pervades this entire book, and connect its notes of time with those given in the book of Daniel, there appears to be sufficient reason to conclude, that just seven literal years are spanned by the transactions set forth under the opening of these seals; no less, and hardly any more.

An important feature of doctrine is thus brought

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out, well worthy of notice as we pass. It is this, that the day of judgment, like the day of the Lord, is not a day limited to twenty-four hours, as people often erroneously imagine. All the acts described under these seven seals, are acts of judgment. Every scene is a judgment scene. The throne is a judgment throne. The agencies are all messengers of judicial power. Their operations are all connected with judicial awards. The finished work presents Satan and his world-powers vanquished, the saints in resurrection glory on their thrones, and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ forever. There is another and final judgment scene, at the end of the thousand years; but all the elements of that, and more, are found in what is described under these seals, trumpets, and vials. Indeed, that is only the finishing up of what is here so vigorously begun. The one gives us the morning, and the other the evening, of the great day of judgment viewed as a whole. The judgment is not one simple act, but a series of varied administrations, which do not reach all alike, nor all at the same time. It begins at the house of God, before it at all touches the world, except in a mere symptomatic way. And when it comes upon the present world-powers, it takes in many diverse and successive acts, running through the course of years, and finally concludes a thousand years afterward, by the consignment of Satan and all his seed to "the

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lake of fire," which is "the second death." (Rev. 20 : 14, 15.)

We accordingly have in the events set out under the opening of these seals, the characteristics and leading facts of a grand transition period. A time of judgment is always a time of transition. It is the closing up of one order of things, and the opening of another. And this is eminently the nature of the transactions here described. They show us how the present world-powers, with their Satanic intermixtures, are to terminate, and the exact particulars by and through which another and better order is to be reached; one which is finally, by still another putting forth of judicial energy, to be resolved and settled into what shall be disturbed no more.

II. With these remarks touching the scope of these seals, we proceed to the particulars described.

The number of the seals is seven, indicative of the completeness of the administrations to which they refer. They are arranged in two distinct groups of four and three. It is the reverse of the order presented in the groupings of the seven Churches. There we had first three, and then four—perfection first and worldly deterioration afterwards. Here we have first four, and then three, intimating advance from worse to better, from earthiness to heavenliness.

The first four seals are mainly distinguished by

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the part which the four Living ones have in the proceedings, and the appearance of a horseman in connection with each. In all of them, the action goes out from heaven, and proceeds from the enthroned powers on high. The effect, however, is uniformly on earth, or on what relates to the earth. Some of the scenes are exceedingly disastrous and revolutionary. It would sometimes seem as if everything were falling into utter destruction. But, amid all the extraordinary and fearful shaking, upheaval, and commotion, in earth and sky, our planet still continues revolving in its place, and reappears from every scene, however terrible, neither depopulated of its generations, nor stripped of its proper investiture or elements. There is suffering, change, and an accumulation of awful and destructive prodigies; but there is no missing of our mundane orb, and no interruption to the succession of its seasons, or the continuity of the orders of being with which God has peopled it.

As soon as the first seal was broken, "one from among the four Living ones" *spoke.* Some have said that it was the lion; but it is not said which it was. Neither does it matter, as all four are equally concerned, and successively speak precisely the same thing.

It is, perhaps, worthy of note, that where the Living ones and Elders speak separately, there is this distinction between them: that when the subject concerns heaven, and matters of instruction, the Elders speak; and when it concerns

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earth, and the going forth of power, the Living ones speak.

The speaking in this case was as with "the voice of thunder." It is the tone of terror, majesty, and judgment, in keeping with the character of the throne, and the nature of the proceeding, which is that of judicial administration.

The cry itself is very brief—*Ἔρχου!* It may be equally rendered *Go*, or *Come!* Our translators give it about as often one way as the other. It does not alter the sense here whichever way we take it. It is not an address to John, as many have regarded it, and as the questionable addition to the text—"*and see*"—would seem to require. John was already on the spot, beholding all that was transpiring, and did not need to be called any nearer, or to remove any further off. And if his nearer approach or further departure had been needed in the case of the first horseman, it could not have been needed for the succeeding ones. But we find the same command repeated in each successive instance. Neither can we explain why it should be such a voice of thundering power, if it was simply a call to the seer. Critics agree that the words, "*and see*," should be omitted.

Nor is it a call addressed to Christ, as others have supposed. That the Saviour should come, or go forward with his grand redemptive administrations, may well be conceived to be the earnest desire of the Living ones in heaven, as it should be of the saints on earth, and as it is of the whole

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suffering creation. But the same cry is uttered in the case of the three succeeding horsemen, in neither of which is Christ the rider. The cry is also one of official command, rather than of supplication. The voice of thunder is not the voice of prayer. And, at the time of this cry, Christ is already present. The prayer for his coming is then not properly in place. The expression is really nothing more nor less than *a bid of power*, calling the several horsemen into action.

It is the teaching of Christ and his apostles, that "the saints shall judge the world"—"shall judge angels." (1 Cor. 6 : 2, 3.) They are to share in the administrations of power against the ungodly world, and against the hosts of the wicked one, both human and angelic. And here is where the fulfilment of that teaching, in part at least, comes in. These Living ones are glorified saints. They are connected with the throne of judgment. They express the mind, and enact the will of that throne. Much of its power toward the earth goes out through them. They are enactors of the judicial energy of Him who sits upon the throne. And it is in this capacity that they speak the word "*Go!*" And as they speak, so it is. As soon as it is uttered by them in heaven, it is already potent on earth. John hears the command above, and at once he sees it doing execution below.

What, then, does he see? Mere power is an abstract quality, and not a subject of sight. It must put on shape in order to be seen. Mere effects would not so well, so clearly, and in so

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summary a manner, display its character and movements. The significance of the command accordingly embodies itself in living forms. John beholds horses, with riders on them. They are not literal horsemen, but symbolic pictures, in which are shown the characteristics and doings of the invisible *Goers*, put into action through the Living ones. They are the powers of the Lion-Lamb, as the Almighty Lord and Judge of all, administered by glorified saints, exalted to participation in his sublime prerogatives. Judgment upon the world has commenced, and here are the symbols of its manifestation.

"*And I saw, and, behold, a white horse; and he that sat on him having a bow; and a crown was given to him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.*" It has been a common error, to regard this as a symbol of the success of a preached Gospel. The progress of the truth is indeed included, after the manner that I have explained; but history furnishes nothing which can be set down as *the* fulfilment of this prophetic picture. The Gospel, as now preached, is not, and in the present order of things never will be, triumphant. This is demonstrated in the seven Epistles, and is the common teaching of the Scriptures on the subject. A leading feature in its entire history is, that it is mostly rejected. It is universally preached "as a witness to all nations," but nations, as such, with all their patronage, have never received it, and have ever been the slayers of its witnesses. The description, again, is not one of progress merely,

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but of a primary sending forth. The Gospel, as now preached, was sent forth more than half a century before this vision. And the vision itself is prefaced with the statement, that it refers to what was to take place after the seven Churches, and hence after the time of the apostle. Neither is a victorious conqueror on a war-steed a fitting image of "the foolishness of preaching," or the work of beseeching men to be reconciled to God. A sower going forth to sow, or a peaceful ambassador, is the scriptural picture of the preacher. And it is quite out of the spirit and scope of the Apocalypse, to find here the patient and forbearing ministrations of grace, as we now have them. We must, therefore, look for some other meaning. Nor does it lie remote. We need not consult the Roman medals or Gibbon's pages, to find it. Scripture itself is always the best interpreter of Scripture, if we only let it tell its own story.

Who has not felt a check of awe upon his heart, when contemplating that magnificent description in the book of Job? "Hast thou given the horse strength? Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him afraid as a grass-hopper? The glory of his nostrils is terrible. He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength. He goeth on to meet the armed men. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that it is the sound of the

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trumpet. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains and the shouting." (Job 39: 19–25.) Put upon that animal now the rider of the text, crowned with sovereign power, and rushing forth to conquest unceasing; and say whether this is the sort of picture which represents a Gospel preacher, or the slow working of the message of grace among human hearts, the great mass of which, in every age, reject and despise it.

Zechariah says, "I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were red horses, speckled, and white. Then said I, O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will show thee what these be. And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom the Lord hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth." (Zech. 1: 8–11.) Were these the ministers of grace and evangelic overture? Were they not rather the powers of God's providence and government of the world? Hear further: "And I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass. In the first chariot were red horses; and in the second chariot black horses; and in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot grizzled and bay horses. Then I answered and said unto the angel that talked with me, What are these, my

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lord? And the angel answered and said unto me, These are the four Spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth." (Zech. 6:8.) And when Elisha prayed that his servant's eyes might be opened to behold the mighty powers of God, by which he protects his people, and inflicts judgment upon their enemies, what did he see? Let the sacred word itself tell us: "And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha," and the hosts of Syria were smitten, and hurled back whence they came. (2 Kings 6:15–18.)

Is it difficult then to divine, what horses signify in connection with the Divine government and administrations? Is not the whole idea that of swift and irresistible power? What then are we to see in these horsemen, but earthly images of the swift, invisible, resistless power of God, going forth upon the proud, guilty, and unbelieving world? So far as the preaching of the Gospel is a potent war-power, and an agent of judicial visitation upon the wicked, so far it is included in this symbol of the white horse and his crowned and conquering rider, but no further. Roman Emperors are here quite out of the question.

There is something special, which I have not seen satisfactorily explained, touching the nature of the work accomplished by this first horseman. It is not war and bloodshed between man and man; for that is the work of the rider of the red

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horse. It is not famine and scarcity; for that is the work of the rider on the black horse. Neither is it pestilence and mortality; for that is the work of the rider on the pale or livid horse. What then is the character of the demonstration by which this crowned rider of the white horse pushes forward the conquest for the heavenly dominion? That it involves a demonstration of judgment, is an idea which we dare by no means let go. This is rooted in the whole spirit of the scene, and required by the tenor of the transactions along with which this horseman appears. What then was the specific form of judgment unto victory which is here adumbrated? It is a most interesting and important inquiry, and one which dare not be passed over without some adequate explanation.

Several peculiarities in the description may help us toward the true meaning. Of the four horsemen, only this one has "a crown." His conquests, therefore, are specifically conquests of the crown—achievements augmentative of heavenly dominion. The color of the horse is "white"—the color of righteousness, triumph, peace. The picture must then somehow link itself with something righteous and good, though associated with a judicial proceeding. The rider of this horse has "a bow." This is an instrument of war; but as no literal slaughter connects with this horseman, it cannot refer to the destruction of life, but to a moral effect. Similar imagery is used to denote conquest resulting in salvation. Habakkuk says,

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"Thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation. *Thy bow was made quite naked, even thy word.*" (Chap. 3:8, 9.) The disclosure and demonstration of the truth by judicial visitations of power, and its triumphant subjugation of those who would not yield to it until thus judicially "made quite naked," would be a legitimate and fitting conception to be associated with this part of the picture. The language employed concerning the career of this horseman, is also suggestive. He goes forth "conquering, and to conquer." There is an idea of continuity in the expression. It describes an ongoing of the work. It is not a past, or mere present success, but a continuous one, resulting, along with what else comes upon the scene, in complete and sovereign dominion.

Is there, then, anything in the declarations of Holy Scripture, or justly inferable from them, touching the period of the judgment, which conforms at all to these intimations? There is; and it is strange that futurist interpreters have not been more impressed with it. "*When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*" (Is. 26:9.) "God shall shoot at them [that encourage themselves in an evil speech] with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded. And men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of his doing." (Ps. 64:7–9.) "*Thy people shall be willing,*" themselves presenting themselves as living sacrifices, "*in the day of thy power.*" (Ps.

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110 : 3.) These are all Messianic prophecies. They can be clearly identified as referring to the period of judgment. And they each affirm a mighty moral subjugation to the Lord, as the result of judicial administrations. Daniel also affirms of "the time of the end," that "many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly, and none of the wicked shall understand." (Dan. 12 : 8–10.) And after the unwatchful and evil servant shall have been surprised by the presence of his lord whom he thought still far away, and after he has been judicially cut off from partaking of the high privileges and rewards of the "faithful and wise servant," THEN the kingdom of heaven shall assume the character of ten virgins going forth with uniform zeal and activity to meet the Bridegroom. (Matt. 24 : 42 –25 : 1.) To locate the state of things represented in this parable, except where the Saviour himself puts it, namely, after the manifest and decisive judgment of the Church has commenced, is to miss more than half its significance. And that it shows a state of conviction, zeal, and general earnestness and anxiety touching the movements of the returning Christ, altogether different and more uniform than was ever witnessed before, no attentive observer can fail to note. It therefore proves to us, that the opening scenes of the judgment include revolutions in the religious views and feelings of men, subduing them into submission to the word and sovereignty of God in unexampled generality and power. To the

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same effect is the prophecy of Joel, where he connects the great outpouring of the Spirit of God, with the incoming of "the great and terrible day of the Lord." (Joel 2:28–32.) Paul also refers to the period of the future forthcoming of the Deliverer, as a period of the turning away of unrighteousness, and of favorable change in the convictions and moral condition of multitudes, so marked and vast as to be like "*life from the dead.*" (Rom. 11:15–26.)*

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* "Prophecies foretell that even during an era of great judgments—in one of the very crises of the world's tribulations—the evangelization and salvation of mankind, so far from being arrested, shall proceed and triumph. 'For when thy judgments are in the earth,' saith the prophet Isaiah, 'then the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness;'—thy heaviest inflictions will subserve thy purposes of mercy in the salvation of mankind."—*The Great Commission*, by J. Harris, D.D., p. 131.

And whence indeed are we to derive that "multitude which no man could number," described in chapter 7:9–17, if not in part at least from among the living population of the earth after the crowned elders and the living ones have been taken? They are specifically described as persons who "come out of the great tribulation." And as they are said to have "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," —remedied the deficiency which kept them out of the first translation,—it is legitimate and reasonable to refer this wonderful cleansing to a new impulse which the incoming of that tribulation imparted to the minds and hearts of people who had been so unsanctified in their surroundings before. Bickersteth has properly said, "The return of our Lord Jesus Christ will be accompanied by unprecedented effusions of the Divine Spirit, and this with such enlarged knowledge, that judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness in the fruitful field." The wicked will persevere in their perverseness, but

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We are therefore authorized to expect, that when the great transactions of the coming judgment begin, and the Lord lays bare the literal truthfulness of his word by the marvellous demonstrations then to be made, there will be a conquering of the hearts of men to the sovereignty of Heaven, such as has never been.

Nay, if there be any truth in the doctrine of successive translations of the saints,—a doctrine so necessary to a consistent and satisfactory construction of a great variety of passages,—it is plainly to be foreseen, that great and mighty changes for the better must ensue, wherever there is any moral susceptibility left. The simultaneous disappearance from the churches of so many watching and praying ones, the demonstration thus given of the reality of all these things, and the certain excision of all the rest from the first honors of the kingdom, must needs have an effect upon those that are "left," which none but the hopelessly hardened can fail to feel in their deepest souls. Their eyes will open then, as they never were opened before. Quite naked to them then, will have become God's bow, even his Word. Gone then, will be all their spiritualizing and rationalizing with which they so long and sadly deluded themselves. At one stroke the whole Bible will have become to them a new book, and

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understanding shall come to multitudes who would not be instructed till enlightened by the Spirit of judgment, which for ever cuts them off from the first dignities of the kingdom.

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prophecy an unmistakable reality. And to all shall be added the certainty, not only that they have forever missed the high honors which once were within their reach, but that a few brief years of terror and tribulation, furnish their last hope and chance of being saved at all. How then can it be otherwise, but that there will be a breaking down of hearts in penitence, and a stirring up of souls to religious activity, and an earnestness of seeking unto the Lord ere his eternal judgments go over them, such as has never been in all the periods of time!

And this is the sort of conquest and triumph which is set forth by the white horse, and his crowned rider, going forth conquering, and to conquer. It is the bloodless conquest of men to God, by the potencies of a present judgment. It is the first great effective symptom that the earth and its inhabitants are about to become our God's and his Christ's. It is a conquest of Judgment. It is the result of the laying bare of God's word and power by a judicial wound, cutting off from the exalted blessedness to which the Gospel now calls. It is the fruit of a proceeding, not in the line of humble entreaty, but in the line of penal infliction, driving home with resistless demonstration the awakening truth, that the first honors are clean gone, and that stern necessity has come for speedy and thorough work ere the last chariot of salvation shall have gone by forever. It is the knock of Christ at the door of the Church of the lukewarm Laodiceans—the sharp knock of terri-

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fying judgment—in which he makes his last proposal to them, even of so much as to share of his supper.

Let us then learn the truth, and profit by it while we may, that this easy halfway Christianity will not avail. God requires something decisive, earnest, and hearty;—a religion which truly renounces the devil and all his works, the vanities of the world, and the sinful desires of the flesh;—a devotion which puts upon us a difference from the world, and marks us in heart and life as citizens of a heavenly country, only sojourning here;—a sanctification of our earthly investments, as well as an inward looking to Christ to save us. After such a religion let us seek, and such a faith let us endeavor to exemplify; denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

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LECTURE TWELFTH.

JUDGMENT OF THE QUICK AND OF THE DEAD — FALSE NOTIONS CORRECTED—THE SEVERAL SEALS PARTIALLY CONTEMPORANEOUS—OPENING OF THE SECOND SEAL — BRINGS WARS AND BLOODY STRIFES—THIRD SEAL—BRINGS SCARCITY AND FAMINE—FOURTH SEAL—BRINGS GOD'S FOUR SORE JUDGMENTS—THE WAY TO ESCAPE THESE DREADFUL CALAMITIES—THE FAITHFUL SERVANTS OF GOD EVER SAFE.

REV. 6 : 3–8. (Revised Text.) And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living one saying, Go! And there went forth another, a red horse; and to him that sat on him—to him was given to take away peace out of the earth, and that [men] shall slay one another: and there was given to him a great sword.

And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living one saying, Go! And I saw and behold a black horse, and he that sat on him having a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard as if a voice in the midst of the four living ones, saying, A measure [chœnix] of wheat for a penny [denarius], and three measures [chœnixes] of barley for a penny [denarius]; and the oil and the wine injure thou not.

And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard [the] voice of the fourth living one saying, Go! And I saw, and behold a pale-green horse, and he that sat on him [was] named Death, and Hades was following with him, and there was given to them power over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with famine, and with pestilence, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

IT must be borne in mind, in dealing with these seal-openings, that we are dealing with the scenes of the judgment. They relate to "the day of the Lord." Anticipatory fulfilments have occurred, but the proper breaking of these seals,

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and whatever is connected with their opening, belongs to the future, and to that momentous period, now at hand, which is to close up the entire order of things now existing. The whole scene presents the action of the judgment-throne in heaven, toward those then living upon the earth.

There is an important distinction, noted in the Scriptures, and in all the creeds, between the judgment of "*the quick*" and the judgment of "*the dead.*" The common idea is, that all men, those that have died, and those who are found living at the time, shall be judged alike, and in one and the same great congregation. It is conceived that the dead will all be simultaneously resurrected, and all the living simultaneously changed, and that only then the judgment will sit for the adjudication of the eternal destiny of each. Painters and poets have outdone themselves in their efforts to portray the overwhelming majesty and terror of so grand and universal an assize. But it is not according to the plain letter of the Scriptures, or of the creed of the Church. If the day of judgment is ever to come, it must find people living upon the earth, who are described as "the quick." They must, therefore, either be judged in the flesh, while still living in their natural life, or they must meet with some miraculous transformation equivalent to the resurrection, by which they lose the distinctive character of "quick." Such a change before the judgment, has also been accepted and affirmed concerning all who shall be living when

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the day of judgment comes. Thus, Bellarmin teaches, that the breaking in of that day will instantaneously end the natural life of all the living; that they will all be suddenly struck dead, and by the same stroke transformed into precisely the same state in which the resurrected shall be; and that then all distinction between "*quick* and *dead*" will have entirely and forever disappeared. And, if we take the doctrine of the simultaneous judgment of all men, we are necessitated to accept some such explanation. But then what becomes of the judgment of "*the quick*," as distinguished from the judgment of "*the dead?*" There is, in that case, no such judgment. All natural life in the flesh being ended and overpast before any judicial awards are made, the judgment becomes only a judgment of the dead, or rather of immortals; for there are no subjects of it except those who have ceased from the natural life, and passed into the post-resurrection state. The distinction made by the Scriptures and the creeds, between the judgment of "the quick" and the judgment of "the dead," is thus turned into a distinction without a difference—a mere matter of words, signifying nothing in particular. But the phraseology of Jesus and his inspired apostles, so uniformly employed wherever the subject is touched, is not thus to be slurred over, and stripped of its proper and natural signification. If words have any meaning, "quick" does not mean "dead," and "dead" does not mean "quick;" and the judgment of the one cannot, therefore, be the

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judgment of the other. Two distinct classes are unmistakably intended, not only as to that state in which the day of judgment finds them, but also as to that state in which the day of judgment deals with them. If the natural life of "the quick" ends before they are judged, then theirs is not a judgment of the quick any more than of the dead, and one part of the sacred description utterly falls away. We must, therefore, allow a judgment which respects men still living their natural life in the flesh, the awards of which they receive, and have visited upon them in their distinctive character as "quick."

And even as respects the judgment of "the dead," there lurks in the popular idea a mischievous and confusing error. People take the resurrection as a mere preliminary of the judgment, and view the judgment itself as something distinct from the resurrection, and coming after it. The language of the last trump they conceive to be: "Awake, ye dead, and come to judgment." They consider that the dead are to be awakened for the purpose of being judged. It is also true, that not *all* the awards of the judgment are made or go into effect till after the resurrection; but the resurrection is itself a part of the judgment. The resurrection of the wicked is certainly something different from the resurrection of the saints. It is different both in character and in time. The one is a resurrection "in glory," and the other is a resurrection of "shame and everlasting contempt." The one is "adop-

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tion, the redemption of the body," and the other is "the resurrection of condemnation." The one is a "change of our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body," and the other is a mere reversal of the state of death, with all the corrupt fruits of the sowing to the flesh still clinging to him who is the subject of it. (Gal. 6 : 7, 8.) The one is the peculiar privilege of the elect, of those who are Christ's, who rise at Christ's coming, and live and reign with him the thousand years; the other is subsequent—εἶτα—*afterwards*,—and embraces "the rest of the dead" who live not again until the thousand years are finished. (1 Cor. 15 : 23, 24; Rev. 20 : 4, 5.) These distinctions are very plainly drawn, and embrace the very highest things of our faith. Nothing that comes after the realization of them can add anything not already substantially included. The estate and destiny on both sides is thus effectually and irreversibly settled in advance. We accordingly would have the anomaly of the chief work and result of the judgment accomplished and concluded, before the judgment itself sits! The truth is, that the resurrection, and the changes which pass "in the twinkling of an eye" upon the living, are themselves the fruits and embodiments of antecedent judgment. They are the consequences of adjudications then already made. Strictly speaking, men are neither raised nor translated, in order to come to judgment. Resurrections and translations are products of judgment previously passed, upon the dead as dead, and

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upon the quick as quick. "The dead in Christ shall rise first," because they are already adjudged to be in Christ; and the living saints are caught up together with them to the clouds, because they are already adjudged to be saints, and worthy to attain that world. And the rest of the dead live not again until the thousand years are finished, and the rest of "the quick" are "left," by virtue of judicial decisions already had, and of which these things are the results. Whatever, in the line of increased blessedness or enhanced damnation, may come after, is only the further carrying into effect of what was already predecided, before there could be either resurrection or translation. And what so irreversibly fixes the estates of the persons concerned, must necessarily, in the very nature of things, be their judgment. The judgment is not a sham formality, or a solemn farce; it is something real; and the substance of it is the award to every man according to his works. And when we see these awards in potent effect in the very life which the dead live again, it is absurd to be thinking of the judgment as only a grand assize to which resurrection and cessation of natural life are only preliminary. And if the true judgment thus precedes, or is already embodied in, the resurrection and translation, it must necessarily take hold of the dead as dead, and the living as living. The language which the Scriptures and the creeds so carefully preserve, is thus found to possess a literal accuracy and depth too generally overlooked. We

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profess to believe that Christ "shall come to judge the quick and the dead." He does not come first to raise "the dead," and then to judge them, but he judges them as dead, that they may rise in their appointed lot, and share the resurrection of the just. He does not first come to change "the quick" in order to judge them; but to judge and discriminate between them while yet living, in order that those accounted worthy may be "changed," and caught up together with the resurrected ones, and that those adjudged unworthy of so high a portion may be cut off from it, and made to suffer still other inflictions in this world. And it is to these judicial dealings with people "left," and living in the flesh, that the action under these horses refers.

I have shown that horses, in prophetic vision, are images of God's swift, invisible, resistless power for the defence of his people, especially in its going forth upon the proud, guilty, and unbelieving world. It was so in the case of those seen by Elisha's servant, and in the case of those mentioned by Zechariah.

In these four different horses and horsemen, we are to see four different forms of the coming forth of the judicial power of God upon the inhabitants of the earth, looking to the breaking up of the dominion of wickedness, the punishment and casting out of transgression, and the consummation of that long-pending revolution whose accomplishment is at once the fulfilment of all prophecy and all prayer.

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We are not to suppose, however, that the action of one ceases entirely, before the other comes into play. They are consecutive in their incoming, in the main stress of them, and in some of their more marked circumstances, but they are all, in a measure, contemporaneous. The action of the first horseman certainly is continuous; for he goes forth in conquest unto conquest, which terminates only in the complete victory in which the opening of the seals ends. His career, therefore, runs on through that of his three successors, and through all the remaining seals. No such intense continuity is expressed with reference to the action of the other horsemen; and the nature of their work is such as not likely to extend itself so far. But there is an inner and natural relationship between the things adumbrated, which renders it quite evident that their several careers overlap each other, and that the doings of the one run side by side with the doings of the other.

We have seen that the white horse, and his crowned rider, and bloodless conquests, indicate mighty moral victories for the heavenly Kingdom, wrought by the spirit of judgment. When God's judgments are in the earth, then will the inhabitants thereof learn righteousness. People shall be made willing in the day of His power.

But John beheld a second horse, called into action in like manner as the first,—"a red horse; and to him that sat on him, was given to take away peace out of the earth, and that [men] shall

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slay one another: and there was given to him a great sword."

The color of this horse is *red—fiery—the hue of blood.* This itself is indicative of vengeance and slaughter. The great dragon is "red," and he is "a murderer from the beginning." The mighty Hero of Salvation, travailing in the greatness of his strength, and crushing his enemies beneath his feet, is "red" in his apparel, emblematic of his work of violent destruction. Nor can we be mistaken in regarding this horse and his rider as significant of bloody times. His work is specifically described to be the taking of peace out of the earth. A great and terrible weapon is also put into his hand; not the ordinary sword of war (*ρομφαία*), but (*μαχαιρα μεγαλη*) a great sword of one having the power of life and death. And the result of his presence is war, much taking of life by public executions, and mutual killing among men.

The picture is particularly terrific. It presents not only disturbance of the relation of nations, the rising of nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; but internecine collisions, civil wars, the murderous hate of one portion of citizens exercised against another portion, and bloody commotions all over the face of society, having no issue but wretchedness and depopulation. It is the rampage of human passion raging to all forms of bloodshed, and the authorities of state in vain drawing the sword to put it down.

A small specimen of this state of things was

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enacted in the days of Asa, when Israel had been "a long season without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law;" in which times "there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries. And nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city; for God did vex them with all adversity." (2 Chron. 15: 3, 5.)

Another small specimen of the same was realized in those times of which Josephus writes, when "the disorders in all Syria were terrible, and every city was divided into two armies, encamped one against another, and the preservation of the one party was the destruction of the other: so the daytime was spent in the shedding of blood, and the night in fear." And again, when, as he writes, "There were besides disorders and civil wars in every city: and all those that were quiet from the Romans turned their hands one against another. There was also a bitter contest between those that were fond of war, and those that were desirous of peace. At first, this quarrelsome temper caught hold of private families, who could not agree among themselves: after which, those people that were the dearest to one another, broke through all restraints with regard to each other, and every one associated with those of his own opinion, and begun already to stand in opposition to one another, so that seditions arose everywhere, while those that were for innovations, and were desirous of war, by their youth

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and boldness, were too hard for the aged and the prudent; and in the first place, all the people of every place betook themselves to rapine: after which they got together in bodies, in order to rob the people of the country, insomuch that for barbarity and iniquity, those of the same nation did no way differ from the Romans; nay, it seemed a much lighter thing to be ruined by the Romans than by themselves."

Fancy a world which has no peace in it—no concord but that of lawless and selfish passion—no regard for life when it stands in the way of covetousness or ambition—no amity between its nationalities, or internal harmony and toleration between citizens of the same city or state—but every man's sword is against his fellow, and every one's hand rises up against the hand of his neighbor, and international slaughter, civil butchery, and private revenge and murder are the order of the day,—and you have what the earth will be under the judgment power of this red horse and his rider. Of old, already, Jehovah threatened to bring a sword to avenge the quarrel of the covenant; and to "call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth." (Jer. 25: 29.) And in this horseman, with his great sword taking peace from the earth, and desolating the world with violence and bloodshed, we have the final fulfilment of that threat. Nor need any one be at a loss to see how everything is already tending to just such a condition of society and the world.

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But the breaking of the third seal starts another horse—"a black horse"—at whose appearance the seer is moved to exclamation: "*And I saw, and, behold, a black horse, and he that sat on him having a pair of balances in his hand.*"

More feeling is expressed at the appearance of this power, because a more general and unmanageable plague is the subject of contemplation. Long ago did Jeremiah say: "They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger; for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field." (Lam. 4:9.) *Black* is the color of dearth and famine. When Jeremiah contemplated Judah and his gates "*black* unto the ground," it was a picture "concerning the dearth." (Jer. 14:1, 2.) The same prophet says: "Our skin was *black* like an oven, because of the terrible *famine*." (Lam. 5:10.) It is the hue of mourning; and the rest of the description identifies it as mourning by reason of scarcity.

The rider of this black horse carries a pair of balances in his hand. There is close and careful weighing: and the things weighed are the common articles of food. John also "heard as if a voice in the midst of the four Living ones, saying: A chœnix of wheat for a denarius, and three chœnixes of barley for a denarius." When things are plentiful, exact weight or measure is not regarded. The Spirit, as given to Christ, was given without measure. So, also, in Joseph's gathering of corn, and in David's gathering of copper for

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the temple. And when corn is abundant, it is sold by gross measure, and no attention is paid to a few hundred grains, one way or the other. But when it becomes high in price and scarce, then it is strictly weighed, and every ounce is taken into account. And, in numerous places in Scripture, the weighing out of the bread to be eaten, is given as one of the marks of great scarcity and want. (Lev. 26:20; Ez. 4:10, 16.)

But the picture is further shown to be one of scarcity, by the prices of provisions which John heard declared. People do not generally suppose that God has much to do with price-lists. They go up and down, and millions higgle over them every day, but no one thinks of anything Divine connected with them. But whether men realize it or not, price-lists are made in heaven. John hears the rates of corn and bread announced by the same heavenly powers by which these mystic horses are called into action. Whatever the weather, the crops, the quantities of money in the country, the extent of speculation in the market, or other subordinate causes may have to do with it, the prime and all-controlling cause is the decree of the throne. It is God from whom we have our daily bread, and it is by His will that it is plentiful and cheap, or scarce and costly.

The prices here given, are judgment prices, indicative of extreme scarcity and distress. A *chœnix* is about a pint and a half of our measure, and is the ordinary allowance of wheat to a man for one day's scanty subsistence. A *denarius* was

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the ordinary wages for a full day's labor. And when a chœnix of wheat costs a denarius, it is as much as a man can do to earn the bread he himself consumes, leaving nothing for his family or for his other wants.

But even at these ruinous rates, there is not wheat enough. People have to betake themselves to barley—the food of horses and beasts of burden. Yet the barley is as difficult of procurement as the wheat. In ordinary times, a denarius would buy twenty-four chœnixes of barley; but here a denarius will buy but *three*—the scanty allowance for a day's subsistence for a slave. The arrival of things at such a pass, accordingly argues a severity of hard times, distress, and want, almost beyond the power of imagination to depict. Yet, it is but the natural result of the state of things under the red horse. The two are closely connected as cause and effect. Take away peace from the earth, and inaugurate universal wars, civil strifes, and bloody feuds, and terrible scarcity of the means of subsistence must follow.

One mitigation attends this fearful judgment. The command to the invisible messenger is, "The oil and the wine injure thou not." These would naturally be less affected by the diversion of the population from their proper business to their bloody work, than those crops which depend more upon human efforts. Olive trees and vines, when once established, will grow and produce year after year without much attention; but not wheat and barley. Yet these also depend upon God,

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and grow and produce only by his command. And it is by his special order that their fruitfulness is preserved in the midst of this reigning scarcity of other things. And it is a matter of grace, that the minister of vengeance is so far restrained.

But the very reservation also reflects the intensity of the famine as respects the ordinary means of subsistence. It carries with it the intimation that, but for the preservation of the oil and wine, it would be impossible for men to find sufficient food on which to keep themselves alive. Nay, though a thing of mercy as regards men's lives, it also bears with it a moral aggravation of the affliction. It is everywhere set forth as one of the characteristics of the last times, that people shall be given to luxurious habits, and inordinate appetency for superfluities of diet. "Eating and drinking," and every extreme of carnal indulgence, is then to mark their modes of life. The staple food of mankind is despised, and every expensive luxury is impatiently pursued. Hence, God shuts them in to their luxuries, partly in mitigation of judgment, but at the same time also in aggravation of it. Just as Israel, lusting after flesh, and no longer satisfied with the bread Jehovah provided, was compelled to live on flesh until it became almost impossible for the people to swallow it (Numbers 11:19, 20); so God in judgment takes away what men despise, and forces them to live on luxuries made loathsome because there is nothing else, that they may learn

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the folly of their wisdom, and taste the fearfulness of their guilty hallucination.

But while all this is being experienced, a fourth seal is broken, and out comes another horse, and horseman, still more terrible. This is the last, and the climax of this particular series of terrific images. The first horse is pure white, mighty, but bloodless in his career; the second is fiery red, blood-colored, and revengeful; the third is black, mournful, gloom-shaded; and when we would think everything dreadful in color exhausted, another breaks upon the view, more terrible than any that have gone before. A pale, death-green, and cadaverous horse appears. *Χλωρος*, translated *pale*, denotes a leprous color. (Lev. 13:49; 14:37.) It properly means *green*, and is several times so translated in the Apocalypse and elsewhere. (Rev. 8:7; 9:4; Mark 6:39.) There are instances of its use in the classics to denote the wan and deathly expression of the face when overwhelmed with fright or faintness. When applied as here, it can only mean a greenish ghastliness, something like the color of a corpse or putrefying flesh. It describes this last horse as unspeakably more horrible than either of the others.

But his rider and attendants intensify the awfulness of the picture. That rider is *Death*, and *Hades* follows with him. There is also given to them power over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with famine, and with pestilence, and by means of the wild beasts of the

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earth. The preceding pictures continue, and repeat themselves in this, but with increased intensity and still other additions. The rider of the red horse is War, destroying peace and exciting all manner of strife and bloodshed. The rider of the black horse is Famine, taking away the staff of bread and oppressing the world with terrible scarcity. And the rider of this ghastly-colored horse carries on the work of his predecessors to still more horrible excesses, and matures their fruits in death-plague and depredations of the animal tribes. The several forms of affliction advance from the lesser to the greater, and one naturally grows out of the other. General war and bloody strife becomes the occasion of famine; and famine brings pestilence; and their combined depopulation of the earth encourages the increase and ferocious instincts of wild beasts, and the multiplication of noxious creatures. God does not work miracles where none are needed; and evils are all so closely related, that it is only necessary to start one, to bring down the whole train. A state of general war and bloody civil strife is terrible enough, but when to it is added scarcity, black hunger, desolating pestilence, and the ravages of depredacious animals—when, as in this instance, Death takes the reins, and the living world is overrun by the legions of the dead —then comes "the great and terrible day of the Lord."

Death is not a being, but the fruit of a power, which operates through many different agencies.

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It is here personified and represented under the picture of some mighty Cæsar, mounted, and riding forth in fearful triumph.

Hades is not a being; it is the grave—the dark region of the dead—the realm which remorselessly swallows up all the living. It is here personified under the image of some great voracious monster, stalking after the rider on the ghastly horse, indicating that whither this horseman comes, Hades comes, and the world of the dead takes the place of the world of the living.

The means by which these awful desolations are wrought, are God's "four sore judgments,—the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence to cut off man and beast." (Ezek. 14:21.) These are the most dreadful plagues with which God usually chastises men. They are not reserved exclusively for the last periods of time. We can trace them under Roman emperors, but also before there were Roman emperors, and since Roman emperors have ceased to be. But the height and fulness of them falls within the period to which these seals relate.

The true sample, as it was in some sort the beginning of the tribulation set forth under these horses, was given in what befell the Jews in the last period of their state. War was there in all its fearfulness. Commotion and strife distracted and distressed the whole land. Wholesale butchery was the order of the day. Whole cities were turned into mere graves, full of dead. Millions

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of men, women, children, fell by the sword, famine, exposure, fright, and other forms of death. Shut in at last to their holy city by the tight cordon of Rome's legions, the soul sickens over the recitals of the sufferings, oppressions, cruelties, and living death which settled down upon the doomed people. Perishing by houses and families every day, the dead became too numerous for the living to bury; and the wretchedness was so great that men, and even mothers, forgot their sympathies. Affection died; all regard for the rights of one another died; and the glorious city of David and Solomon was turned into a tomb under the prancings of the ghastly horse, whose rider is Death, whose attendant is Hell, and who is yet to dash through the world and trample it in like manner under his dreadful hoofs.

We are not to infer, however, that there is to be an utter extirpation and extinction of the race of mankind under these visitations. Only "the fourth part of the earth" is put under this fourth horseman's sway. There are also other seals to be broken, and other judgment scenes to be enacted, of which men in the flesh, nations and earthly confederations are largely the subjects. We have thus far only the first acts in the terrible drama. We have been contemplating merely the beginning of sorrows, which multiply and grow in fearfulness till the last seal is broken, the last trumpet sounded, and the last bowl of wrath emptied. Other and worse impieties are to come, and still more awful displays of Almighty

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vengeance upon the enactors of them. The greatest masterpiece of hell yet awaits full development, and the greatest thunders of God's judgment remain for its wreck, and the final ruin of its unsanctified abettors.

I know not, my friends, what degree of credit or thought you may give to these things; but, as Paul told the assembly on Mars Hill, so I tell you, that "God hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world [*the living world of mankind*] in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." (Acts 17 : 31.) You may shrink back and exclaim as Balaam did: "Alas, who shall live when God doeth this!" Like Balaam you may also turn away from it to pursue the wages of unrighteousness. But, I beseech you to beware, lest you procure for yourselves a Balaam's end. The picture may be dark, and awful beyond what you are willing to contemplate; but it must be filled out in the real world some day, as certainly as God's word is true.

Neither has it been so graphically sketched without a purpose. The Almighty intends that we should look at it, that we should be premonished by the contemplation of it, and that it should have effect upon our hearts and lives. He would have us see and know to what this vain, proud, and guilty world is coming, that we may separate ourselves from it, and secure a better portion. And with all the universal agony in

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which its presumptuous dominion shall expire, there is this to be added by way of comfort, that there is no necessity that any of us should ever feel it. A way of escape exists. As there was an ark for Noah when the world was drowned, and a Pella for the saints when Jerusalem sunk under God's resentment for the murder of His Son, so there is a place of safety provided for us, where we may view these horsemen, as unharmed by their fearful doings, as was the apostolic seer himself. It was of this the Psalmist sung, when he said: "In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me." (Ps. 27 : 5.)

Nor is the grave this hiding-place. Should these scenes begin to-night, the refuge is as available and as availing as if they should tarry yet a thousand years. God's pavilion is above the clouds, not under the ground. Not hades, but heaven, is the true centre of the aspirations of the saints. And as Isaiah beheld these desolating judgments about to sweep the earth, he heard a voice of sweetness going before them, saying: "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." (Is. 26 : 20.) That voice comes from heaven. It is none other than the loving Saviour's voice. It is a voice addressed to his true people. It is a voice which calls them to where he is. Hence the same prophet adds: "They that wait for the Lord shall renew their

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strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles." (Is. 40 : 31). Hence the apostle still more plainly declares: "We which are alive and remain shall be caught up . . . in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4 : 17.) Hence also that admiring song of David: "Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men! Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." (Is. 31 : 19, 20.) And the direction of the apostle is, that we "comfort one another with these words." (1 Thess. 4 : 18.)

The only question is, as to how we stand in relation to the Lamb who breaks these seals. Do we accept and rely on him as our hope and salvation? Are we trusting to his meritorious sacrifice as the satisfaction for our guilt, and to his victorious exaltation to the right hand of the Father, as compassing everything needful to make us forever safe? Have we truly taken him as our Lord, confessed ourselves to his Gospel, and given our hearts and our all to his service? Are we making it the great business of our lives to "watch and pray always," and to keep ourselves in fellowship with him, patiently waiting upon him as our all-sufficient portion? Oh, blessed, blessed, is that servant who, when his Lord cometh, shall be found so doing! He is safe. His

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judgment is passed. No dregs of wrath remain for him to drink. Christ will not leave him to suffer with hypocrites and unbelievers. And while these storms of woe are desolating the earth, he shall be rejoicing in a heavenly crown. Yea, and I would be recreant to my commission as a minister of Christ, if I did not declare the Master's readiness this hour to receive and seal every one of you against all dangers of the great day of wrath. Indeed, these pictures of coming woe have been given to awaken us from our false security, to quicken us in the search for the refuge set before us, and to bring us to unreserved consecration to the Lord our Redeemer. Only fall in with his offers, and "salvation will God appoint for walls and for bulwarks." (Is. 26 : 1.) Cleave unto him, and to his unfailing promises, and "ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the mighty one of Israel." (Is. 33 : 29.) Rest in Jesus, and do his commandments, and the place which he has gone to prepare is yours; and before his wrath breaks forth upon the guilty world, he will come again, and receive you to himself, that where he is, there you may be also. (John 14 : 1–3.)

You have read in the Scriptures of the superior favors of "the wise," in relation to the day of judgment. The wise virgins went in with the Bridegroom when the door was shut against their foolish companions. Solomon wrote: "The wise

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shall inherit glory." But an essential part of that blessed wisdom is, to "observe these things" —to understand this, to consider what the end shall be. "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself." To close our eyes and ears against these foreshowings of God, or to delay earnest and energetic effort in view of their speedy fulfilment, is not wisdom. There must be the wakeful, observant, far-seeing eagle eye, if there is to be a timely and triumphant eagle flight And if we would "escape all these things that shall come to pass," and find a place of safety in the presence of the Son of man, we must learn to realize that the day of these fearful visitations is approaching, and that we have no time to lose, and no opportunities to be neglected. "The voice of free grace cries escape to the mountain;" but it is a voice which we have occasion to heed with solemn care and prompt obedience. "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which, at the first, began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs, and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" (Heb. 2:2-4.)

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LECTURE THIRTEENTH.

THE CHARACTER OF THE FIFTH SEAL — INDICATES BLOODY PERSECUTION—THE TESTIMONY FOR WHICH MEN SHALL BE SLAIN IN THE PERIOD OF THIS SEAL—DISEMBODIED SOULS — THEIR LIVING CONSCIOUSNESS — THEIR PLACE BENEATH THE ALTAR — THEIR CRY TO CHRIST — THE ANSWER THEY RECEIVE — COMMENTS ON THEIR CASE TOUCHING THE CONSUMMATION.

REV. 6 : 9–11. (Revised Text.) And when he opened the fifth seal I saw beneath the altar the souls of those that had been slain on account of the word of God, and on account of the testimony which they held fast: and they cried with a great voice, saying: Until when, thou Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood from them that dwell on the earth? And there was given to each of them a white robe, and it was said to them that they should rest yet a little time, until their fellow-servants also, and their brethren, shall have been completed, who are about to be slain as also they themselves [had been].

IT is hardly worth while to occupy attention with the diverse and contradictory interpretations that have been given of this seal. Though all are more or less intermingled with some truth, the principles upon which the Apocalypse is to be construed, and which have been followed in this exposition, lead us, with directness and certainty, to conclusions which brush away, as only so much rubbish, the most that has been written on the subject.

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Professor Stuart takes this fifth seal as a mere artistic prelude to certain very simple results. He refers to Nelson's address to his squadrons, on the eve of the engagement which yielded England her greatest naval victory, as an illustration, in real life, of what he supposes John to be attempting in poetic fancy, as a preparation for the victorious conclusion; only that the hosts here are imaginary, and their inspiration, by the cry of the slaughtered saints, merely a lively poetic conception.

But if the array is mere poetry, we would naturally suppose that the vengeance and the victory are ideal also; and so the whole Apocalypse is turned into artistic fiction; which is about all it is in the hands of this writer. With him it is a book everywhere full of wondrously grand beginnings, exordiums, and proemial marshallings of poetic images; but when he reduces the results to literal and solid prose, what crowds John's twenty-two eventful *chapters*, might be more clearly stated in twenty-two well-written *lines*. The least to be said of such exposition is, the less of it the better.

According to an older commentator, "the scope of this seal is not prophetically to point out new events, and to relate to a particular time." But this is exactly the opposite of the truth. If the text means anything, "new events" are just what it is intended prophetically to point out, and "a particular time" is precisely that to which it does relate. As certainly as the Apocalypse is the book of the consummation of God's providence

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with this present world, and as certainly as the action under these seven seals is the action of judgment upon faithless Christians, usurpers, and rebels, just so certainly does this fifth seal refer to a particular stage and phase in these judicial transactions, and to a class of events which only then come to their full development. As the throne is a judgment throne, and the whole administration proceeding from it is an administration of judgment, every seal that is broken must lay open a phase of judgment, in one direction or another. All the seals, thus far, have been judgment seals; and the two that follow are judgment seals; capable of being identified, as such, from the nature of the events attending them. The symmetry of the whole would therefore be interrupted, and an unaccountable break made in the distinctly connected series, if this fifth in the list were to be taken in any other acceptation. The four horsemen are judgment powers. The earthquake, and the terrific commotions in earth and sky, under the sixth seal, are directly linked with the presence of judgment. The seventh seal, with its seven trumpets and seven last plagues, is nothing but judgment from beginning to end. And whatever peculiarities may attend the breaking of the particular seal now before us, it can be nothing other than judgment also.

The manifestations under the breaking of this seal differ, in some respects, from the four preceding. There is here no expression from the Living ones. There are no horsemen or horses. And

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the burden of the description is exhibited in the results rather than in the processes. Still, everything turns out as belonging to the same general category of trial and suffering. Under the first seal we have the picture of moral conquest, by means of the arrow of truth, sped by the power of sorrowful judgment. Under the second, we have war, disorder, strife, and bloodshed. Under the third, we have famine and distressing scarcity. Under the fourth, we have the combined fruit of all these,—pestilence, death-plague, and the living world largely overrun with the regions of the dead. And, under this fifth seal, we have added, bloody persecution of those who hold and testify to the truth. The entire population of the earth, at that period, being alike rejected from the company of those accounted worthy to escape these evil times, is alike made to feel the stripes of judgment. The good as well as the bad suffer the hour of trial. And though there shall be multitudes then brought to the knowledge of the truth, they will all be such as had failed to improve their more favorable opportunities in the preceding days of Divine long-suffering and forbearance; and hence, by way of judgment for their previous folly, their piety, at this late hour, becomes a thing of sore cost. Having been unbelieving, worldly-minded, and hypocritical, when they might have walked with God without serious risk, they now find the way of salvation judicially become a way of torture and of death. Evil and depravity will hold the sovereignty and power in this world unto the last

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And it would be strange if the bad passions, which then are to reach their most aggravated intensity, should not also develop particular violence in the direction from which the Church, in every age, has suffered more or less.

Hence, this fifth seal is the picture of Persecution and Martyrdom. As soon as it was opened, John saw souls of people "slain on account of the word of God, and on account of the testimony which they held fast." It sets before us the solemn fact, that people who will not give their hearts to God now, when once these judgment times set in, if they ever get to heaven at all, will be compelled to go there through fire and blood.

There are no voices of command from heaven under this seal, and no messengers despatched from the throne; for the reason, that bloody persecutions of God's servants come from beneath—not from above. It is the devil who is the murderer from the beginning, and by him, and his seed, has all martyr-blood been made to flow that ever has flowed or ever will. It is the Dragon that makes war with the saints. Celestial powers are concerned in it no further than to permit the malignant butchery. It is not flashed forth from the sky, like the calamities with which the wicked and rebellious are overwhelmed; but it is left to develop itself from Satan's reign and domination in the hearts of his children, unmoved by any direct agency from heaven. The Living ones do not say, *Go!* for they are neither directly nor indirectly concerned in bringing suffering upon God's

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servants for their fidelity to the truth. No horses dash out upon the scene, because no Divine powers are employed in martyring the saints. The entire earthly part of the proceeding enacts itself by the powers already in sway among depraved mortals, and John beholds only the results. The seal opens, and the invisible world has a vast accession of souls of martyrs, slain on account of the word of God, and on account of the testimony which they held fast. They are not the martyrs of the past ages, for those, by this time, already have their crowns, and are seated on their heavenly thrones, and are with Christ in glorified form, as we saw in chapters 4 and 5. These are, therefore, martyrs of this particular period—martyrs who suffer the great tribulation which all preceding saints and martyrs escape—martyrs of the judgment times, who lose their lives for their faithful testimony during the sharp and troublous era in which God's judgments are in the earth.

In treating of them more particularly, we may notice,

I. THE CAUSE OF THEIR MARTYRDOM;
II. THEIR ESTATE AS JOHN BEHOLDS THEM;
III. THE CRY THEY UTTER;
IV. THE ANSWER THEY RECEIVE.

It is an old maxim: *Non est mors, sed causa mortis quæ facit martyrem.* "It is not death, but the cause in which death is incurred, which constitutes a martyr." Millions upon millions perish under

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the preceding seals, but they are not therefore martyrs. The cause for which the persons mentioned here were slain, constitute them true martyrs. They "had been slain *on account of the word of God, and on account of the testimony which they held fast.*" However skeptical, rationalistic, or unbelieving they may have been previous to the setting in of the judgment, the occurrences under the first four seals had quite cured them of their erroneous thinking and indifference. What they once held only in the coldness of mere speculative faith, or received only with much subtle refining, and rasping down to a materialistic philosophy, or disbelieved altogether, they had now learned, to their sorrow, to have been the literal and infallible word of God. The Bible they now read with new eyes, and received and obeyed with a new heart. Its literal teachings they now were brought to understand, appreciate, live, and proclaim as the unmistakable Revelation of the Lord God Almighty. There will still be plenty of unbelief, skepticism, and utter rejection of the Scriptures; and the dominant spirit of the times will be the spirit of rebellion against the Lord, and of contempt for his word. But that spirit will now have been quite cast out of the persons brought to view in this vision. Having learned to deny themselves, to crucify their self-seeking, to cease from their confidence in their own fancies, and to accept, live, and testify to the true will and word of God, they will have come to be genuine servants of the Most High. And this is one of the procuring causes of

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the world's hatred of them, and wish to have them put out of the way.

But there is something more special entering into the cause of their martyrdom. In addition to their close adherence to the Divine word, and as one of the most marked fruits of it, there was a particular "testimony which they held fast;" and on account of which, more directly, the world could not abide them. Many have regarded their whole testimony as nothing different from the common testimony of good and faithful men in every age. John says that he "was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ;" and the testimony of these martyrs is considered to be the same for which John was banished. But the phraseology is not the same, and seems to indicate something personal to these martyrs themselves. It was not the testimony of Jesus in general; but "*τὴν μαρτυρίαν*—THAT *testimony, which they held fast*" —some particular testimony specially in question in their times, and specially obnoxious to the then reigning spirit. And when we consider the character of the period in which they were called to testify; what it was that had operated to bring them into this attitude of zeal for the Divine word; what would naturally be uppermost in a mind enlightened as to the times on which they had fallen, and what would be most offensive to an unbeliever in those times, we can be at no loss to have suggested to us what the particular character of that testimony was. It was necessarily a

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testimony touching the judgment already begun; a testimony which interpreted all the plagues, disorders, and horrors around them, as the veritable inflictions of the Almighty, now risen up to pay off all the long-accumulating arrearages of his wrath upon transgressors; a testimony that the true elect had already been received up into glory, and that, in a few short years more, the whole mystery of God should be finished, and all his enemies cast down to irretrievable perdition; a testimony that swift and utter destruction now impended over all the governments, fabrics, powers, and hopes of this world; that the fires were then already burning which should never more be extinguished or repressed till everything of this world, and all its devotees, should be consumed from root to leaf; that Christ, the angry Judge, was then present in the clouds, ready to be revealed in all the terrors of his consuming power; that the day of grace was in its last darkening twilight of departure, after which nothing should remain but everlasting discomfiture and death; a testimony that the world was then already trembling in the agonies of its dissolution, and that the last hope of salvation was flickering in its socket, ready to expire.

In a modified degree, this is ever the testimony of the true people and ministers of God; but, at such a time, and in such surroundings as these martyrs testified, there would needs be an intensity, a certainty, and a pressing urgency in their convictions and utterances, such as had never be-

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fore appeared. People who had been cool, complacent, and philosophic in their religion before, will then have been awakened to a state of warmth, and earnestness, and excitement, and zeal, a thousandfold more irrepressible and energetic than what they had previously regarded as sheer fanaticism, and piety run mad. Oh, there will be fervor then, and outspoken testifying for God then, and warnings with tears and entreaties then, and striking expositions of the prophecies then, and appeals and outpourings from the men of God more thrilling than the cries of Jonah in the streets of Nineveh! It will be more than the hardened hearts of scorning unbelievers can bear. And because of being besieged and pressed by the resistless arguments and fervency which then shall be brought to bear upon them, they will seize the witnesses of the truth, and punish them, and resort to all sorts of murderous violence, to silence them, and put them out of the world. Thus, then, because their days of indifference toward the Divine predictions have passed away, and because they now are faithful in standing to the truth as to what God has said, and as to what times they have fallen upon, and because they will no more keep silence touching the awful perdition about to break forth upon the guilty world, they are massacred and slain.

II. THEIR ESTATE AS JOHN BEHOLDS THEM.

They are "souls"—disembodied souls—souls in that state which ensues as the result of corporeal death.

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Their slaying, then, is not the end of them. It is not the total interruption of their being in all respects. It makes them invisible to men in the flesh, in the natural state; but it does not hinder their living on as souls, or their being visible to heavenly eyes, or to the eyes of John in his supernatural and prophetic exaltation. The holy Apocalyptist tells us that he "*saw*" them, although they "had been slain;" and heard them speaking with loud voices, though their material tongues had been burnt to ashes, and their corporeal organs of speech had been stiffened in death.

It is altogether a wrong interpretation of the Scriptures which represents the dead in a state of non-existence, unconsciousness, or oblivion. I am not among those who think that "they which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished," either forever, or for a limited time. There is such a thing as an intermediate state between death and the resurrection; but it is not a state of utter dilapidation and cessation of being. It is an abnormal and unsatisfactory state, far below what is to be gained by the resurrection; but it is not a state of vacancy and nothingness. However strongly the ruinous character and evil of death may be stated in some Old Testament passages, there are others in the Scriptures which, by all just and fair exegesis, prove and demonstrate that mental and psychical life continues under it, and continues in wakeful consciousness. And if any one has doubts upon this point, let him candidly consult and determine the positive meaning of the following texts:

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Matt. 10 : 28 : "*Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*" The argument from this text is plain, unanswerable, and conclusive. If the soul dies, or goes into oblivion, when the body dies, then he that kills the body would, with the same stroke, kill the soul too. But our Saviour tells us that those who kill the body cannot kill the soul. And if it be said that this is meant only of the utter destruction of the soul, God having promised a resurrection to life again, then our Saviour might as well have denied that it is in the power of man to kill the body, because God certainly will raise it again at the last day. But our blessed Lord grants that the body may be killed by man, in the same sense wherein he denies that the soul can be; and therefore he is not speaking with reference to the resurrection at all. There is, then, a life which the death of the body cannot touch.*

Luke 20 : 38 : "*He* [*the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*] *is not the God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.*" So far as the righteous are concerned, we are here assured that, although they "sleep in Jesus," as regards the body, and are "absent from the body," as regards the soul, they still "ALL LIVE UNTO GOD." This the Saviour quotes from the Old Testament, where "Moses

* The attempts of Whately, McCausland, and Courteney to answer this argument, are really mere evasions; and there is nothing in all the literature on the subject that at all meets it.

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calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; for He is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto Him." The argument assumed is, that a negation of existence dissolves all covenant relations. God cannot be called the God of beings who no longer exist, or the continuity of whose existence has been interrupted by a blank. Whatever else He may be, it is no property of His to be a God of nonentities. "HE IS NOT A GOD OF THE DEAD, BUT OF THE LIVING." But Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were dead, and had been dead for centuries; and yet He proclaims Himself "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." The conclusion is thus deduced by the Saviour, that though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were dead, as to their bodies, they were still, in some sense, *living unto God.*

Very pertinent, also, was this argument to the question of the resurrection, in support of which it was produced. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, being still *alive unto God*, though corporeally dead, God's covenant with them still held—held because both parties were still in being; and because it still held, the promises which it included had yet to be fulfilled, which could only be in the resurrected state. In this text we accordingly have existence and life predicated of the righteous dead, and that existence and life put forward as the basis of the continued validity of the covenant, which covenant necessitates a resurrection, that its promises may not fail. And though this passage specifically refers to but one class of the dead, yet, by

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disproving the nonexistence, and establishing the continued life of departed believers, it overthrows the doctrine of the oblivion of the dead in the abstract, and fastens very strong unlikelihood upon its truth in any case.

Luke 16 : 19–31 : the case of the rich man and Lazarus. In this startling parable, if parable such an unveiling of the invisible world may be called (it is not called a parable in the Scriptures), we have not only principles on which to argue the non-oblivion of the dead, but literal instances and illustrations of the continued life and consciousness of departed souls of both classes—good and bad. That the scene of this narrative is laid in the state immediately succeeding death, and anterior to the resurrection, is indisputable. Hades is to be destroyed at the final resurrection; and it is not in Hades that the wicked are to have their ultimate portion. That is the Abyss, the lake of fire, the second death. (See Rev. 20 : 14.) But this rich man was in Hades—"*in Hades* (εν τω ἅδῃ) he lifted up his eyes, and seeth Abraham and Lazarus." And at the very time he is suffering in Hades, he still has relatives *living in the flesh*, whom he wishes to have warned, that they may not encounter similar sufferings. "He said, I pray thee, therefore, father, that thou wouldst send Lazarus to my father's house, for *I have five brethren*, that he may testify unto them, *lest they also come into this place of torment.*" Either, then, there will be probation after the general judgment, and godless men living in the flesh upon the earth

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after the wicked are adjudged to their final punishment, or this picture must relate to the state intermediate between death and the resurrection. The first alternative is as unscriptural as it is absurd. The latter, then, must be the fact, and the whole scene necessarily fixes itself to the period immediately succeeding the death of the body. All the terms and relations of the narrative require this location of it. The received belief of the orthodox Jews was such that they could not otherwise understand it. And there is no show of right to accept the picture in any other relation.

Taking it, then, as we are in reason bound to take it, we have it settled, by Christ himself, that wicked souls have a life and consciousness which death does not interrupt, and that there is still a form of being for both good and bad between death and the resurrection.*

* Whately and Courteney think that the torturing "flames" spoken of, argue the presence of the body, and so the craved water and the parched tongue. But it is assuming too much to affirm of the soul in Hades, that it is altogether disrobed of sensitive and vehicular clothing—that it is a mere thought-principle, a substance without parts, extension, or circumspection—a mere nobody. Such is not our doctrine, nor that of the Scriptures. Man is a trinity. The apostle assigns to his composition a *body*, a *soul*, and a *spirit*. (1 Thess. 5: 23.) There is such a thing as the "dividing asunder of soul and spirit" (Heb. 4:12), but there is nothing to show that death can do this, or that anything of the sort occurs at death. And why may not the soul serve to give the mental principle a locality and a sensibility to outward impressions in the state after death, somewhat as the body serves the soul in this life? Besides, as the world in which

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Luke 23 : 43 : "*Verily I say unto you, To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.*" Language more clear and precise, as to the life and conscious happiness of a saved soul immediately after death, cannot be framed. All that Psychopannychists have been able to do with it on their theory, is, to say that the case of the penitent thief is so "peculiar," that we cannot infer from it what will be the lot of other men. But it concerned the dying *Christ* as well as the dying thief; and He certainly died as deep a death as any of His saints. And as both died that day, so they both went that

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the scene is depicted is spiritual, which the whole narrative assumes, what right have we to condition its flames by the laws which apply only in the natural world? The torments which the rich man suffered were, of course, of a sort answering to the character of the world in which he felt them, and of a nature to take effect on the sort of existence in which the scene is laid. Leaving the earth, the flames are no longer to be considered flames of earthly fire, or the thirst as earthly thirst, or the water desired as earthly water, or the pain as earthly pain. All is of a class with the new state and character of things. It is not figurative, as some have been willing to claim, but neither is it corporeal, as these men would assume. And if it were, we have no proof that material fire can affect a resurrected body any more than a disembodied soul. It is precisely of the nature of Hades, and of the nature of man's form of being in Hades, that all this is affirmed. So the narrative alleges, and in no other way is it allowable to argue with reference to these flames or sufferings. At any rate, Hades is specifically indicated as *the place and state*, and the lifetime of his "five brethren" in the flesh is noted as *the time*, in which these conscious pains and anxieties were experienced by this godless deceased worldling. Hence, if Christ is to be accepted as authority, wicked souls are alive and conscious between death and the resurrection.

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day, and before the resurrection of either, into Paradise. Be that Paradise what it may, Christ and the thief were not yet in it while they lived on their crosses, and yet were in it before the day ended, and while their bodies yet hung upon those stakes. It was not a state of non-existence or oblivion, for it was the subject of consoling hope and promise, and the declaration embraced the idea of conscious presence and fellowship with each other, on reaching the blessed place. *Being* is affirmed —ἔσῃ, *thou* SHALT BE. *Communion* is affirmed— μετ' εμου, WITH ME. *Conscious happiness* is affirmed —ἐν τῳ παραδεἰσῳ, IN PARADISE. *Time* is specified, not the time of the resurrection, or after a long and indefinite period of nothingness, but σημερον, THIS DAY—the very day they hung side by side on Calvary, and before the setting of the sun then sinking beyond the sea.*

The case of Paul (Phil. 1 : 2) is also in point. If ever son of Adam lived a noble life on earth, it

* Some have proposed to change the punctuation of the passage, so as to make the σημερον refer to the time of the utterance of the promise, and not to the time of its fulfilment. But whence the reason for so solemnly asserting that he said it *that day*, when it was evident that he was speaking it *that day*, and not on some other day? Well has Dean Alford observed: "This attempt, considering that it not only violates common sense, but destroys the force of the Lord's promise, is surely something worse than silly." And every interpretation of these words which cuts out of them the recognition of the conscious life and blessedness of righteous souls between death and the resurrection, so far as we have seen, does but put an equivoke in those holy lips, otherwise as guileless as the heavens.

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was this great apostle. To him to live was an unspeakable blessing to the Church, and to himself a zeal, and joy, and divinest fellowship with the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ. *To him to live was Christ.* And yet he adds, "To ME TO DIE IS GAIN,"—gain even upon such a life. "Then, surely," as William Arthur puts it, "it was not to enter into nothingness, and to continue in nothingness while the world stands. From the life of an apostle to a state of torpor, is progress, not from glory to glory, but from glory to death—not gain, but blank and benumbing *loss.* Though his life here had many burdens, Paul proclaimed its joys to all; yet he had a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. He does not mean that the resurrection life is better, for it would not be delayed a day by his staying to profit the churches here, nor hastened by his departing. The better state he had in view is manifestly one which is postponed while he remains in the body, but which will open so soon as he goes hence. Is it, then, better to be nothing than to be an apostle? to miss days and years, than to improve them? to be as inanimate as water spilled upon the ground, than to be communing with God and serving man? Had Paul expected that, in departing, he would become inanimate, surely he would have regarded each moment added to his holy labors, not as a delay of a far better life, but as so much golden time rescued from emptiness. Who can reconcile to his heart the notion of Christ's great ambassador desiring to depart and be a blank? And, at

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last, that great soul stands on life's extremest verge, crying, 'I have finished my course.' A moment, and it is gone! And what now is it in its new dwelling? A dark and vacant thing, mere emptiness?" Then nothingness is gain on apostolic usefulness, and communion with God! Then to lie in oblivious death, is better than to hope, and pray, and praise, and live Christ Himself! Who can believe it for a moment!

Consider also the experiences of dying believers, and the consciousness which they sometimes manifest in their last moments, of the presence of a world which they, then, for the first time, see, and among the bright dwellers in which they feel themselves going to take their places as earth "recedes and disappears." Shall we say that these visions of a new-dawning life, and bliss, and conscious fellowship, is all hallucination, the mere fantasies of an outgoing being, the delusions of the holy soul bidding farewell to the universe and God, until the archangel's trump shall sound? Shall we draw the black line through all these cherished testimonies of those saints of God who have gone from us, and account them all meaningless, eccentric sparks of scattering existence, as it sinks to dark oblivion? Believe it who wishes; I have not so learned Christ, or the portion of His saints.*

* Refer also to 1 Peter 3 : 19, 20, which, grammatically and literally interpreted, proves not only the conscious activity of Christ's own soul, in the interval between his death and resurrection, but also the consciousness of those human spirits to

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Nor ought it to be necessary for any one to go beyond the text itself, to be assured of the fact, that the death of the body is not the death of the soul. These martyrs were "slain," and yet John sees and hears them in living and speaking sensibility between their death and their resurrection. It will not answer to say that the whole thing is only a vision. It was a vision of *the reality*—a miraculous view, in advance of the facts, indeed, but of *the facts themselves*, as they are actually to transpire. The slaying of these martyrs was, likewise, nothing but a vision; but no one thinks of assuming that no literal martyrdom is in contemplation. Why then suppose that the asserted continuation of their soul-life, after their corporeal death, is not to be understood as equally a matter of literal reality? When an author gives us a thing as a matter of fact, that has occurred in his own experience, we must either accept what he says as true, or impeach his credibility or his competency. And when John tells us that he *saw and heard* "*the souls of those that had been slain*," either he is not to be believed, or he saw what had no manner of existence, or the souls of dead saints *do live, and act, and speak*, in a state of separation from the body.

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whom he went and preached in the unseen world. Consider, too, the facts and doctrines concerning *demons*, and the desires of these beings to be incorporated with living bodily organisms, and the laws and scriptural prohibitions of necromancy and communion with the souls of the dead. Was this all superstition? And did God legislate against intercourse with nonentities?

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John saw the souls of these martyrs "*beneath the altar.*" Many regard this as "simply symbolical;" but I am not clear that it is so to be taken. No earthly altar is meant, for none such existed at the time of the vision, or shall exist at the time of its fulfilment; at any rate, none acknowledged of God. Nor is it exactly a material altar, as we are conversant with material things. It is something heavenly, and partaking of the same heavenly and spiritual nature of the scene out of which all these proceedings issue, and from which they are contemplated. There is a heavenly Temple, and everything that related to the earthly one, was patterned after the celestial one. There is a "true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man," of which that which Moses built was the material picture and copy. (Heb. 8: 1–5; 9: 21–24.) And this altar pertains to that heavenly sanctuary whence the "pattern" of the earthly was taken. It was at the altar of burnt-offerings that all bloody sacrifices were made. Under it there was a deep excavation in the solid rock, into which the blood of the slain victims was poured. The law com manded the officiating priest to "pour all the blood of the bullock at the bottom of the altar of the burnt-offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation." (Lev. 4 : 7.) The ancient arrangement for the reception of this blood is still visible. I have myself stood in the opening, under the rock, on which the altar had its place, and stamped my foot upon the marble slab which closes the mouth of the vast receptacle,

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and satisfied myself, from the detonations, that the excavated space is very deep and large. And as the life of the animal was in its blood, this vast subterranean cavity was, naturally enough, regarded as the receptacle of the lives of the victims which there were slain. The Mahommedans, to this day, as I was told on the spot, regard it as the place where spirits are detained until the day of judgment. They call it *The well of spirits.* It is in the centre of the Mosque of Omar, whose interior had, for ages, been most rigidly guarded from the visits or eyes of any but Moslems, but, by firman from the government, can now be seen. And as the deep cavern under the earthly altar was the appointed receptacle of the lives of the animal sacrifices, so the souls of God's witnesses, who fall in His service, are received into a corresponding receptacle beneath the heavenly altar.

Some describe that altar as Christ, under whose protection and shade the souls of the martyrs are preserved, free from all perils and evils, till their recall, in renewed bodies, by the resurrection. It denotes a near and holy relation to God; a place of sacred rest under the protection of Christ and His sacrifice, and a state of blessedness, to which, however, higher stages are to come. The idea of sacrifice also pervades the language of Scripture in general, respecting eminent devotion in the Divine service, especially when life is jeoparded or lost in consequence of it. Hence our bodies are to be offered a willing sacrifice unto the Lord. Hence Paul spoke of his sufferings for Christ, and

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of his approaching martyrdom, as an offering in the sacrificial sense. All martyrs are contemplated as sacrifices to God. And as sacrifices to the heavenly altar, their souls pass into the sacred receptacle beneath that altar. It is precisely the place where we would most naturally expect them to be, and where they are most sacredly kept, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body.*

III. THE CRY THEY UTTER.

It is not a mere metaphorical cry, like that of the blood of Abel from the ground; but a literal cry of visible and conscious existences—an articulate cry, the voice of which is heard, and the utterances of which are in literal words. "*Until when, Thou Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood from them that dwell on the earth?*" It appears, from this, that their murderers are then still living. Consequently these crying ones are a specific class of martyrs, who had then very recently been slain. It is another item to fix the vision to this particular time.

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* "The souls of Martyrs repose in peace under the Altar, and cherish a spirit of patience (patientiam pascunt) until others are admitted to fill up their company of glory."—*Tertullian*, Scorpiace, c. 12.

"The souls of the departed go to the place assigned them by God, and there abide until the Resurrection, when they will be reunited with their bodies; and then the saints, both in soul and body, will come into the presence of God."—*Irenæus*, Grabe, v. 31.

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The cry is addressed to the throne. It is not a vindictive cry, although it looks to the avenging of their blood. If the whole scene did not relate to the judgment period, it would be difficult to avoid attaching the idea of intense vindictiveness to this utterance. Such a cry would be out of season, except in this place. But it is the time of judgment. The judgment throne is set. The judgment proceedings have commenced. The years have come in which God had long ago promised that the principles of His righteous government should be enforced, to the recompense of His people, the vindication of their wrongs, and the overthrow of evil. They had every assurance that such was the Divine intention, and that this was the period for its fulfilment. They could not, therefore, understand why there should be delay. The thing had begun, why was it not at once carried to its consummation? They had sacrificed their lives to this particular testimony, and everything had appeared to them in the very article of the long-predicted fulfilment; how was it, then, that it now tarried? Even the titles by which they address the Lord, show that this was the feeling and spirit of their inquiry. It was not so much impatience that their blood was not avenged, as their perplexity about the hesitation which seemed to retard the ongoing of what they knew had commenced. They do not address Christ as the *Saviour*, but as ὁ Δεσπότης—the centre of irresistible power already in force—the holy and true DESPOT, now on His judicial throne. Their hearts

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are set, as they were in life, on the glorious consummation begun before they were slain. They had died for their testimony that the time for that consummation had come. And as it still delayed, and could only be realized in the visitation of vengeance upon the wicked hosts who had murdered them, they cry to the great and holy Avenger, to know why it tarried, and how long the suspense was to last. It was an utterance from the world of disembodied saints, somewhat akin, in feeling and meaning, to that which John the Baptist sent from his prison to the Saviour. (Matt. 11 : 2–10.) It shows us that the intermediate state is still an imperfect state, and that the proper hope of saints is connected with the resurrection of the body. Bede has remarked upon this passage, that "those souls which offered themselves a living sacrifice to God, pray eternally for His coming to judgment; not from any vindictive feeling against their enemies, but in a spirit of zeal and love for God's glory and justice, and for the coming of that day, when sin, which is rebellion against Him, will be destroyed, and their own bodies raised."

IV. The answer they receive.

Jehovah does not disdain to lend an ear to the cry of His faithful servants. He is concerned for their rest, comfort, and right information, even while they lie disembodied beneath His altar. The prayers of His people are always precious before Him, and their peace He will ever consult. He

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heard the appeal of His slain ones, and came to minister to their souls the requisite comfort. Living or dead, if we are faithful to God and His word, we shall not want any merciful grace and help appropriate to us. The Lord remembers us in our sufferings and trials on earth, and He will not fail to come to us under the altar, to comfort and establish us concerning His purposes and ways. He will not forget or disregard us when dead, any more than when living; and our necessities, apart from the body, are as graciously cared for as those in the flesh. Indeed, His promises overspan every possible contingency of our existence, in the body or out of the body, in time or in eternity. His word to us is, that He will *never* leave nor forsake us.

"*There was given to each of them a white robe.*" Can lifeless shades and non-existences receive white robes? Can spilled blood, dead and absorbed in the earth, wear the livery of heaven? Yet these souls of slain ones received each the celestial stola, even while their resurrection delayed. And that stola was the symbol of their justification—the Divine assurance of the truth and acceptableness of their testimony—the cheering token from the throne that they were approved, and precious, and near to their Lord, and blessed with his favor, notwithstanding that what they hoped and testified was still deferred. White robes, in such connections, are always the emblems of Divine approval and blessed relationship with God. And the giving of them to these zeal-

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ous and anxious souls under the altar, was the cheering proof of their preciousness in the Master's sight.

"*And it was said to them*"— . . . Mark; how could dead ashes hear and understand? Where was the use and meaning of speaking promises to unconscious dust, which knows not anything? Where is the sense or intelligibility of such a converse, if no living and wakeful beings are concerned? God does not speak his comforts and promises to nothings. And yet it was said to these souls of martyrs, in advance of their resurrection, "*that they should rest yet a little time.*" This implies that they had been resting, and that their state was one of blessed repose and quiet, though imperfect. The dead in the Lord are not wandering, melancholy ghosts. They are experiencing the meaning of that sweetest word of our language—*rest.* And over their ashes, at least, we may confidently sing:

> Happy the dead! they peacefully rest them,
> From burdens that galled, from cares that oppressed them;
> From the yoke of the world, and from tyranny,
> The grave, the grave hath set them free,
> The grave hath set them free.

But, after this rest, comes a brighter day, and a sublimer station. "Yet a little time," these slain ones are told, and then that day will come. The reason for the delay is also explained to them. Their number is not yet full, and the world is not yet quite ripe for its doom. Hence it was said to them, "that they should rest yet a

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little time, *until their fellow-servants also, and their brethren, shall have been completed, who are about to be slain, as also they themselves* [*had been*]." John is made to hear these words, because they are a prophecy for the Church on earth, as well as an explanation to the souls waiting in heaven. They tell of continued persecution and bloody sufferings for God's witnesses among men. Many good people are wont to think the days for killing men, on account of their religious principles, have long since passed, never to return. They flatter themselves that the world has become too enlightened, too humane, too civilized, too much pervaded with a reasonable and forbearing spirit, ever to repeat such scenes as were enacted by Pagan rule, or in the dark ages of Christendom. But they are entirely mistaken. We may think the world has changed, but it still has that ancient murderer for its god and prince, and its malignity towards the Lord's people, especially when they come to be sifted out from their present adulterous intimacy with the world, will again head up into an intensity to which there has been no parallel in the past. This fifth seal is a revelation of nothing but slaughter for the saints, as regards this world, and the times to which it relates. It shows us slaughtered saints in heaven, and tells of the slaughter of many more. And elsewhere, in this book, we are advised of coming times, when an idol shall be the object of the world's adoration, and as many as will not worship it shall be killed. (Rev. 13 : 15.)

This might seem to be but poor consolation to

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these resting souls; and yet, a real consolation it was. It assured them that they were not alone in the sufferings they had experienced; that theirs was but the common lot of all faithful ones in those trying times; that, though they were dead, the cause in which they died still had representatives, who would stand to it unto death, as they had done; and that, though the consummation was delayed yet for a little while, *their* sufferings were over, and there was a flood of sorrow still to deluge the earth from which *they* now were free.

But, above all, was the assurance, pervading and implied in each particular, that what they had hoped and testified, was presently to be accomplished. Those white robes were the earnest of a sublimer life. Their martyrdom for their steadfast maintenance of the truth, was duly remembered, and, in a little while, should be fully requited to them, and to the godless hosts who had inflicted it. Their blood was not long to remain unavenged from them that dwell on the earth. The years of waiting and of suffering were now on the margin of their close. Yet a little time, and the consummation should be complete. Yet a little while, and the wicked should not be: yea, they should diligently consider his place, and it should not be. The thrones were already set; the work was really in progress; the time of the end had verily come; and, after a short space more, they would be able to say: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree; yet he passed away, and lo,

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he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." (Ps. 37 : 35, 36.)

Striking and impressive is the fact here brought to view, that that which the saints of all ages have been "looking for," and which has been their "blessed hope" in every time of earthly trial and adversity, even "the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2 : 13, 14), is also the chief comfort and stay of the pious dead in their heavenly rest. "Until when, Thou Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood from them that dwell on the earth?" is the cry which they utter "with a great voice" from beneath the altar. They rest, but their desire for the end still rises, and glows, and pleads. And the chief element of the consolation which they receive is, that that consummation cometh.

And if the holy martyrs, in their white robes under the heavenly altar, make so much of it, and find their chief comfort in the contemplation of its nearness, how unreasonable and unjust that we should be accounted enthusiasts and fanatics, for pointing to it as our hope and joy amid these earthly tribulations? Why should it be branded as lunacy, when we wish and pray, with departed saints, that sin's long war against the majesty of heaven were over—that the rending strife of spiritual evil, which has so long torn God's world, should come to an end—that the vast train of wrongs, with which Satan has been oppressing Heaven's sons and beautiful creations, should be

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done away? Would it really be for the peace, and piety, and consolation of the Church, that all such interest should cease, and that all such testimony should be silenced? Would it really be God's kingdom come, and His will done on earth as it is in heaven, if all prayer and prophecy of coming and nearing judgment were to be hushed from such a world as ours? Or, should we not rather be grateful that there are on earth, and will be, even in its darkest times, some to echo the spirit which thrills in the hearts of departed souls, testifying to an evil and adulterous generation, of a coming vengeance, in order to a completed redemption? Let men scowl, and mutter their ill-timed reproaches, if they will, and persecute, even unto death, those who hold it fast, there is in this theme what constitutes the true hope of the saints, whether suffering in the flesh or resting in heaven, and on account of which we may well ever

Thank God, there's still a vanguard
  Fighting for the right!
Though the throng flock to rearward,
  Lifting, ashen-white
Flags of truce to sin and error,
Clasping hands, mute with terror,
Thank God, there's still a vanguard
  Fighting for the right!

Through the wilderness advancing,
  Hewers of the way,
Forward! far their spears are glancing,
  Flashing back the day.
"Back!" the leaders cry, who fear them;
"Back!" from all the army near them;
They, with steady step advancing,
  Cleave their certain way.

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Slay them! From each drop that falleth
Springs a hero armed.
Where the martyr's fire appalleth,
Lo, they pass unharmed.
Crushed beneath thy wheel, oppression,
Bold, their spirit holds possession,
Loud the dross-purged voice out-calleth,
By the death-throes warmed.

Thank God, there's still a vanguard
Fighting for the right!
Error's legions know their standard,
Floating in the light.
When the league of sin rejoices,
Quick outring the rallying voices:
"Thank God, there's still a vanguard
Fighting for the right!"

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LECTURE FOURTEENTH.

THE SIXTH SEAL — WRONG APPLICATIONS OF IT — DESCRIBES FEARFUL PRODIGIES IN NATURE—GENERAL CONVULSION—DARKENING OF SUN AND MOON—FALLING OF THE STARS—RECOIL OF THE HEAVENS — MOVING OF MOUNTAINS AND ISLANDS — STATE OF SOCIETY WHEN THESE THINGS COME —THE DISMAY THEY OCCASION—HOW PEOPLE WILL INTERPRET THEM — THE ABSURDITIES TO WHICH THEY WILL DRIVE MEN.

Rev. 6 : 12–17. (Revised Text.) And I saw when he had opened the sixth seal, and there was a great shaking; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood; and the stars of the heaven fell to the earth, as a fig-tree sheddeth her untimely [or winter] figs when shaken by a great wind. And the heaven recoiled as a book [or scroll] rolling itself together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the captains of thousands, and the rich, and the mighty, and every slave, and every freedman, hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains. And they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: because the great day of His [or, as some MSS., *their*] wrath is come, and who is able to stand!

WE have here a sublime and startling description. Some think that it refers to the destruction of Jerusalem; others, to the persecutions under Diocletian; still more, to the victories of the Church under Constantine; and some, to the final judgment and the end of all things. But neither of these applications of this vision, as I am constrained to take it, is the true one.

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The evidence is sufficiently conclusive that John wrote years after the fall of the Jewish state, whilst he is particular to tell us that all these visions refer to things to come subsequent to the time of his writing. It is also plain that the terrors described are not such as pertain to Christians, however fiercely persecuted. And the theory which applies it to the age of Constantine, besides other objections which it cannot satisfactorily solve, labors under the fatal embarrassment of having to adapt a picture of sheer disaster and calamity to events which were not only, for the most part, terrorless, but whose chief characteristics were peaceful and prosperous. Had John beheld the sun bursting forth, with new lustre, from an eclipse of darkness, and the moon coming out from under a bloody obscuration, to shine with silver light, and the stars taking their places serenely in the heavens, there might be some show of adapting the description to the events marking the Constantinian period. But he saw no such things. He saw the very reverse, with not a relieving ray from first to last. Nor were all kings, rulers, and great men, then driven from their thrones and palaces to seek shelter in the rocks and mountains. With all the changes, Pagans were still permitted to enjoy full religious liberty, and did not answer at all to the terrified and conscience-stricken masses of high and low, whom we here behold confessing the power and majesty of God and the Lamb, and seeking for death to conceal them from the fearfulness of avenging wrath.

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And whatever secondary and imperfect fulfilments this opening of the sixth seal may have had in the history of the past, it is impossible for any one to look at it attentively without feeling that the day of judgment itself must come in order to exhaust the description, and that it belongs properly and only to those great events which immediately precede and usher in the great consummation.

And yet it does not refer to the last acts of that terrible drama. It is only the *sixth* seal, while there is yet a seventh to follow it. With all its terrors, it is only one link in the chain of judicial wonders which the great day will bring. Much of the language employed, and the descriptions which follow, show that we still have to do with the present order of things, although in its last stages. The action of all the seals is the action of judgment, after the saints have been taken to their Lord in the sky; and we here have the sixth in the series, whilst the final catastrophe is still deferred. Neither Titus, nor Diocletian, nor Constantine, has anything whatever to do with it; but only those people who shall be living upon the earth in "the time of the end."

The words before us present two classes of facts—

I. FEARFUL PHYSICAL PRODIGIES;

II. THE EFFECTS OF THEM UPON MANKIND.

We will consider them in the order in which they are narrated, looking to God to enlighten and bless us in the attempt.

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1. *Great commotion in the fabric of nature.* "I saw when he had opened the sixth seal, and there was a great shaking." The common version says *earthquake;* but the original word (σεισμὸς) is not so limited and specific. Though usually rendered *earthquake*, it denotes quakings in general, and is often used for any sudden and violent shaking in any part of the world. In the following verse it is applied to the shaking of the fig-tree. Matthew employs it to express tempestuous commotion of the air and sea (8 : 24); and in the Greek translation of Joel (2 : 10), it is used to denote violent disturbances in the heavens. In the form of a verb, it signifies to shake, toss, jolt, agitate,—whether the things shaken be the earth, the air, the sea, the sky, or anything else. It here includes a general shaking of the earth, as is plainly manifest from the context; but there is the same reason for extending it beyond the earth to the atmosphere, sky, and heavenly regions. The whole system of the world is implicated in the vastness and violence of the commotion.

In very many places, great convulsions of nature are spoken of in connection with special manifestations of Deity, particularly when those manifestations are of a judicial character. When God gave the law, which was for the restraint and condemnation of sin, "Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire, and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a great furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly" (Ex. 19 : 18.) When Elijah made com-

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plaint unto the Lord that Israel had shed the blood of His prophets, and trembled for his own safety, "The Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks; and after the wind an earthquake." (1 Kings 19 : 11.) When Jesus was murdered, "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent." (Matt. 27 : 50, 51.) And when Paul and Silas were beaten, imprisoned, and put into the stocks, and appealed unto the Lord in songs and prayers, "suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed." (Acts 16 : 26.)

Especially are such convulsions prophesied of in connection with the judgment, and the approach and consummation of the end of this world. Jesus has plainly told us that "famines, and pestilences, and *earthquakes*," are more and more to characterize the coming of the end. (Matt. 24 : 7–9.) In the preceding visions we have had the famines, pestilences, and persecutions, and here we behold the commotions of nature. Haggai has prophesied: "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Yet once, it is a little while, and *I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land*" (2 : 6); and all this in specified connection with the coming of the Desire of nations. Paul, commenting upon this and like ancient predictions, speaks of a shaking of the earth and of the heaven, and connects this shaking with the coming administrations

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which are to determine and end the dispensation (Heb. 12 : 26–28.)

We know something of earthquakes—how they overturn and change the surfaces of countries, sink the hills, alter the courses of rivers, overwhelm vast populations, dry up lakes, set the mountains to vomiting fire, and agitate the mightiest seas. But, in the time to come, when God shall judge the nations for their iniquities, there shall be enlargements and intensifications of such convulsions. The commotions are to be "*great*," and they are to extend to the whole system of our world, and to involve the very heavens.

2. To the general convulsion is added *the darkening of the sun*. "And the sun became black as sackcloth of hair." I take all this literally. There is neither reason nor piety in undertaking to explain away the plain terms of Scripture, where there is no necessity for departure from their common meaning. When the Lord came down on Sinai the mountain was shrouded in darkening smokiness. When Jesus hung upon the cross, "There was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And *the sun was darkened*." (Luke 23 : 44, 45.) When the judgment of God was upon Egypt, "There was a thick darkness in all the land three days." (Ex. 10 : 22.) By Isaiah (33 : 9, 10) the word came forth: "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the earth desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. *The sun shall be darkened in his going forth*." The same was re-

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peated by Joel (3:9–15). And the blessed Saviour himself has told us, that "immediately after the tribulation of those days," and soon before the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, '*shall the sun be darkened.*" (Matt. 24:29, 30.)

In what manner this darkening is to be produced, is nowhere told us. It may be by some natural eclipse, or it may be by some extraordinary putting forth of the power of God for the purpose. We cannot explain the three days' darkness sent upon the Egyptians, nor the darkness which prevailed during the Saviour's crucifixion. It is easy enough for Omnipotence, either by natural or miraculous causes, to fulfil His own word. Extraordinary obscurations of the sun have more than once happened, and they can just as readily be made to happen again, if God so wills, and in a still more marvellous degree of intensity. On the 19th of May, 1780, a wonderfully dark day was experienced throughout the northeastern portion of this country. The witnesses of it have described it as supernatural and unaccountable. It was not an ordinary eclipse, for the moon was nearly at the full. It was not owing to a clouded condition of the atmosphere, for the stars were visible. Yet it was so dark from nine o'clock in the morning throughout the usual hours of sunshine, that work had to be suspended, houses had to be lit with candles, the beasts and fowls went to their rest as in the night-time. And though the sun was visible, it had the appearance of being shorn of all its power of illumination. Connect such an oc-

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currence with the general convulsions which have just been described, extend it over the world, intensify it according to the description of the text, and you may form some conception of this feature of what the opening of the sixth seal shall bring, when the sun shall be dull and rayless as the haircloth of a Bedouin's tent.

3. A further particular is *the ensanguined appearance of the moon.* "And the whole moon became as blood." A writer on the Apocalypse has said: "The further I advance in the exposition of this book of prophecy, the more convinced I feel that the key to its interpretation is to be found in the great outline of things which shall be hereafter sketched out by our Lord Jesus Christ in His prophecy on the Mount of Olives." Recurring to that "outline," we find this lunar phenomenon distinctly referred to. As the sun is to be darkened, so also "*the moon shall not give her light.*" (Matt. 24 : 29.) The nature of the portentous obscuration is also described. With the privation of its usual effulgence, the moon is to be converted into an object of horror. In place of the genial silver disk, men shall behold, as it were, an orb of blood—dark, dim, sickly, and portentous. The same is spoken of in other prophecies. In Joel (2 : 30) we read, that before the consummation of "the great and terrible day of the Lord," not only "the sun shall be turned into darkness," but also "the moon into blood." Anticipations and foreshadows of this have, in like manner, occurred. Great convulsions in the earth and at-

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mosphere often produce such appearances of the sun and moon. When the earth is shaken by the wrath of God, the heavenly luminaries sympathize with the general commotion; and along with this "*great shaking*," a shaking, not of the earth only, but of heaven also, we might well expect the sun to put on blackness, and the full moon to appear as if deluged in blood. Whatever the specific details of the manifestation may be, by whatever means produced, or however long continued, the general character of it will be sufficiently marked and terrific to correspond with the awfulness of the occasion to which it relates. Similar language may have applied to other scenes, but it will then be realized with a fulness and literalness which have never yet been, and on a scale altogether unprecedented.

4. Then comes *the falling of stars*.—"And the stars of the heaven fell to the earth, as a fig-tree sheddeth her untimely [or winter] figs, when shaken by a great wind." Some see in this an impossibility in the way of accepting this description as literal. But they are thinking only of the great and unknown bodies which shine in the vast fields of immensity. It remains to be proven, however, that the apostle had his eye upon stars of that character. Those heavenly orbs, of which astronomy tells, are not the only objects to which, in common language, the word *stars* literally applies. Even science speaks of "shooting stars," and "falling stars," which are not worlds at all, but *meteors*, visible only while they fall, and leav-

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ing no discoverable remains where they seem to alight. It used to be thought that they were generated in our atmosphere, but learned men now regard them as incandescent fragments of matter, detached perhaps from their proper places, and set on fire and consumed by contact with the atmosphere of the earth. Such a convulsion as the text describes, would naturally multiply the number of such loose particles, which, precipitated into our atmosphere, and ignited by contact with it, would not only fill it with moving incandescent points, such as we call shooting or falling *stars*, but also fulfil the image to which the apostle likens the falling. Conceiving of the physical universe as a great fig-tree, he beholds it terrifically shaken, but in no way blown down or destroyed. Only its unseasonable fruit, which winter has overtaken, and incongenial weather has rendered ready to drop, is made to fall.

There is also something peculiar in the apostle's designation of these falling stars, which does not appear in the common version, but which is worth notice. He calls them "*the stars of the heaven.*" Not simply "the stars," as if there could be no mistake as to the objects intended—nor yet "the stars of the heavens" generally considered—but "the stars *of the heaven;*" some particular stars of some particular heaven. And when we call to mind that the word *heaven* is often used to denote the air, the atmosphere which surrounds the earth, the region in which the clouds move, it becomes more than probable that he is here referring to

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objects which pertain to this particular region alone. The stars proper are certainly still found in their places after the fulfilment of this vision. (See chap. 8 : 12.) And remembering that the Scriptures speak in the common language of men, without reference to the distinctions of science, and that even science itself still popularly speaks of "falling stars," when it means simply meteoric phenomena, it appears but reasonable that we should understand the apostle to be speaking of something of the same sort. Professor Stuart agrees that the meaning of the words is sufficiently met by such an interpretation, and that the reference most likely is to some meteoric manifestation, the like of which has once in a while happened, and which we find spoken of, among the people and in the books, under the name of *falling stars.*

A most marvellous meteoric shower of this class was witnessed on the night of the 13th of November, 1833. It is perhaps remembered by many now present. During the three hours of its continuance, hundreds and thousands of people, of all classes, were thrown into the utmost consternation, and filled with the belief that the very scene described in this text, was actually transpiring. Fiery balls, as luminous and as numerous as the stars, came darting after each other from the sky, with vivid streaks of light trailing in the track of each. They were of various sizes and degrees of splendor, flashing as they fell, and so bright as to awaken people from their sleep. It

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seemed as if every star in the firmament had suddenly shot from its sphere, and was falling to the earth. And all who saw it will bear witness that it was a most terrific spectacle.

Conceive, then, of a repetition of that scene, intensified and extended according to the spirit of this vision, with stunning explosions added to the general commotion, and the alarming rush of hissing balls of fire, darting like rain-drops from the sky, and you have exactly what John foresaw in this part of his vision of the opening of the sixth seal.

5. "*And the heaven recoiled as a scroll rolling itself together.*" We have here the same particular heaven. With the prodigies already named, the sky folds upon itself. The fastenings which held it outstretched, are loosed in the general convulsion, and it rolls up. Great, massive, rotary motion in the whole visible expanse, is signified, as if it were folding itself up to pass away forever. Some tell us that this never can literally happen, and that we are not therefore to expect it to be fulfilled in any physical fact. But why not? Does not Peter, in a plainly literal passage, tell us of just such commotions in the aerial heavens? Does he not say, in so many words, that they shall be *loosed* (λυθήσονται), and move with a noisy rushing, after the manner of a tempest?* And so significant and awful is to be the nature of the fact, that nearly all the prophets have taken notice of it, and

* ῥοιζηδὸν παρελεύσονται. See 2 Pet. 3. 10–12.

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foretell the same in language which we must monstrously pervert to understand in any other than a literal sense. We may not be able to describe it in the language of modern science, and philosophers may laugh at the unsophisticated descriptions of God's prophets; but, everything that relates to the coming of Christ, and the day of judgment, has upon it the same disability. And if the literal truthfulness of the record will not hold in one case, I cannot see by what reason we can insist upon it in another. God certainly is able to fulfil literally all that he has spoken, and here John tells us that he really *saw* what Peter and other prophets have said shall come to pass.

6. And all this is further attended with *fearful changes in the configuration of the earth.* "And every mountain and island were moved out of their places." These are but the natural effects of the terrible convulsions that shake everything. On a smaller scale, the same has often happened. Within the space of a month past, the world has been astounded with accounts of an earthquake along the Pacific coast of South America, by which cities and villages by the score have been blotted from the earth, islands moved in their places, mountains shaken, vast districts of shore engulfed in the sea, thousands and thousands of lives lost, and hundreds of millions of treasure destroyed. Extend the same to every country and every sea; let all the dwellers on earth be made to feel such a shock, intensified so as to hurl the mountains from their seats, and wrench the

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islands from their roots, and convulse each ocean from centre to circumference; let the hills exchange places with the waters, and all the consequences of such vast and sudden transformations be spread over the face of the world, with their natural effects upon its cities, its traffic, and its thronging populations, and you may have some idea of the dreadfulness of what John beheld as ordained to come to pass under the opening of this seal.

Such, then, are the physical prodigies here foreshown. Let us now look at the impression they make upon those who witness them.

"And the kings of the earth, and the great men [nobles, lords, princes], and the captains of thousands, and the rich, and the mighty, and every slave, and every freedman, hid themselves in the caves, and the rocks of the mountains; and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: because the great day of His wrath is come, and who is able to stand!"

1. We have here a glimpse of the constitution and general condition of society at the time these prodigies befall the world. Some believe and teach, that free institutions are destined to become universal, and that monarchy is doomed to fall before the march of modern civilization. We here see that such hopes will not be realized. Kings are still on their thrones, and princes and orders of nobility remain, till the judgment comes.

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Some are looking for a blessed time of peace and prosperity in this world, when all wars shall cease, all armies be disbanded, all nations transmute their implements of destruction into instruments of husbandry, and the clash of arms be hushed forever. We here see that there will still be soldiers and military commanders pursuing their bloody profession up to the time of the end. Some will have it that universal emancipation has but a few more battles to fight, and that human slavery is as good as at an end. We here see that the day of judgment still finds slaves in the world, as well as men who have but recently been freed, and all the present distinctions of class and fortune unchanged. Suppose that the sixth seal were to be opened to-night; what would it find? Kings and emperors on their thrones; princes, nobles, dukes, and lords, securely priding themselves in the prerogatives of their caste and station; standing armies at rest and in action, and military commanders with swords upon their sides; rich people wallowing in wealth and luxury; men and women in high places and in low, working the wires that fashion events; slaves toiling at their tasks, and freedmen just out of their bondage; and evidences everywhere of a depraved and disordered state of things. This is what the judgment would find if it came to-night. And this, John tells us, is what it finds when it does come in reality. Let political reformers and theologians then say to the contrary what they please, human society as it is, and as it has been for these ages, with all its bur-

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dens, disorders, and inequalities, will continue the same, till Christ himself shall come to judge it for its sins.

2. There is one thing, however, which shall be very different under the opening of the sixth seal, from what it is now. The self-security and composure with which godless people live, will then be driven to the winds. Though all the judgments under preceding seals may have failed to appal or arouse them, they will not be able to maintain their equanimity under what this shall bring forth.

I have said, that we know something of the dreadfulness of earthquakes. And yet, we, who know them only by descriptions, cannot at all enter into the feeling of alarm and horror which they produce. A gentleman who has had some experience on the subject, says: "Although I am not a man to cry out or play the fool on such occasions, yet I do fairly own that these earthquakes are very awful, and must be felt to be understood. Before we hear the sound, or, at least, are fully conscious of hearing it, we are made sensible, I do not know how, that something uncommon is going to happen. Everything seems to change color. Our world appears to be in disorder. All nature looks different to what it was wont to do. And we feel quite subdued and overwhelmed by some invisible power, beyond human control or comprehension. Then comes the terrible sound, distinctly heard; and immediately the solid earth is all in motion, waving to and fro like the surface

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used to the shocks of battle, the rich, the great, the wise, the bond, the free, high and low, without exception, become the victims of their fears, and tremble, and howl, and pray, and rush to the fields, to the cellars, to the caves of the rocks, to the clefts in the mountains, to every place where shelter and concealment is dreamed of amid the general desperation. So John foresaw the scene, and so it will be. Self-possession, unshaken courage, dignified composure, philosophic thinking, hopefulness, assurance, and the last remains of the stern intrepidity and statue-like imperturbability which characterize some men now, will then have vanished from humanity. That day will destroy them utterly.

3. We notice, also, the correct interpretation which mankind will then put upon the terrific disturbances of nature around them. Storms, earthquakes, eclipses, and unusual phenomena in the heavens, are natural symbols of Divine wrath. The ancients regarded them as auguring and embodying the destroying power and wrath of Deity. They are always and everywhere precursors and prophecies of the forthcoming judgment of God. They are so presented in the Scriptures, and accordingly inwrought with all inspired diction. There is also an instinct to the same effect, which has ever lingered with the race, and which cannot be entirely suppressed. Modern science calls it superstition. Savans of earthly wisdom propose to explain all upon philosophic principles, and think to prove to us that neither God, nor His

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anger, nor His judgments, have aught to do with it. People also have become so enlightened nowadays, as to be above alarm at strange commotions in the elements, or signs in the sky. They have learned better. These things may all be naturally accounted for. Why, a little care might give us tables of them for a thousand years to come, with the days, and hours, and minutes noted. Indeed, men have become so knowing about Nature and her laws, that they do not see much necessity any more for a God at all, much less for any judgment or interference of His in the affairs of the universe. This is the spirit of much that men call science,—a spirit which is working itself into the popular mind, and, sad to say, largely affecting even the theological thinking and teaching of the day. But when the vision of the text comes to be realized, woe to the materialistic, pantheistic, and atheistic philosophies with which men suppose they have rid themselves of the superstitions of antiquity! One flash from the judgment throne will confound them utterly. When the sixth seal breaks, and the vibrations of it are upon the universe, turning sun and moon to darkness and blood, convulsing the firmament, shaking down the stars, and moving mountains and islands from their places, not the ignorant only, but the philosophic and the learned—kings and magnates of science and state, and all classes and kinds of men together, rush from their dwellings, strike for the caverns, cry out like terrified babes, confess to the presence of a Divine Power whose ex-

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istence their superior learning had put down as a fable, and with one accord now preach and proclaim the advent of a day which they had pronounced impossible! Why this consternation—this change in their way of regarding and treating these advent doctrines—this preaching of the judgment—this trepidation and horror about the day of wrath now? This is not the way they used to deal with this subject. There is a mighty shaking indeed; but earthquakes are all from natural causes! Rather remarkable eclipses truly; but such things are easily explicable on natural principles! An extraordinary star-shower; but these are innocent periodic things which belong to the natural ongoing of the universe! Unusual storms and atmospheric commotions; but they are the results of natural causes! Why, then, this dismay at the sublime activities of nature, which a philosophic understanding should be able calmly to contemplate and really enjoy? Cowardly fools! shall we call them, to break down in the conclusions of their superior intelligence, amid such splendid opportunities for enjoyable scientific observation? Alas, alas, the old superstition is too strong for the modern wisdom! The horror-stricken world —kings, savans, heroes—with strained eyeballs and bloodless lips, fall prostrate and confess that these beautiful activities of nature and her laws, are, after all, somehow linked in with the wrath and judgment of God and the Lamb!

4. Nor is it so much the physical prodigies, as what they argue, that renders the dismay so un-

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supportable. If there were nothing but the convulsions of the body of nature, terrific as they are, there would be a chance for some to endure them without becoming so thoroughly unmanned. But the chief consternation arises, not simply from the outward facts, but from the unwelcome conclusions which they force upon the soul. The physical manifestations may be in the line of physical laws, and in no way contrary to them; but whether miraculous or not, they are so terrific and Divine, that they compel the most atheistic to see in them the hands, and arms, and utterances of a Being transcendently greater still, and to feel the demonstration in their souls that He has verily risen up in the fierceness of just indignation against long neglect and defiance of His authority. It is not that nature has ceased to be herself, or that the principles of her activities have been repealed, that overwhelms them, but the resistless proof that all her awful potencies, now in such terrific motion, are God's direct powers, aroused and inflamed with His dreadful anger, and charged as heralds and executioners of His almighty wrath. It is not the shaking, the obscured sun, the bloody moon, the falling stars, the recoiling heavens, the moving mountains, so much as the moral truths they flash into the spirit, to wit, that God is on the throne, that sin is a reality, that judgment is come, and that every guilty one must now face an angry Creator. It is not nature's bewildering commotions, for they would willingly have the falling mountains cover them, if that would shel-

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ter them from what is much more in their view, and far more dreadful to them. What they speak of is, God upon the throne, the fear of His face, the day of reckoning, and the wrath of the Lamb. These are more than all the horrors of a universe in convulsions. These are the daggers in their hearts—the thunderbolts that rend and rive their souls—the fires that kindle the flames of hell within them.

5. And how pitiable and absurd the expedients to which they are driven! Many an opportunity for prayer had they neglected. Always had they contemned such humiliating employment. It did not suit their ideas of dignity, or their theories. But now they pray, and have a grand concert of prayer, in which kings and mighty ones join with the meanest and lowest. They had often laughed and sneered at praying men; but now they all pray. Some prostrate in the dust, some on their knees in dens and caves, some clinging to the trees, and all shrieking out in unison their terror-moved entreaties. O, imbecile people! When prayer would have been availing, they scorned and detested it as mean and useless; and now, that it is futile, they go at it with a will.

Still more absurd is the direction in which they address their prayers. Once they considered it folly that man should call on the living God; but now they pray to dead rocks! Once they thought it philosophic to deny that He who made the ear could hear prayers, or that He with whom is the Spirit, and whose is the power, could answer

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them; but now they supplicate the deaf and helpless mountains!

And yet weaker and more insane is the import of their prayers and efforts. Beautifully has the Psalmist sung: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee." (Ps. 139: 7–13.) Omniscience and omnipresence are among the natural attributes of God. The very things before these people's eyes should have been enough to teach them this. And yet, philosophers as they are, their proposal is to conceal themselves from the Almighty, and so elude His wrath! Often had shelter and peaceful security been offered them in the mercies of the loving Saviour, and as often had they despised and rejected them; but now the silly souls would take the miserable rocks for saviours! O, the foolishness of men who think it folly to serve God! "He that fleeth of them, shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them, shall not be delivered. Though they dig into hell," saith the Lord, "thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them

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down; and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence." (Amos 9 : 1–3.)

These kings and mighty ones of the earth had highly estimated the terrors of death, and tried to restrain and terrify men with fears of them. As shown in the preceding seal, they had been persecutors of the saints, and shed their blood to silence their testimony. Yet, what they then thought so awful, they are now themselves willing and anxious to suffer; yea, and to go down into everlasting nothingness, as a happy alternative to what they find coming upon them. "They say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb!" O, miserable extremity to which guilt brings men at last! There are those whom these judgments shall not thus overwhelm. Hid in Jesus, and His sheltering grace, they are secure against all such dismay. But "the day of the Lord of Hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low." (Isa. 2 : 12.)

Friends and brethren, what a mercy that that day is not yet upon us! There is a Rock to which we still may fly and pray, with hope of security in its wide-open clefts. It is the Rock of Ages. There are mountains to which we may yet betake ourselves, and be forever safe from all the dread convulsions which await the world. They are the mountains of salvation in Christ Jesus. I believe

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that I am addressing some who have betaken themselves to them. Brethren, "hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering; for He is faithful that promised." (Heb. 10 : 23.) But others are still lingering in the plains of Sodom, who need to take this warning to heart as they never yet have done. O ye travellers to the judgment, seek ye the Lord while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near! And may God in His mercy hide us all from the condemnation that awaits an unbelieving world!

Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly;
While the billows near me roll,
While the tempest still is high;
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life be past,
Safe into the haven guide,
Oh, receive my soul at last!

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LECTURE FIFTEENTH.

THE SEALING OF THE 144,000—MERCY IN THE MIDST OF JUDGMENT—ARE JEWISH PEOPLE—ARE DESCRIBED BY THEIR TRIBAL NAMES—THE NUMBER OF THEM—THE NATURE OF THEIR SEALING—NOT A MERE ARBITRARY OR EXTERNAL WORK—THE AGENT PERFORMING IT—AN IMPARTATION OF THE HOLY GHOST—HOW MANIFESTED IN THESE SEALED ONES—THE INTENT AND EFFECT OF THIS SEALING—GOD NOT YET DONE WITH THE JEWS—OUR CALLING.

Rev. 7: 1–8. (Revised Text.) After this I saw four angels standing over the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that wind might not blow upon the earth, nor upon the sea, nor upon any tree.

And I saw another angel going up from the sun-rising, having a seal of the living God; and he was crying with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was given to injure the earth and the sea, saying: Injure ye not the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads.

And I heard the number of the sealed: a hundred and forty-four thousand [were] sealed, out of every tribe of the children [rather, *sons*] of Israel; out of the tribe of Juda, twelve thousand [were] sealed; out of the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Aser, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Nepthalim, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Manasses, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Zabulon, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand [were] sealed.

THESE words describe the continuation of the action and course of events signified by the breaking of the sixth seal. It is, therefore, still

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the period of the judgment with which we here have to do. But in the midst of wrath, God remembers mercy. With all the fearful physical prodigies which mark the first shock under this seal, and the terror and dismay of mankind in general in view of those prodigies, the material universe remains, the earth continues in its place, and gracious operations still go on among its remaining populations. Though the heavens and the earth are terrifically shaken, and the whole system of nature is thrown into commotion, as if on the verge of utter ruin, there is a lull in the storm; the angels who have charge of the disturbing blasts are commanded to hold them back for a season; and a scene of calm, and of gracious manifestation to certain of the children of men, ensues, before the great and terrible day of the Lord advances to its meridian. The judgment has begun, and has progressed through a number of its most important stages, but still Divine compassion lingers, grace has not entirely departed, and the merciful act of the sealing of the 144,000 has to be completed before another step in the succession of judicial wonders can occur. And this sealing, it is, which is to occupy our attention this evening. We may consider,

I. THE SUBJECTS OF IT;

II. THE NATURE OF IT;

III. THE EFFECTS OF IT.

And to this end, may God help us with the illumination and guidance of his Holy Spirit!

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I. *Who, then, are these* 144,000 *sealed ones?* This is a vital question, in the right interpretation of this part of holy writ. But very conflicting and uncertain have been the answers generally given to it. Many writers are so perplexed and confounded with it, that they scarcely presume to answer it, and seek to quiet inquiry by saying that the subject is too difficult for man to handle. Did people only keep themselves to the plain reading of the words as they are, without subjecting them to chemical treatment to bring them into affinity with radically false conceptions of the Apocalypse, they would save themselves much perplexity, and their readers much confusion.

So long as men will keep thinking of the present Church, and the location of these events in the past, or in what is now transpiring; just so long they will remain bewildered in the fog, and fail to find any solid way through these wonderful revelations. If we only take to heart, that, when John writes "*children of Israel*," he means "children of Israel"—the blood descendants of the patriarch Jacob,—and that, when he mentions "the tribe of Juda," "the tribe of Reuben," "the tribe of Gad," "the tribe of Aser," "the tribe of Nepthalim," "the tribe of Manasses," "the tribe of Simeon," "the tribe of Levi," "the tribe of Issachar," "the tribe of Zabulon," "the tribe of Joseph," and "the tribe of Benjamin," he verily means what he says, we will at once have the subjects of this apocalyptic sealing unmistakably identified. But many are so morbidly prejudiced against everything Jewish,

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that it is concluded in advance, that anything merciful, referring to the Israelitish race, must needs be understood some other way than as the words are written. Though all the prophets were Jews, and Jesus was a Jew, and the writer of this Apocalypse was a Jew, and all the Apostles were Jews, and salvation itself is of the Jews, and the Jews as a distinct people are everywhere spoken of as destined to continue to the world's end, it is regarded as the next thing to apostasy from the faith, to apply anything hopeful, that God has said, to this particular race. Though Paul says, that, to his "kinsmen according to the flesh," "the promises" pertain; that "God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew;" "that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in," but only "in part," and only until then; and that God's unchanging covenant still has something favorable for them in reserve; even many otherwise enlightened Christians become impatient, and will not at all hear us, when we presume to pronounce God's own words as if He really meant what He has said.

No wonder, therefore, that they cannot find a consistent interpretation of a vision of grace which is predicated of Jacob's literal seed, in contradistinction from all others. Nor is there a vice or device of sacred hermeneutics, which so beclouds the Scriptures, and so unsettles the faith of men, as this constant attempt to read *Church* for *Israel*, and Christian peoples for Jewish tribes. As I read the Bible, when God says "*children of Israel*,"

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I do not understand Him to mean any but people of Jewish blood, be they Christians or not; and when He speaks of the twelve tribes of the sons of Jacob, and gives the names of the tribes, it is impossible for me to believe that He means the Gentiles, in any sense or degree, whether they be believers or not. And this would seem to be so plain and self-evident a rule of interpretation, that I can conceive of no legitimate variation from it, except in such case as the Holy Ghost Himself may explain to the contrary.

There is a sense in which a man may be a Jew outwardly, and yet not be one according to the spiritual calling of the Jews; and there is a sense in which even Gentiles, if they be true believers, are "Abraham's seed;" but I know of no instance in which the descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel include the Gentiles, or in which, what is discoursed specifically of persons out of the tribes of Juda, Reuben, Gad, Aser, Nepthalim, Manasses, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zabulon, Joseph, and Benjamin, is to be understood only of "the blessed company of *all* faithful people, gathered together from all parts of the world, and constituting the Church universal." Above all, would such a way of interpreting the Scriptures be out of place in a book in which more is said about "the church," strictly as such, than in any other sacred book, and in which it is particularly shown that the Church's judgment has begun, and to a large extent already gone into effect, before what is thus written of the tribes of the sons of Jacob takes place.

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It is also to be remembered, that the crowned Elders and the Living ones are a part, and a very conspicuous part, of "the glorified company of the whole Church;" yet, in chap. 14:3, they appear in connection with the 144,000, but as a wholly distinct body. The sealed ones are one company, complete in itself; and the Elders and Living ones are another company complete in itself. John beholds them both at the same time, the one in the presence of the other, but each with its own separate place, character, and blessedness. The 144,000 therefore can by no possibility "represent the glorified company of the whole church." There is no proof that they represent any body but themselves, or that they are at all a part of the Church, properly so called. Everything shows that they are a class of the saved, separate and distinct from all others.

They are also described as being "the first fruits unto God and the Lamb." But they cannot be the first fruits of all saints; for the Elders and Living ones are glorified, and have received their golden crowns, *before* these 144,000 have even been sealed on earth. They must therefore be the first fruits of another calling and order, after the present period of the Church, strictly so called, has run its course.

And when we take along with us the apostolic commentary upon the ancient covenants, to wit: that, after the fulness of the Gentiles is come in, the scales are to drop from the eyes of Israel's blinded descendants, and a fresh current of salva-

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tion is to set in towards them; the argument seems to me conclusive and overwhelming, that these 144,000 are just what John says they are—*Jews*, descendants of the sons of Israel—the first fruits of that new return of God to deal mercifully with the children of His ancient people for their father's sakes.

If we look a little further on in the chapter, we find another company described, whose nationalities are also distinctly given. They are "out of every nation, and [of all] tribes, and peoples, and tongues." Literal nationalities are therefore an important element in the whole chapter. And as those said to be out of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues cannot be Jews only, so those said to be out of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel cannot be Jews and Gentiles indiscriminately.

Some have inferred the necessity of taking these Jewish tribes in a mystic sense, from the omission of the names of Dan and Ephraim, and the substitution of the names of Levi and Joseph in their stead. But these are circumstances from which I infer the exact contrary. If it were the common body of all believers that is meant, the proper symbol would be the complement of the common twelve tribes, as historically known. But here is a new enumeration, and quite a different order developed, so far as respects this sealing. It is, therefore, a new and original thing to itself, in which one of the historical tribes appears to be omitted altogether, and a double number taken out of another. Besides, if we are to take these

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tribes mystically of the whole Church, it is impossible to find anything to correspond to it in all the history of the Church, past, present, or to come. On that theory, the vision has never been and cannot be explained. Hence, we are driven back upon the literal sense, which was the accepted sense in the time of Irenæus, and which introduces no such embarrassing difficulty. The tribes mentioned by name, are the tribes meant. So, at any rate, I read the sacred account; and if I err, I err with "many," and err on the side of the most direct and plainest sense of the word, as God has caused it to be written. Nor have I ever yet seen the argument for any other acceptation, which does not seem to me to torture and browbeat all the records that bear upon the case, set aside all safe laws of exegesis, and bring the whole Apocalypse into inextricable confusion.*

But these 144,000 are not simply Jews, for there are many of Jewish blood, and even of the saved among them, who are not of this number. They are Jews of a particular class, singled out from the Israelitish populations on account of spiritual attainments and character not found in the rest. They are not only descendants of the Hebrew

* Alford remarks on the passage: "By many, and even by the most recent commentator, Düsterdieck, these sealed ones are taken to represent Jewish believers; the chosen out of the actual children of Israel." Among these we may note Irenæus, Bullinger, Grotius, Bossuet, Bengel, Eichorn, Heinrichs, Maitland, Züllig, Hoffman, B. W. Newtton, Kelly, "Matheetees," and others.

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patriarchs, living in the time of the judgment, but such of those descendants as shall then correspond in their characteristics to the signification of the several tribal names by which they are designated.

In Genesis 5, we have the names of the antediluvian patriarchs, from Adam to Noah. In the meaning of those names, taken in the order in which they stand, we have a singular epitome of the history of the race, and of the principal teachings of holy Scripture from first to last. Taking these tribal names of the 144,000 in the same way, we also find a very striking indication of their personal character, on the ground of which their peculiar honors are based. All Jewish names are significant, and the meaning of those which here are given, is not hard to trace. Juda means *confession* or *praise of God;* Reuben, *viewing the Son;* Gad, *a company;* Aser, *blessed;* Nepthalim, *a wrestler* or *striving with;* Manasses, *forgetfulness;* Simeon, *hearing and obeying;* Levi, *joining* or *cleaving to;* Issachar, *reward*, or *what is given by way of reward;* Zabulon, *a home* or *dwelling-place;* Joseph, *added* or *an addition;* Benjamin, *a son of the right hand, a son of old age.* Now put these several things together in their order, and we have described to us: Confessors or praisers of God, looking upon the Son, a band of blessed ones, wrestling with forgetfulness, hearing and obeying the word, cleaving unto the reward of a shelter and home, an addition, sons of the day of God's right hand, begotten in the extremity of the age.

This certainly is very remarkable, and cannot

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be taken as mere accident, particularly as the order of the names, and some of the names themselves, are changed from the enumerations of the twelve tribes found in other places. The same will also account for the omission of the names of Dan and Ephraim, and the substitution of the names of Levi and Joseph in their stead. Those names are not of the right import to describe these 144,000. Dan means *judging*, or *the exercise of judicial prerogatives;* but these 144,000 are not judges, and never become such. Ephraim means *increase, growth by multiplication;* but these 144,000 are a fixed company, with none of the same class going before them, and none of the same class ever to come after them. The idea of increase or multiplication is altogether foreign to them. "They are virgins." These names are therefore unsuitable, and are superseded by others better adapted to describe the parties to whom they are applied.

These 144,000, then, are Israelites, living in the period of the judgment, who are only then brought to be confessors and praisers of God, whilst the most of their kindred continue in unbelief and rebellion. Viewing the Son, as their fathers never would view Him, they acknowledge Him as their Messiah and Judge. As Jews, they thus constitute a distinct company to themselves, and are blessed. As the result of their conversion, they are also very active in practical righteousness. They strive and wrestle against their own and their nation's long obliviousness to the truth as it is in Jesus, hearing and obeying now the voice of

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the Lord, cleaving unto the shelter and heavenly home promised by the prophets as the portion of those who call upon the name of the Lord even at that late hour. They are not of the Church proper; for their repentance comes too late for that. They are a superaddition to the Church—a supplementary body—near and precious to Christ, but made up after the proper Church has finished its course. As Paul in his apostleship was like one born out of due time, so they are in the position of children belated in their birth;—sons of God indeed, and destined to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth; but sons begotten in the day of God's right hand, in the period of His power and judgment, in the last extremity of this age. All this comes out naturally and distinctly, without the least straining of a single word.

As to the number of this company, there could not be a clearer or more definite announcement than that which is given. John says: "*I heard the number of the sealed: a hundred and forty-four thousand,*"—twelve thousand out of each of the twelve tribes named,—twelve times twelve,—not a unit more, nor a unit less.

Owing to the fact that most of our expositors suppose this company to embrace all the saved of all the natural children of Jacob, or the whole Israel of God both Jewish and Gentile, they have generally taken these numbers as mystical—a definite number for an indefinite. Unwilling to believe, as they well might be, that only 144,000 of all the children of men, or of all the children of

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Abraham, are finally saved, they propose to understand a much greater number than the figures give. But such views of this body of sealed ones are thoroughly erroneous. These 144,000 are not all the saved, either from among the Jews and Gentiles together, or from among the Jews alone. They are a particular class of the saved, gathered up from among the seed of Jacob in and during the period of the Judgment. And with this made out, as I think it is most conclusively, every reason for taking these numbers in any but a literal sense entirely disappears. John heard the number of them announced as twelve times twelve thousand; and I know not by what right they are to be accounted any more or any less.

II. We come, then, to inquire into the nature of the sealing of which these 144,000 are the subjects.

1. It is manifest that the transaction takes place on earth, and in the case of people contemporaneously living in the flesh. It does not run co-ordinately with the entire Christian dispensation, for it only begins after the Judgment has begun, and has progressed beyond the opening of the sixth seal. It is also completed and finished before the opening of the seventh seal; for the opening of the seventh seal, with its trumpets and vials, is the letting loose of the four hurtful blasts which are commanded to be held back until the sealing is done. Under the sounding of the fifth trumpet particularly, we find these sealed ones living and moving among those upon whom the plague falls,

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and exempted from it by reason of their having been sealed. The sealing has therefore been finished before that time.

2. This sealing involved the impartation of a conspicuous and observable mark. A sealing is necessarily a marking of some sort. It is a common thing in God's administrations to have some fixed and understood token by which His people are distinguished. Under the Old Testament He set a visible mark in the flesh of His chosen. When He visited Egypt with death, He exempted the children of Israel by a mark which He commanded to be put upon their dwellings. When Jericho fell, He saved Rahab by the mark of the scarlet line which she was directed to bind about her window. Antichrist, in his mimicry of Christ, causes a mark to be put upon the right hand or forehead of his people, and will not permit any one to buy or sell who has not the mark. And we hence infer, that this sealing also involves the impressment of some manifest sign upon those who are the subjects of it.

Ezekiel describes a similar transaction, under similar circumstances, in which reference may be to precisely the same thing beheld in this vision. In the one case the executioners of vengeance appear with slaughter weapons in their hands, in place of the four angels with their hurtful blasts in this instance. But in that description also, a single sealer appears, who is sent out before the slaughterers, to "set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for the abomina-

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tions," on account of which judgment impends. That mark was to be a visible means of identifying those who receive it, and of securing their safety in the midst of general destruction. And so these 144,000 have impressed upon them some manifest token, at least as conspicuous and prominent as a physical inscription upon their foreheads, if not, indeed, a physical mark. It is described as a sealing "in their foreheads," and as the "Father's name written in their foreheads." (Rev. 9:4; 14:1), and it cannot be otherwise than something particularly distinguishing.

3. It is something Divine. The seal with which the sealing is done, is "a seal of the living God." The affixing of a seal of God can only be by Divine authority and appointment. It is so intensely an official act, and connects so fully with the direct administrations and government of God, that it must needs be done by the hand or ordination of the Almighty himself. It so pledges Him, and to Him, that it must be regarded as His own act.

4. The office of this sealing is in the hands of an Angel, who comes forth from the sun-rising. He is a high officer of God. He carries a seal of the miracle-working God, and He gives commands to the angels of judgment. Many take Him to be the Lord Jesus himself. There is much to sustain this view. The star which heralded His nativity came from the East. He is himself called "the bright and morning star." Ezekiel beheld the Shekinah returning to the deserted temple from the East. His second coming is referred to

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as the lightning which shines from the East even unto the West. The promise to the Jews with reference to the judgment time is: "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise;" which involves a going up from the East. And He is the sender of the Holy Ghost. With these representations the vision of this Angel well harmonizes. We may, therefore, readily regard this Sealer as verily the Jehovah-Angel, even the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who comes forth, invisibly it may be, for the sealing of the 144,000. That He appears as an Angel, that He speaks of God as *his* God, and that He alludes to the sealing as if other agencies were associated with Him in the work, does not at all interfere with this conclusion. Like language is found in the lips of Jesus in other portions of the Scriptures; and one of His most characteristic titles represents Him as the Messenger from God—the Angel of the Lord. He is here also very particularly distinguished from, and assigned an authority over, the four angels of judgment. It really does not alter the character of the matter whether this Sealer from the sun-rising be Christ in person or not. It is, at any rate, a high officer of God who has charge of the work; and what he does proceeds from Christ's mediatorial achievements.

5. This sealing was moreover a moral, and not a mere arbitrary or external thing. Those who receive it are described as "the servants of our God," as contradistinguished from other classes of men. And from what is said of them in the

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fourteenth chapter, they are very eminently and very peculiarly God's servants. They are there described as having been entirely free from the adulterous and idolatrous defilements of mankind in general. "In their mouth was found no guile." And they finally come up faultless before the throne. The whole spirit of the record shows, that this their extraordinary sealing is connected with, and based upon, their extraordinary spiritual characteristics. This was also the case in the parallel instance in the ninth of Ezekiel. It was the men who sighed and who cried for the abominations that were done, upon whom the mark was set. And it is the common law of the Divine proceedings, that His special honors are never otherwise conferred than in connection with special dutifulness and fidelity under very special trials and difficulties. Every branch that bringeth forth fruit he purgeth, that it may bring forth more fruit; and he who doth not profit by the talents bestowed, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath. These were people who had humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God. They had learned rightly to interpret the signs of judgment enacting about them in the heavens above and in the earth beneath. They had learned, and effectually taken to heart, the true character of the times in which they were living, what God was doing in their day, and what place they occupied in the ongoing of the Divine purposes. And the fruit of all was a vigor of faith, confession, and holy consecration seldom attained

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among the children of men. All their idolatries, and sensualities, and unbeliefs, they had most solemnly abjured. They had now given up to know nothing but God and His service, in the most unfaltering trust in that Lion of the tribe of Judah under whose wondrous power the whole earth was trembling and smarting, as if in the agonies of dissolution. And because of this thorough spiritual transformation, and their holy sighing and crying for the abominations that cover the world, "the Angel of the covenant" comes up from the quarter of grace to honor their devotions, and to set apart and seal them for a peculiar destiny of favor and exaltation.

6. And from this we are enabled to get a still deeper glance into the nature of this peculiar sealing. The seal of God is the Spirit of God, particularly in His more unusual gifts. Thus Christ himself was *sealed* by the Father, when the Holy Ghost descended upon Him from heaven, marking Him out, and endowing Him for His wonderful career. (John 6 : 27.) Thus, also, Paul wrote to the Ephesians (1 : 13): "After that ye believed, ye were *sealed* with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance;" and besought them: "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are *sealed* unto the day of redemption." (Eph. 4 : 30; also, 2 Cor. 1 : 22.) We may, therefore, conceive of this sealing of the 144,000 as a special and extraordinary impartation of the Holy Ghost; which again connects this vision with particular Old Testament promises.

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By the mouth of Joel, the Lord said to Israel: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." This was indeed a general promise, but with it was coupled another, which is not so general, but particularly to Israel: "And *your* sons and *your* daughters [O Jews] shall prophesy, *your* old men shall dream dreams, *your* young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaidens in those days will I pour out my Spirit." Peter tells us that this began to be fulfilled in the miracle of Pentecost; but the fulfilment did not end there. There are also particulars in the passage which were not fulfilled upon the primitive Church—particulars which refer to the judgment times, and connect directly with the scenes to which this sealing of the 144,000 is related. "Wonders in heaven and earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke," are spoken of; and the turning of the sun into darkness, and the moon into blood; and all, directly on the eve of "the great and terrible day of the Lord." In this we distinctly recognize the occurrences under the red horseman of the second seal, the physical prodigies of the sixth seal, and the exact manifestations under the first and fifth trumpets. And in connection with these wonders, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call." (Joel 2:28-32.) Pre-eminent among this "remnant" are these 144,000. In them, therefore, is fulfilled above all

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what is foreshown of mercy and grace thus mixed up with the terrors of the judgment. They are the sons and daughters of the people whom the prophet addressed. They are the ones who, above others of their time, call upon the name of the Lord. They are related to Mount Zion and Jerusalem as none of the Gentiles are. And it is not too much to say, that their peculiar sealing at least embraces this self-same miraculous endowment with the Spirit of God, which is so often referred to as the seal of God. They shall be made to dream God-begotten dreams, and to see God-shown visions. The Pentecostal Baptism from heaven shall be renewed in them with its original vigor. All the fruits and manifestations of the Holy Ghost, which characterized the apostles and early Christians at the beginning, shall reappear in them, perhaps with augmented power. And whether particular ceremonies connect with the thing or not, this is the chief element and essence of this sealing with "a seal of the living God." At any rate, those sealed, by virtue of their sealing, have the Father's name in them; and *so* in them, as to mark and distinguish them as though a visible inscription stood written upon their foreheads. And those who are so eminently and peculiarly the bearers of the Father's name, must needs be partakers, in very extraordinary degree, of the gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost. Besides, the title of "the living God" is seldom, if ever, used except in connection with some display of His power in the sphere of the miraculous.

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7. Very various and diverse, hence would also be, the outward manifestations of this mark. It would show itself in the doctrines professed by the sealed ones, in the power with which they announce and defend them, perhaps in miraculous works wrought in proof of them, in a particularly holy, prayerful, and self-denying life, in a bravery and fearlessness before gainsayers which no earthly powers can daunt, and in a wisdom and heavenliness of demeanor, making them appear like beings from another world, and lighting up their very faces, perhaps, like the face of Moses when he came down from the mount, or like the face of Stephen in the midst of his murderers.

III. We come, now, to the intent and effect of this marvellous sealing.

It is agreed, on all hands, that it is a merciful and gracious act. Its first effect is to stay the blasts of judgment, and to produce a lull in the work of vengeance. Four angels, stationed over the earth at the four points of the compass, have already received power to hurt the earth and the sea. These four agents seem to be the same that act in connection with the first four trumpets, under which the whole system of the world is so fiercely smitten. Hail and fire, mingled with blood, there fall upon the earth, and the third part of what grows in the fields is destroyed. A great burning mountain is cast into the sea, and a burning star upon the rivers and fountains, turning the waters into blood or bitterness, and

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making havoc with all forms of life, both in the deep and on the land. Portentous and afflictive manifestations are also wrought in sun, moon, and stars. All these would seem to be, at least included in, the blasts with which these four angels had received power to blow upon the earth, the sea, and the trees. But the sealing Angel, with a great voice, commands them to hold back their blasts, until these servants of God are sealed.

And so it is ever. God's people are the salt of the earth. But for them, and God's gracious purposes toward them, judgment and ruin would instantly break over the globe. It is only for the elect's sake that the world stands, that the sun shines, that the fields yield their increase, and that men's greatest blessings are not at once turned into curses. It is only because God has his servants in the world, and saints preparing for glory, and children among earth's populations who sigh and cry for the abominations that are done, that the chariots of destruction do not rush over all that is. Governments stand, society exists, the waters flow, the trees live, the sea retains its salubrity, the grasses grow upon the earth, and the death-blasts of the destroying angels are restrained, only because the Lord is engaged taking out from among the nations a people for His name, the number of which must first be made up. Ten righteous persons in Sodom would have put off the ruin of that sink of sin; and even when the terrific scenes of the great day have begun, and advanced to the very margin of their culmination,

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the whole process is made to delay till the 144,000 servants of God are sealed. O the compassion and forbearance of Jehovah, and the intensity of His faithfulness to them that call upon Him! Nor do the proud and haughty ones of this world begin to comprehend, neither can it be measured, how much they owe to those meek children of obscurity, whose faith, devotions, and concern about the judgment, they so often ridicule, and so much despise.

But this sealing was more particularly for the comfort, assurance, and security of the sealed ones themselves. In the parallel passages in Ezekiel and Joel, the preservation of the marked ones, and the deliverance of those who call upon the name of the Lord, are specifically asserted. Here also, in the general commission of the agents of destruction and torment against men in general, there is a reservation in favor of those who have the seal of God in their foreheads. (Chap. 9:4.) The nature of the sealing itself is such as to forewarn and empower those who receive it against the impending evils. The restraint upon the blasts until this sealing is completed, also shows a relation of this sealing to those blasts, implying securement against them. And all such Divine markings in every other case had protection and deliverance for their object. It was so in the case of the children of Israel in Egypt. It was so in the case of Rahab. And it is so in the case of Baptism now. Hence, as remarked by Wordsworth, "this action of sealing with the seal or

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signet of God, is equivalent to a declaration, that they, who are so sealed, appertain to God, and are distinguished as such from others who do not thus belong to Him, and are assured by Him of His protection against all evil." As the gift of the Holy Ghost certified and assured the apostles, of the Divinity of the cause they had espoused, of their acceptance as God's acknowledged ambassadors, of the certain fulfilment unto them of all that their Lord had promised, and of their everlasting life, triumph, and glory, no matter what men might do unto them, or what might happen; so this sealing with the seal of the living God certified and assured these 144,000 of the unmistakable character of their faith, of their election as a first fruits of incoming new administrations, and guaranteed unto them, not only security amid the blasts of heightening judgment upon earth, but also a peculiar and blessed portion with Jesus in His glory. And as the Baptism of the Spirit secured the safety of the primitive Christians when Jerusalem was overwhelmed, so this sealing secures the safety of the sealed ones as the judgment of the great day goes over the nations. They trust in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; and the Psalmist's words are fulfilled unto them: "*When the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it.*"

From this, then, we see, that God is not yet done with the Jews. Their national restoration is not necessarily involved in this text; though such a restoration in advance of this sealing, would

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admirably agree with the vision, and with other predictions relating to the same transactions. But it *is* involved, that the Jews shall remain a distinct people upon earth up to the day of judgment; and that, before the final consummation, God will again turn Himself toward them, and begin to deal with them once more in mercy, as in the days that He brought them up out of the land of Egypt. Edom, and those who disbelieve with Edom in Jacob's birthright, may sneeringly ask: "Watchman, what of the night?" But, there is a morning coming. A stormy morning it may be; but a morning nevertheless, and not without its sunshine and its rays of blessing. They err who tell us that all God's promises to Israel as a race are dead, never again to be revived. The Giver of them does not so speak. His inspired Apostle, even after Jerusalem had fallen, wrote, with regard to this very subject, that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance;" and that for the self-same Israel which has fallen, and been cast down, and broken off, there is a coming fulness, recovery, and grafting in again, when the Deliverer shall come. (See Rom. 11.) And the visible pledge of something special yet in reserve for this marvellous race, is written in all their history, from the fall of Jerusalem to this hour. Else why the unparalleled preservation of this people, with such unwaning and ever-active life-energy, "against such overwhelming odds, through the storms of so many centuries, the vicissitudes and perils of so many generations, and amid the wrecks of so many

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buried empires?" Else why that undying presentiment, which throbs in the universal Jewish heart, and which no adversity can quench or prosperity entirely charm into quiet, of some future return to the high estate of their fathers? The very land itself, in its perpetual refusal to give peaceful and secure home to any of the Gentiles who have overrun it, throughout all its sad desolations, gives out its plaints and prayers that Jehovah would not forget his covenant with the house of Israel, and utters from every hill and valley, shore and sea, the prophecy of some future of hope and blessing which cannot be delayed forever. What that hope is, we need not here inquire. But linked in with it is the sealing of 144,000 out of the twelve tribes of the children of Jacob, to stand as God's servants and witnesses upon earth amid the ongoings of the judgment, and finally to take their places with the Lamb on the Mount Zion, amid the Halleluias and harpings of heaven, and to sing there a song, never sung before, and never to be sung by any but themselves.

Friends and brethren, it is not for us to be a part of this 144,000. But we have our calling also, and a much superior one. The Jehovah Angel from the sun-rising is even now at work throughout the world, marking and sealing men for kinghoods and priesthoods far sublimer than all the honors of these 144,000. His proposal is made alike to all, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, bond or free; and that proposal is, by His word, sacra-

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ments and Spirit, to set a seal upon each of us, not only for our safety in the day of judgment, but for our admission into the royalties of heavenly empire. And it is only to allow time for the making up of the full number to reign with Him forever, that the blasts of vengeance are restrained, and the day of judgment tarries. Child of Adam, hast thou, then, the mark? Hast thou been set apart to God, and sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise?

I am addressing some who hope they have the seal of God. Baptized into His name, enrolled among His professing people, communing punctually at His table, lifting oft their hearts and voices unto Him as their stay and strength amid earth's trials, believing with all their soul in Jesus as their salvation, and with the desire ever burning in their breasts to be found of Him in peace, they promise well to be among the first-born in heaven. But, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12.) No one of us is out of danger yet; and the word of the Master is: "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (Rev. 3:11.)

But I am addressing others who have forfeited their right to any such hope. Though baptized, it is the same as if they had not been, except that they have vows upon them which they do not fulfil. Though outwardly grafted into the Church, no life-connection has been formed, and to-night they are mere dead branches, leafless, fruitless, unsightly, and ready for the burning. They are witnesses against themselves that they have chosen

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them the Lord to serve Him; but they have not done it. O ye backsliding children, remember whence ye are fallen, and repent, and do the first works, lest your Lord come in an hour when ye think not, and assign you place with hypocrites and unbelievers. Though you may never have run to the same excess of riot with many around you, if you have lived forgetful and neglectful of God and duty, it would be blasphemy for you to say that you are ready for the judgment. Up, then, and be doing; for your opportunities will soon be past.

And yet others are listening to me who have not so much as been baptized; whose names are nowhere on the records of the pious; who have hitherto been living without God and without hope in the world; and who are conscious that no saving mark is on their foreheads. Prayerless and careless, they have passed the precious hours in which they might have become the sons of God, and are to-night on the road to everlasting death. O sinful, self-deceiving mortal, to thee, once more, is the word of this salvation sent!

> Jesus ready stands to save thee,
> Full of pity joined with power.

With the seal of the living God in hand, He waits consent to stamp its saving impress on thy brow. Ask, and it shall be given; seek, and thou shalt find. But let not another day or hour be lost, lest there should be no more hope for thee.

LECTURE SIXTEENTH.

THE VISION OF THE PALM-BEARING MULTITUDE—UNCERTAINTY OF COMMENTATORS AS TO WHO THEY ARE—NOT FIRST CLASS SAINTS—NOT THE SEALED ONES—NOT THE CHURCH GENERAL—HARDLY ANY RESURRECTED ONES AMONG THEM—ARE RANSOMED MEN—PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN THE JUDGMENT TIME—THE "LEFT" WHEN THE CHURCH WAS TAKEN—THEIR CONVERSION AND FINAL BLESSEDNESS—HIGHER BLESSINGS THAN THEIRS.

REV. 7:9–17. (Revised Text.) After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, out of every nation, and [of all] tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm-branches in their hands; and they cry with a great voice, saying, The salvation [be ascribed] to our God who sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb. And all the angels were standing around the throne, and the elders, and the four living ones, and they fell before the throne on their faces and worshipped God, saying, Amen, the blessing, and the glory, and the wisdom, and the thanksgiving, and the honor, and the power, and the might, be to our God unto the ages of the ages. Amen.

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, These that are arrayed in the white robes, who are they? and whence came they? And I said unto him, My lord, thou knowest. And he said (to me), These are they that come out of the tribulation, the great [one]; and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. On this account they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne [Codex Sinaiticus: *knows them*] shall tabernacle over them. They shall not hunger any more, nor yet thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, no nor any scorching heat: because the Lamb which

is in the midst of the throne is their shepherd, and shall lead them to fountains of waters of life, and God shall wipe away every tear out of their eyes.

THREE visions are embraced in the results of the breaking of the sixth seal: first, the prodigious commotions which fill the world with consternation; second, the sealing of the 144,000; and here, the multitude of palm-bearers before the throne. The first two of this particular series relate to the earth and to people in the flesh; the one which we are now to consider relates to heaven and to people in heaven. What it presents is subsequent in time, both to the great shaking and the gracious sealing. The great and terrible Day of the Lord is not one ordinary day of twelve or twenty-four hours. All these seals, and the varied occurrences under them, belong to that day; but it is very manifest that each of them covers a continuous period of months and years. The vision now before us refers to one section in a series of successive judicial wonders.

The rapt apostle is in heaven. He was called thither at a very early stage of these successive visions, and from thence he contemplates all that he narrates after the beginning of the fourth chapter. It was from heaven that he beheld the shaking and the sealing; and from the same point of observation he sees this company of palm-bearers. They stand before the throne, and before the Lamb. They shout and praise God for their redemption. The angels form a grand circle around them; the throne, with the Living ones and the

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Elders, as described in the fourth chapter, being in the centre. They are arrayed in bright robes, are acknowledged as servants of God, and pronounced forever free from tribulation, and from whatever might distress them or interfere with their blessedness.

The picture would seem to be a very plain one, and one easy to be understood. There was also such a particular announcement of the history and character of the multitude in view, that there would appear to be no room for difficulty in this regard. And yet, on all the prevalent systems of Apocalyptic interpretation, the question of the Elder: "*Who are they? and whence came they?*" is still the great question to be decided. Indeed, there is scarcely one point with reference to these palm-bearers upon which expositors are agreed. It is generally acknowledged that they are, or represent, children of men, who had a deal of trouble in their day, and are some way related to the family of the redeemed; but whether people in the flesh on earth, or disembodied spirits in the intermediate state, or risen and glorified saints in their heavenly home, is matter of mere dreamy opinion, indifferently debated, and in no way settled. And from what I have seen upon the subject, I would take it as a crucial point to try the consistency of any proposed method of interpreting the Apocalypse, whether it has capacity satisfactorily to dispose of this palm-bearing multitude.

Some have taken these palm-bearers to be the early Christians, victorious over the sorrows and

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persecutions which afflicted the Church in the first ages. Others see in them a symbol of the prosperity which came to the Church by the conversion of the Emperor Constantine; or of the vast accessions which were made to the Church under his and subsequent reigns; or of the exalted and happy state of the Church in a fancied millennium yet to be realized in this world. Others take these palm-bearers to be the spirits of the redeemed, anterior to the resurrection; others, the 144,000 sealed ones of the preceding vision, exalted to their final glory; others, the whole body of the Church of all ages; others, the Church of the Gentiles; some the Church on earth; some the Church in resurrection glory; some the Church in some ceremony of recognition by Christ in heaven; and some a mere poetic adumbration of victory for the Gospel, without definite significance or application. A greater chaos of opinions and fancies is scarcely to be found on any other distinct subject presented in the Scriptures, than that which exists upon this. There is no alternative, therefore, if we would at all ascertain the truth, but to go back to first principles, and find out some method of explaining this whole Book, which will take in these palm-bearers, in the place at which they appear, in harmony with all the statements given concerning them, and with all that goes before and follows after.

On the plain and simple principles upon which we have conducted this exposition thus far, we cannot well fail to reach results of a definite and

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solid character, needing no far-fetched and doubtful substructure to bring us to them, and so direct that the plainest understanding may judge of their worthiness to be accepted as the real truth meant to be set forth.

It is sometimes profitable to consider questions negatively. It serves to narrow the inquiry, and to free and clear the subject for more direct solution and settlement. And this method seems to be called for in this case. In order, therefore, to decide rightly who these palm-bearers are, I will first show *who they are not.*

1. Evidently they are not the first and highest class of redeemed men. As we have seen in the fourth and fifth chapters, there is a body of ransomed ones, glorified, crowned, and promoted to pre-eminent dignity in heaven, where the apostle beheld and heard them before the book was taken, and hence in advance of all the judgment plagues developed under the seals. These are the Elders and the Living ones, redeemed out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation—the seniors in glory, and highest of all the saints—crowned with golden crowns, and related to the throne as none others. No sooner had John seen the judgment throne set, than he also saw other thrones around it, and these princely Elders seated on them, ready to take part in the solemn adjudications about to be visited upon the earth; and also Living ones conjoined with the throne, and sharing in the administration of its decrees. These same Elders and Living ones appear again in the

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vision before us, occupying the same nearness to the throne and the same royal dignity in which the seer first beheld them. They are distinguished in various particulars from the palm-bearing multitude. They *sit;* the palm-bearers *stand.* They have crowns and thrones; the palm-bearers have neither. They appeared in their places and received their rewards before the sorrows of judgment began; the palm-bearers only come to their place before the throne *after* the judgment has progressed to the sixth seal. The Elders were in heaven before "the hour of trial" came, being "accounted worthy to escape all these things;" the palm-bearers were *in* that "trial," and only reach heaven "out of the tribulation, the great one." The Elders and Living ones are "Kings and Priests;" the palm-bearers are connected with the same general company, but only in the capacity of servants. It is therefore a great mistake to confound these palm-bearers with the highest order of saints.

2. Equally erroneous is it, to identify these palm-bearers with the sealed ones of the preceding vision. The sealed ones consist of a definite and ascertained number; but these palm-bearers are uncounted and numberless. The sealed ones are all Israelites, blood-descendants of the patriarch Jacob; but these palm-bearers are described as "*out of every nation, and* [*of all*] *tribes, and peoples, and tongues.*" The sealing of the sealed ones had reference to their preservation through storms of judgment upon men on earth, which storms are only let loose under the seventh seal; but these

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palm-bearers are already in heaven before the seventh seal is touched. Besides, in a subsequent vision, in chap. 14, we find this particular 144,000 again, in their own distinct character, and only then, at that late period, introduced into their glorified estate. It is, therefore, most unreasonable, and forever irreconcilable with the record, to take these palm-bearers and the 144,000 sealed ones as one and the same body. They are as different as time, place, and characterizing circumstances can make two classes of people.

3. Neither do these palm-bearers represent the Church universal at the end of the great tribulation. We have that in the 20th chapter, in its own proper place, and including all these several separate classes of the redeemed. I have seen it put forth by an otherwise creditable writer, and upon the authority of the vision now before us, that there is no such thing as a rapture of the Church before the great tribulation; that these palm-bearers show us the Church in final salvation; and that they all pass under the great tribulation, and only come to glory through it. But he is sadly mistaken in every point of this statement. Where do the gold-crowned Elders and Living ones come from, if there is no rapture of the Church before the great tribulation? They are glorified saints, clearly identified as such, in chapters 4 and 5; and they are glorified and crowned before the great judgment tribulation begins, being saved from that "hour of trial." And where is the proof that these palm-bearers represent the Church at all? They

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are not called the Church, or any part of it. The Church—the *Ecclesia*—in its proper New Testament acceptation, ends its earthly course with what was represented by "the seven churches," and is never heard of again in all the Apocalypse, after the third chapter, except as it appears in the Elders and Living ones in glory. There still are believers, saints, and witnesses for God, who subsequently attain to high and glorious places in the Divine Kingdom; but they are not "the Church of the *first-born*,"—the only proper Church,—which receives its judgment, and whose true members are apportioned their heavenly dignities, before a single seal is broken, and hence some time before this palm-bearing multitude appears before the throne.

Besides, if there is no rapture of the Church until the final termination of the judgment troubles, and all the saints together only then are introduced into glory, how shall we account for John's mental questionings and uncertainties with reference to these palm-bearers? If they represent the finally complete Church, did he not know that the Church was to be thus exalted and glorified? Was he so ignorant of the character and destiny of that chosen body of which he was an apostle and a chief, as not to know it, or whence it came, upon encountering it in heaven? Would it not be a sorry impeachment of his apostolic character and enlightenment, besides very stupid and unreasonable, to proceed on such an assumption, or on anything which involves it? The man-

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ıfest fact that he was perplexed and in doubt with reference to these palm-bearers, and that the Elder interfered to solve his questionings, proves that they are not the Church proper, but the Church of the *after-born*, if of the Church at all; that is, a body of saved ones, with a history and place peculiarly their own, and not as yet exactly understood by the apostle.

Still further, it is a false gloss upon the Elder's words, to understand them as if these palm-bearers had passed through the entire duration of the judgment troubles before reaching the position in which John beholds them. The language corresponds with the order of succession in these several visions, and suggests, if it does not imply, that these palm-bearers cease to be in the great tribulation before its final termination. It is not said that they *pass through it*, but that they *come out of it*, thus leaving it behind them to run on after they are gone.

Some argue, indeed, that "the great tribulation" is realized only under the seventh seal, during the murderous domination of the Beast and the False Prophet; and that as these palm-bearers "come out of the tribulation, the great one," we must necessarily throw this vision forward, and nearer to the extremity at which all tribulation ends. But this also is a mistake. That which the Scriptures describe as "the great tribulation," though inseparably linked with the Judgment, is made up of more than one blast. There is a tide in it, dividing it into sections. There was a prelibation

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of it in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish state, as that was also a prelibation of the Judgment itself. And though the highest stress and fulness of the great tribulation are realized under the seventh seal with its trumpets and vials, we have the testimony of Christ himself, that mighty gusts of its power are expended before the opening of the sixth seal. The darkening of the sun, the obscuration of the moon, the falling of the stars, and the shaking of the whole system of nature, described in Matthew 24 : 29, and Mark 13 : 24, are precisely identical with the great physical prodigies which John beheld at the opening of the sixth seal, and are the great characteristics of the sixth seal. And yet, in both instances, these occurrences are located by the Saviour "*after*" and "immediately after," very sore and awful tribulation, which is necessarily embraced in, though it does not exhaust, that "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." (Matt. 24 : 21.)* We

* It is manifest that the great and unequalled tribulation here described, is not viewed by the Saviour as finally ended before the occurrences of verse 29. This is proven from what is said in verse 30; for there he tells us that "*then*"—after the physical commotions of verse 29—"*shall all the tribes of the earth mourn.*" This universal mourning is certainly a part of what is summarily referred to in verse 21; but it is specifically said to come *after* the events which are confessedly coincident with the sixth seal. The manner in which Mark gives the same things, seems also distinctly to imply, that the tribulation preceding the disturbances in sun, moon, and stars, is only a part or section of *the one* great time of trouble. He represents the Saviour as saying, "after *that* tribulation, the sun shall be darkened." &c., imply-

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thus have it scripturally ascertained, that "the tribulation, the great one," partly precedes, as well as partly succeeds, the breaking of the sixth seal. These palm-bearers could therefore be *in it* and *come out of it*, and still be transferred to heaven before the last dregs of it are poured out upon the guilty world.

Referring back to the second, third, fourth, and fifth seals—to the red horseman, taking peace from the earth and filling it with strife, havoc, and bloodshed—to the black horse of scarcity and famine—to the livid horse, with death-plague on his back and greedy hell at his heels, overrunning the world—and to the persecution and butchery of men for their faithful testimony for God under the fifth seal—we behold an accumulation of sufferings and horrors which, if they belong not to the Great Tribulation of the judgment times, I know not how to place or what to call. And as these palm-bearers do not appear upon the heavenly scene until after the opening of the sixth seal,

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ing some *other* or *further* tribulation, which the record in Matt. 24:30, and the trumpets and vials of the Revelation show to be subsequent to these marked commotions, just as the first was before them.

It is quite untenable to assign the unequalled tribulation of Matt. 24:21 to the fall of Jerusalem, and the subsequent afflictions of the Jewish people, in any sense except as preliminary first fruits—a mere sample in advance; for in Daniel 12:1, this unparalleled time is unmistakably connected with *the deliverance*, not with the destruction, of that people. Properly, therefore, it relates to the *ending* of the times of the Gentiles, not to the beginning of them, as some have erroneously insisted.

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they must needs have been partakers in these dreadful trials, and hence are rightly described as coming *out of* "the tribulation, the great one," though translated and in heaven before its last blasts smite the guilty world.

Our position thus stands firm, that these palm-bearers do not represent the Church general at the end of all tribulation, or anywhere else.

4. It is doubtful, even, whether there are any resurrected people at all among this multitude. There may be such, but there is no proof to that effect. There is nothing said about resurrection, and nothing which necessarily involves it. A rapture or translation, like that of Enoch or Elijah, is implied; for these people are in heaven, and have received their places and rewards; but it is not intimated that any of them had ever died. They are to hunger and thirst no more; but it is not added that they shall die no more. To those under the fifth seal, who had lost their lives for Christ, the word was that they must rest as disembodied souls under the altar, until others of their brethren should be slain as they had been. But we read of no more such slaying of witnesses for the truth before the opening of the seventh seal. This would seem to imply that no resurrection occurs between the fifth and the seventh seals. It is but a remote implication, and cannot be regarded as conclusive; but if correct, it precludes the possibility of any resurrected ones being among this palm-bearing multitude. At any rate, as all of them come "out of the tribulation, the great one,"

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there can be no resurrected ones included, except such as died during the great tribulation time.

We thus find our inquiry greatly narrowed, and ourselves far on the way to a satisfactory understanding of the whole matter. I therefore proceed to state more positively who these palm-bearers are, and whence they come.

1. They are ransomed human beings. They were once sinners and sufferers on the earth, and members of its tribes and peoples. They were cleansed and sanctified by the blood of Jesus. They ascribe their salvation to God and to the Lamb. Whether they be rated with the Church proper, or not, they are by nature of the stock of Adam, and by grace of the family of the redeemed.

2. They are people who were living on the earth in the period of the Judgment. The great tribulation times are everywhere inseparably linked with the judgment times (see Dan. 12, Matt. 24, Mark 13, Rev. 1 : 7); and this whole multitude is made up of those who come *out of the great tribulation.* This is positively stated by the hierophant Elder, and so recorded by John. It is therefore true, and no man is at liberty to question it. There are other saved ones, of several classes, who subsequently come out of the afterparts of this great tribulation—the 144,000, for instance, the two witnesses, and those which refuse to worship the Beast or to receive his mark—but they are not of this particular company.

Some make a great deal of the allusion to *the number* of these palm-bearers, and might perhaps

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bring this forward against their being contemporaries in one particular period of the world's history. But Dr. Hengstenberg has well observed that, "this magnifying of the numbers here to something beyond all bounds," is not legitimate. The Jews constitute a very small fraction of the people now living, or that will be living when the judgment comes. And yet, the few elect and sealed from among them, as beheld in the preceding vision, make up a multitude which the Apostle did not pretend to count. He "*heard* the number" of them; otherwise, even that company would have been numberless to him. And if we add to that number, in proportion as all nations, peoples, kindreds, and tongues exceed the Jewish population, we will necessarily have a body sufficiently large to answer all the terms of the description before us. When John speaks of these palm-bearers as "a great multitude which no one could number," he speaks relatively, not absolutely. (Compare his language in John 21 : 25.) And if we add to the number of the sealed ones, but twenty-five for one, we will have more than 4,000,000 of people, who, if viewed in one congregation, as in this vision, would be vastly in excess of the capacity of one man to count, and hence "a great multitude which no one could number." And when we consider the import of the opening of the first seal, the moral and spiritual revolution which it sets forth in vast masses of mankind, and the continuous ongoing of these conquests, judgment-aided, under all the subsequent seals, there

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certainly is no just reason for hesitating to believe, that by the time the end of the sixth seal is reached, there will be people enough, won from the half-christianity, lukewarmness, unbelief, and sins in which the beginning of the judgment found them, to make up even "a great multitude which no man could number." At any rate, we are not to allow reasonings of our own, upon expressions altogether indefinite, to stand against the clear and positive Divine statement, that all these palm-bearers come *out of the great tribulation*, and hence must of necessity have lived upon the earth contemporaneously in the judgment time.

3. They are people whom the judgment found unprepared, and who consequently were "left" when the rapture of the Church took place. The Scriptures are everywhere very particular in forewarning us that the day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night—that it will come as a snare on all them that dwell on the earth—that the great mass of men, and even of the professing Church, shall be overtaken by it unawares—and that, "in that night, there shall be two in one bed," one of whom "shall be taken, and the other left;" and "two grinding at the mill," one of whom "shall be taken, and the other left;" and two in the field, one of whom "shall be taken, and the other left." The representations are also very clear, that great will be the number of those who will thus be "*left.*" Indeed, the intimations are, that so few will be found ready, and waiting for their Lord, that their removal will cause no very noticeable depletion in

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the population of the earth. The great body of the professed Church of that day will be "left," as well as the entire community not of the Church; for "when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" And to all that are then found unready, and are "left," gone forever will be the privileges and honors of "the Church of the first-born!" Gone, the crowns, the thrones, the princedoms of eternity, which are now so freely offered to every hearer of the Gospel! Gone, to return no more, all hope and opportunity of regaining the lost prize of immortal kingship and dominion! Grovelling worldlings, profane blasphemers, blinded skeptics, may not understand it, and, for the most part, go on in their sins; but, for millions upon millions, "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." In place of invitations to heavenly rulership, will be judgment pangs; and in place of the joyous day of God's long-suffering, will be the dark waves of the great tribulation.

But, even then, not yet everything will be lost. The crown will be gone, but salvation may still be attained. There will then be no more heavenly thrones to be distributed, but there will still be palms to be secured. The pains of the great tribulation will then have to be endured, but there will remain a possibility of coming out of it, before it culminates in eternal perdition. And many, whose repentance comes, alas, too late for eternity's higher glories, will turn themselves in sorrowful earnestness to that Saviour whose sublimer offers they let slip for this paltry and perishing world

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"For when God's judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." (Is. 16:9.)

Not by any means all, who are "left" when the Church is translated, will thus turn unto the Lord. The corrupt world will continue to be the same base and God-defiant world, until the waves of hell go over it forever. "Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly." (Dan. 12:10.) As the calamities thicken and deepen, evil will become more outbreaking, and rush with giant strides to its final consummation. But, amid much painful disappointment, regretful tears, and great tribulation, Laodiceans, who thought they were rich, and increased in goods, and had need of nothing, will discover how wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked they were the while, and repent, and profit by their chastenings, and find salvation, though having lost their crowns; and many more, who would not give themselves to Jesus in order to be eternal Kings, will learn to think themselves happy to follow him in the fires of judgment, if they may only be servants in the kingdom of heaven. And these are they whom John here beholds "standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palms in their hands."

All this is latently contained in what is recorded of these palm-bearers. "These are they that come out of the tribulation, the great one; and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. On this account they are

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before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple." Having been "left" when the elect were "taken," John would naturally be surprised to find them in heaven. Having come under the judgment pains, he would naturally infer that heaven was not for them. Hence his silent astonishment at beholding so large a company of after-comers exalted into the presence of God; and hence the special explanation of the Elder.

It is one of Christ's messages from heaven to his people on earth: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments." (Rev. 16:15.) The implication of the Elder's words is, that these people had failed to comply with these conditions, while the judgment delayed; but were worldly in their temper, had their "garments spotted by the flesh," and so were without right to the promises. Making themselves at home in the ways, and thinking, and emoluments of this world, of course they had no claim on heaven. The Apostle was, therefore, justly surprised to see them in heaven. But the Elder explains it. Having been cut off from the Church of the first-born, and made to feel their failure by the fierceness of judgment sorrows, they came to a better mind. Their spotted garments they washed in the blood of the Lamb. Their false philosophizing they gave up for the simplicities of the faith; and the truths they once accounted fanaticism, they found to their sorrow and at length confessed to be realities. And by the depths of their penitence, amid the pains of the great tribu-

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lation, and by the sorrowful earnestness of their seeking unto Jesus in the last extremities, they obtained forgiveness, and were recovered from their sins. "On this account," the Elder says, they are saved, though out of the fires of judgment;—admitted into heaven, even though they have lost their places among the crowned ones;—permitted to stand "before the throne of God," though they have no thrones for themselves;—made servants in God's house, though not of the high order of royal sons.

Having, then, ascertained who these Palm-bearers are, the next point to be considered is *their blessedness*. We have not the time now for such a discussion of it as it deserves; but a few observations are demanded, before dismissing the subject.

1. *They are in heaven.* This is a great thing to say of any one. It is to be in the enjoyment of an estate, by the side of which all the exaltation, honor and glory this world can bestow, shrinks into utter nothingness. Lazarus in heaven, is a far sublimer picture than that of any rich man on earth, however royally clad, or sumptuously luxuriant in worldly possessions. "Oh, if I can only get to heaven!" is often the highest ejaculation of the noblest and purest hearts. And this goal of pious longing, these Palm-bearers have reached. They are where the gold-crowned Elders and the glorious Living ones are. They are where the holy angels stand round them in serried ranks of glory upon glory. They are where the Almighty's

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throne is located, where God is, and where the Lamb shows Himself in all His sublime benignity and power. They are where the pure worship ascends forever in the presence of eternal Godhead, and the *Amens* to every strain of adoration come in from principalities and powers. They are in Heaven! True, they have no crowns, no thrones, no dominion. True, they stand while some others sit, and serve while others reign. True, they come in after all the royal places of the first-born are filled. But still, *they are in Heaven!*—bright, beautiful, lovely, untainted, imperishable, HEAVEN!

2. *They are "before the throne of God,"*—that throne which John saw set in heaven, encircled with an iris of emerald, and filled by Him whose appearance is like crystalline and smokeless flame; that throne around which all other thrones are stationed, and out of which go forth the lightnings, and voices, and thunders of the eternal forces. They are not joined to the throne, as the Living ones; nor associated with its Occupant in subregencies, like the Elders; but they are in the presence of it, before it, near it;—nearer even than the angels. To be admitted into the presence of the King, to be permitted to stand before the throne when the King is there in the majesty and state of His eternal dominion, and to be allowed to remain in such a station permanently, is an honor not be dispised. It was the high distinction of David to stand before King Saul, after that victory over Goliath. It is a privilege which is awarded

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to none but those who find favor in the King's sight. And these Palm-bearers "stand before the throne, and before the Lamb."

3. *They are "clothed in white robes."* They wear the garments of saints—they are attired in unspotted righteousness and faultless splendor, acquired through the Saviour's blood. They were sinners once, but they are holy now. They were naked once, but they are clothed now; and their clothing is the pure and shining raiment of heaven. To be free from sin!—to be sure that our hearts are clean!—to be released forever from the soils of earth and its corruptions!—to be clothed with the unsullied purity of the spiritually perfect!—is the deepest, greatest, heaviest sigh of every child of God! But these Palm-bearers realize what it is to have these yearnings satisfied. They have robes; and those robes are spotless bright, having been washed and whited in the blood of the Lamb.

4. *They have "palm branches in their hands."* The joy of the feast of tabernacles is theirs. God ordained for his ancient people that, after the harvest was gathered, they should take the branches of palm trees, and dwell in booths, and rejoice before Him, as the Lord that brought them up out of Egypt. And so we read in Nehemiah, that "all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity," as they found written in the law, fetched olive-branches, and palm-branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, and sat under the booths, "*and there was very great gladness.*" These seasons were the most joyous, ex-

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ultant and bright, observed by the Israelitish people. They were times when everything glittered and thrilled with deep, pure, and lively joy. And these palm-branches in the hands of this white-robed multitude connect with the ancient feast of tabernacles, and bespeak gladdest exultation over their deliverance. To this also answers the further description, which represents them as "crying with a great voice, saying, The Salvation [be ascribed] to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb;" whilst angels, and Elders, and Living ones fall down on their faces in reverent adoration, and answer: "Amen, the blessing, and the glory, and the wisdom, and the thanksgiving, and the honor, and the power, and the might, be to our God, unto the ages of the ages. Amen."

5. *They serve day and night in the temple of God.* This shows them to be no longer subject to the clogs and weariness of mortal life, but glorified, and in the immortal state. John saw no temple in the New Jerusalem; but the New Jerusalem is not all of heaven. There is a celestial temple as well as an earthly one. Jesus, in this very Apocalypse, gives the promise: "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out." (Chap. 3:12.) And in that temple these Palm-bearers serve continually. In what their services consist, is not told us; but they are services befitting saints and the glory of heaven, and such as give ample exercise to all their glorified capacities and powers.

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6. Nor are they without God's distinct and favorable acknowledgment. "He that sitteth on the throne knows them;" or, as in other copies of the text, He "shall spread his tent upon them," "tabernacle over them." As the Shekinah brooded over the pilgrim Hebrews by day and by night, the glorious symbol of the Divine presence, protection, and favor, so these Palm-bearers abide under the shadow of the Almighty. As in the final consummation the tabernacle of God shall be with men, and he shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be his people, and God Himself shall be with them as their God; so shall His pavilion cover these Palm-bearers, and they shall be His people, and He will be their God.

7. "They shall not hunger any more, nor yet thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, no, nor any scorching heat." Oh, to be delivered from the straits, and wants, and painful necessities of mortal life!—to be released from these earthly burdens, vicissitudes, and deaths!—to find some blessed homestead, where these aching, wasting, dying natures may once know what it is to have abiding rest! Man's anguished spirit knows no intenser hunger and thirst than this. But what we all thus yearn for, is the everlasting possession of these saints. Once they felt the weight of famine, the plague of drought, the fires of trial, and the burdens of toil; but, gone forever, now, are all "the burdens that galled, and the cares that oppressed them."

And the reason why they fare so happily, as

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stated by the Elder, is, "because the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne is their shepherd, and shall lead them to fountains of waters of life, and God shall wipe away every tear out of their eyes."

O the blessedness, the peace, the comfort, the everlasting satisfaction, which is the portion of these Palm-bearers! Our souls thrill with the mere contemplation of it! What must it then be to possess it—to feel it to be our own—to enjoy it without let or hindrance forever! A home so happy, a rest so glorious, a place so high, a bliss so exquisite and enduring, would not be too dearly purchased at a cost of all the pains of the great tribulation. It is verily the very mount of transfiguration to which we are carried by this theme. We feel ourselves overshadowed with the cloud of brightness. We cannot open even our drowsy eyes to the scene, but our lips mutter: "Lord, it is good for us to be here." Fain would we set up our tabernacles where we might ever contemplate the blaze of living glory. Here we would sit forever viewing bliss so great, so true, so high. This glorious Lamb! This glorious throne! These glorious ones with their glorious crowns! This effulgence of gracious Godhead! These sinless splendors! These eternal consolations! These holy services! These smiles of favor beaming from the King! These never-withering palms! These ever-shining robes! These ever-thrilling songs! These ever-flowing springs of never-failing life! These joy-speaking eyes which never weep, and singing lips which never thirst, and uplifted

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hands which never tire, and comforts from God as a mother would comfort the child she loves, and sorrow and sighing forever fled away! O blessed, blessed, blessed contemplation!

And yet, this is only an inferior part of Heaven. There are higher dignities and sublimer joys. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be;" but, as golden crowns exceed palm-branches, and kings are above servants, and the possession of a throne is more than to stand before one, even by so much is the heavenly estate held out to us greater than that of these Palm-bearers.

I know not, O I know not,
What royal joys are there!
What radiancy of glory,
What light beyond compare!

And when I fain would sing them,
My spirit fails and faints;
And vainly would it image
The possessions of the saints.

But, from these high scenes, we must go down again into the common world, where tears, sin and death still hold dominion. Duties, and pains, and trials await us there; and often we may grow faint and weary under them. Let us, then, go to them, humbler, wiser, and better men, determined to do, and bear, and wait, and watch, till the Master says, It is enough. But, let us not omit to carry with us the strengthening, quickening, and purifying inspiration of what we have seen and learned

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this night. These Palm-bearers reached their blessedness through the pains of the great tribulation; but to us is offered a better and higher portion than theirs, and without the judgment sorrows which they were made to feel. If we will but keep our garments, and the word of Christ's patience, and work, and watch, and pray, as He has given command, His word is out to keep us from the hour of trial which shall come upon the lukewarm, the worldly-minded, and the unbelieving in that day, now so near at hand. Let us then know and improve our privileges, and ever press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling; remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said: "Behold, I come quickly; hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

END OF VOL. I.

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