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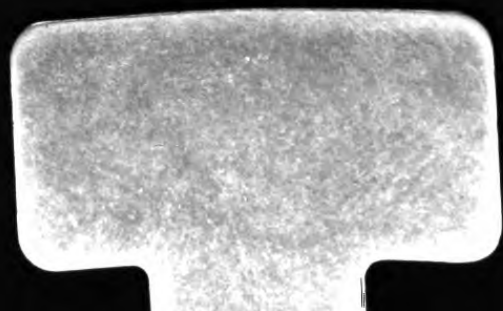
SEVEN PROMISES

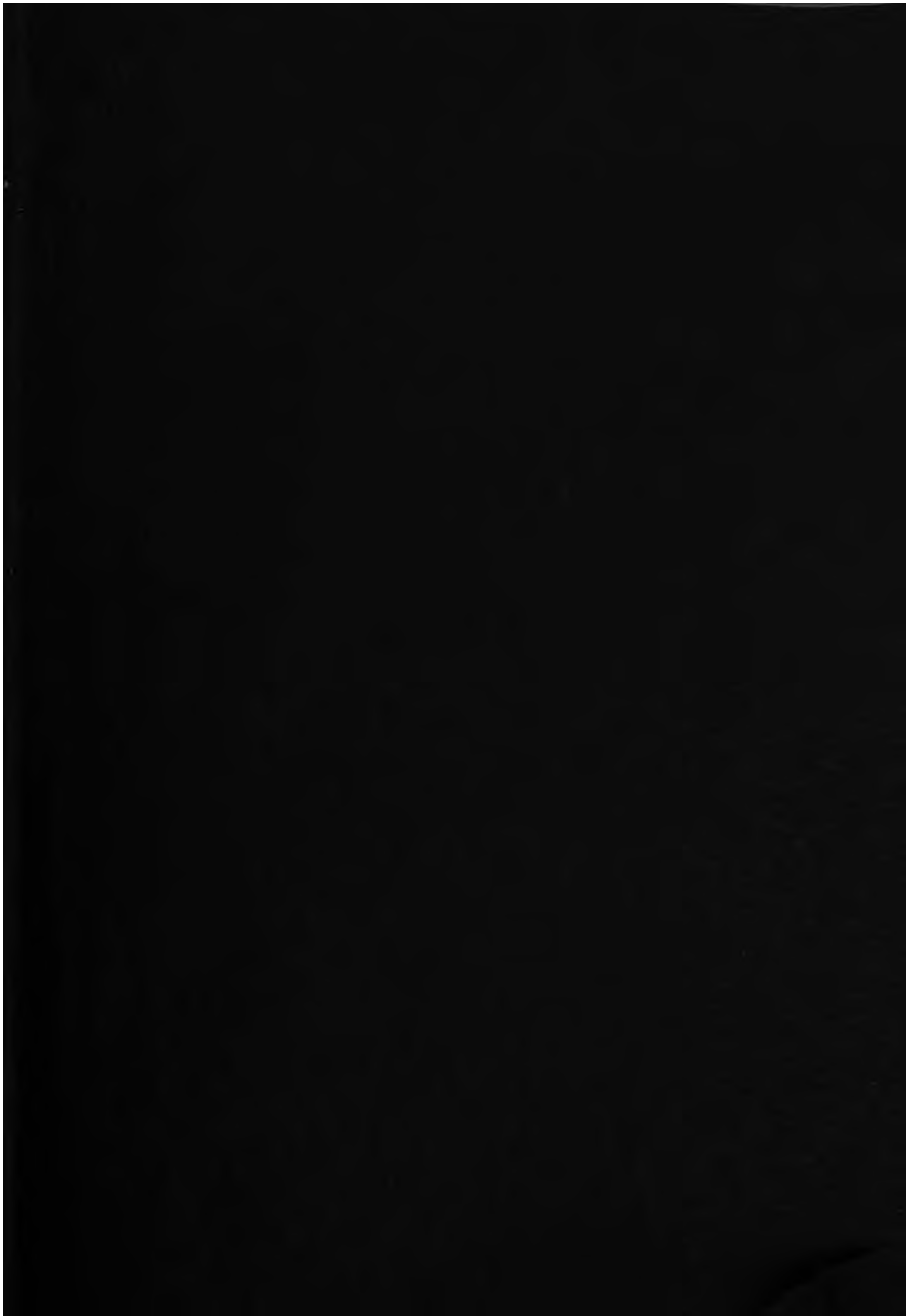
EXPOUNDED

DONALD FRASER M.A. D.D.



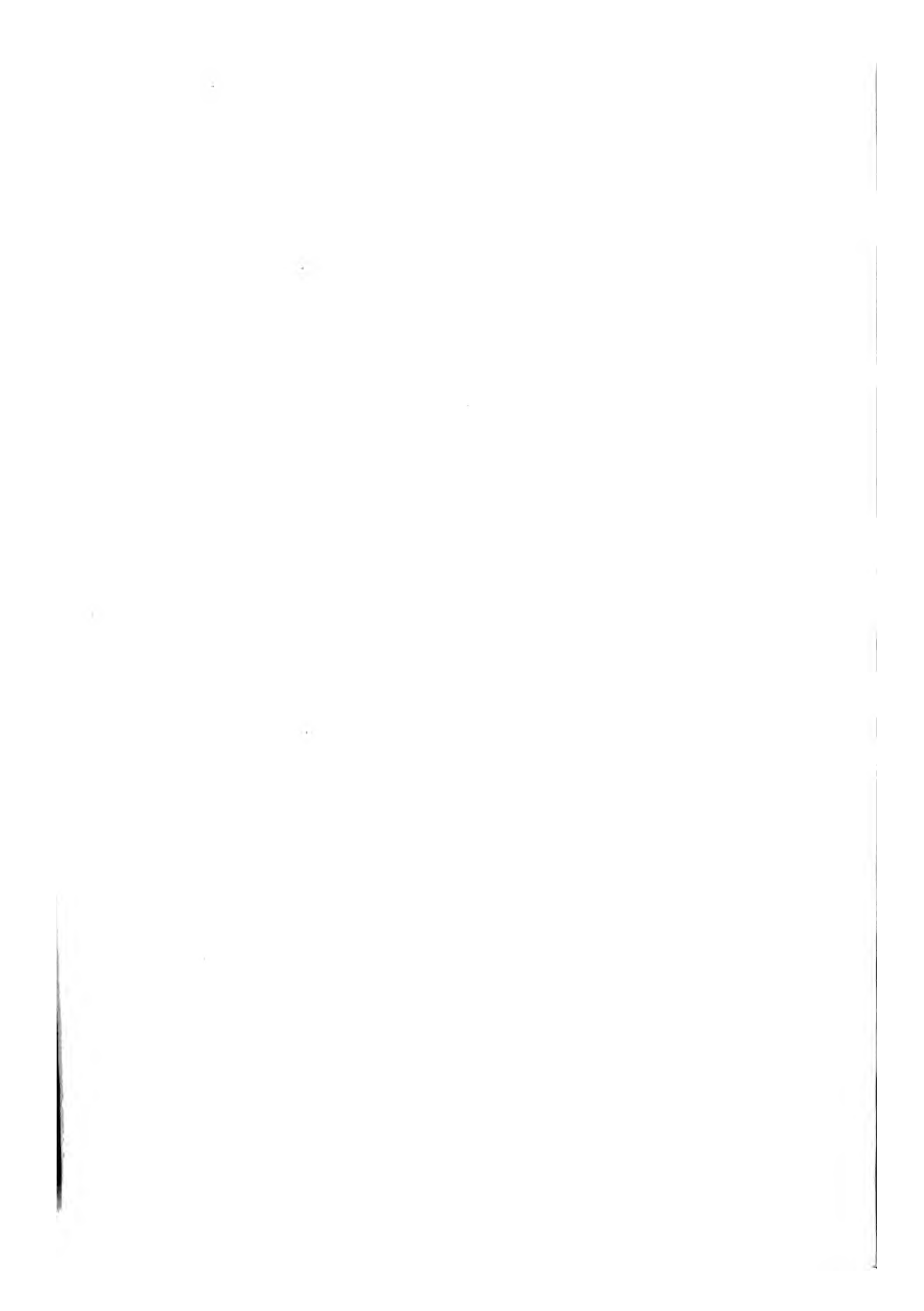
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SEVEN PROMISES EXPOUNDED.



SEVEN PROMISES
EXPOUNDED.

BY

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"SYNOPTICAL LECTURES ON THE BOOKS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE,"
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INTRODUCTION.



THE Seven Promises which we propose to study are found in seven messages sent by the Lord Jesus Christ to seven Churches in the province of Asia. Those messages were directed to the Angels of the Churches—not human bishops or presbyters, but guardian angels, for this is the Apocalyptic fashion of thought, just as in the visions of Daniel there are angels of the nations—of Grecia, Persia, and Israel.¹

We are not able to accept the theory which regards the seven communications or epistles as predicting seven successive periods of Church history. In our judgment, each septenary series in the Apocalypse indicates a cycle having a certain completeness—not a straight line of anticipated annals. And in regard to this, which is the first series, the advocates of the interpretation to which we refer are quite unable to point out in Church history the seven successive periods which correspond with the

¹ Dan. x., xii.

Seven Churches of Asia, or else contrive to do so by the very unsatisfactory device of at one time extending their view to all Christendom, and at another confining it to England, or to one or two countries of Western Europe. But the epistles are prophetic in this sense, that they illustrate conditions of the Church at large, and of particular Churches, which return again and again in the large cycles of time—diversities of faithfulness and unfaithfulness, zeal and lethargy, with tendencies to decay of love and relaxation of discipline and formality of spirit.

The whole tenor of thought and language in these epistles is elevated and impressive; and each of them reaches its highest point, and emits its brightest rays in the promise, "To him that overcomes." Let us introduce our study of them by stating a few considerations and principles which are common to them all.

(1.) *The reward is promised to an individual.* Whatever the general condition of the Church, the individual Christian had his own battle to fight, his own ordeal to pass, his own responsibility to carry, his own reward to win or lose. The Church, as an institution, might stand, and yet the individual fall; or the Church might be overcome of evil, and yet the individual might overcome evil with good.

(2.) *It is in every case an ordeal of moral fortitude and endurance in which the individual must overcome.*

It is no mere intellectual strife or controversy. The question is of right or wrong; and the weapons of the conqueror are mighty through God.

(3.) *There is always a significant relation between the character of the victory and that of the reward.* The promise in any particular epistle holds good only for successful endurance of the kind of trial indicated in that epistle.

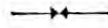
(4.) *There is an ascending scale in the promises.* They begin with Paradise after death; they end with the placing of an overcomer on the very throne of Jesus Christ in glory.

We have added a short study on a cognate topic in the Apocalypse—the victory of the Saints over the Dragon.

April 1889.



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SEVEN PROMISES.



First Promise.

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.”—*Epistle to Ephesus.*

By yielding to temptation, man lost paradise: whoso would regain it must master temptation, through the grace of Christ.

Adam was not to blame for the admission of the Tempter into the garden of innocence; but he was responsible for complying with temptation, and was therefore expelled from “the happy garden.” By non-resistance to the devil he forfeited access to the tree of life.

Jesus Christ, the last Adam, has brought the remedy. Having overcome temptation in the wilderness, and passed through all the ordeal of His humiliation, and “destroyed him that had the power of death,” *i.e.*, the devil, He has, not for Himself only but for all who follow Him, re-opened paradise. But they must follow Him, and not merely say or sing the name of Jesus. In His footsteps they must

endure and overcome in order to enter and enjoy the paradise regained.

We can understand and respect the anxiety of good people to keep themselves and others well out of the reach of temptation, and to fence their children from danger by many regulations and restraints. But the thing cannot be done; or, if done, induces weakness and not strength of character. The fact seems to be that endurance of temptation is necessary to the development of moral vigour, just as exercise and labour are requisite to the development of physical vigour in the human frame. We must all live in the neighbourhood of forbidden fruit, and learn to let it alone, because it is not good for us, and God has commanded us not to eat of it. And even in the Church we must encounter spiritual adversaries and resist seductions of error and of evil, that we may be approved and perfected.

It may be urged against this that the angels excel in strength and yet have no temptation. But who can be sure that they have not? There once was a critical hour for angels, as afterwards for man; and in that great trial many fell from the "first estate." From that fall they have never risen. The angels who continue to serve God and the heirs of salvation, are those who, when tempted as others, did not sin as others, but overcame. Whether or not these still have to sustain trials of loyalty and steadfastness no

man knows. We cannot affirm or deny. But there surely is a martial spirit among those bright messengers of heaven. Michael and his angels fight against the dragon and his angels, and overcome.

It may also be urged that we are taught to pray the Father not to "lead (bring) us into temptation." But obviously this petition means—Carry us not into a moral peril which is too hard for us. Give us not over to the Evil One, but deliver us from his cruelty. Luther prays—"We are surrounded by temptations; but be Thou our help that we consent not to them, nor be taken and overcome by them." Then he tells that a brother, young in Christian experience, expressed to his seniors his anxious desire to be free from the plague of evil imaginations. To whom one of the elders replied—"Thou canst not prevent the birds of the air from flying over thy head, but thou canst prevent them from building their nests in thy hair."

But let us not speak of temptation at large. Our present business is to ascertain the kind of temptation which a Christian man at Ephesus was required to grapple with and conquer.

The Church in that city had an early history full of promise. St. Paul addressed to it a noble and eloquent epistle; but in the end of it gave emphatic warning of spiritual dangers, and charged the Ephesian Christians to put on the panoply of God that they might "stand in the evil day." The same

apostle, in an address to the elders of the Church, warned them that "grievous wolves" would enter into the fold "not sparing the flock." His exhortation to them to watch, and the subsequent admonitions of St. John, were not without good effect. Firm discipline was maintained at Ephesus; false apostles were detected and repudiated; a Libertine sect tried to obtain a footing, but was deservedly scouted—"Thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." And yet a temptation had made some way among the orthodox Christians. They had left their first love. Their fault before the Lord was a decay of spiritual affection.

At such a time it was easy for the individual to fall in with the prevailing tendency, and to regard it as sufficient that good order was kept in the Church and false teachers were rejected, although there was not so much fervour of piety as in former days. He might soon learn to refer with a half-pitying smile to the glow and enthusiasm which had suited the youth and inexperience of the Church, but had calmed down into a reasonable sobriety. It was difficult for him to retain a warmth in his own breast with such a reduced temperature all around. But he who did so, and kept his first love undiminished, was the overcomer at Ephesus, to whom pertained the promise.

Who can deny that similar temptation besets us

in Orthodox Churches of the present day? Without presuming to judge particular Churches, far less to institute invidious comparisons between them, we must be allowed to say that even where sound doctrine is taught and defended, many Christians have lost anything like sacred ardour, and fallen into a dull routine. They feel nothing and do nothing for Christ with any sort of heartiness or intensity. They have no enthusiasm in themselves, and are suspicious of it in others. Surely they once had a tender heart towards the Lord; but they have "left their first love."

It is not without a struggle that any one of us successfully resists the temptation to accept the lower standard of Christian affection and life which so generally prevails. One has to fight for the retention of his "first love." One has to refuse conformity not to the world only, but also to the cold-hearted crowd in the Church. Yet not by contending with those who are cold-hearted, but by drawing nearer to the Lord Jesus. Lest our love grow dim and faint, let us dwell on His love that ours may be revived; let us go up closer to the Central Heat, that the warmth within our breasts may glow more fervently.

It is an ill-judged and pernicious habit of some old Christians to reprove the ardour of young disciples, by telling them that it cannot last, and that

the best men have had their times and moods of emotional and even practical declension. Why suggest retrogression in either faith or feeling as though it were inevitable? Young Christians will discover soon enough the failures and inconsistencies of their seniors; but let us not teach them to plead these as excuses for yielding to temptation. Let us say to them from the outset that it is a base thing to love the Lord less than at first, and that He expects each of us to be earnest disciples always, and to our life's end. If any have struggled for this, but failed, it may be permissible to tell them that others have failed in the same manner, but have been recovered, if by telling them so we may prevent their sinking into despair. But along with this we must give them the charge—"Remember whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works." And it may help some to regain what they have lost, to know that other soldiers of Christ, having fallen, have by grace recovered their footing, and been avenged upon the enemy, overcoming that which seduced them from their first love.

To the overcomer of affectional declension is this promise made: "I will give to him to eat of the tree of life." Thus are we taken back to the symbolism of Eden. Adam left his first obedience. Inclination triumphed over duty. He broke the law of righteousness, and so incurred the penalty of death. The

symbolic way of expressing this is that he ate of the fruit of a tree which was forbidden, and so forfeited any right he might have had to eat of the fruit of the tree of life. St. Paul tells the same story, without the symbolism of the garden and the trees, in the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. The Second Man, Jesus Christ, having stood the test of perfect obedience and overcome the Wicked One, has right to the tree of life, and is able to give of its fruit to those who follow Him in patient and loving service. Not that they merit this life by their goodness: it is "given to them" freely. It is by the aid of His Spirit, freely imparted, that they "overcome;" and it is His life and joy freely imparted that they obtain as "the recompense of reward."

To eat of the tree of life was to become immortal. Debarred from this tree, Adam was a mere mortal toiler on the face of the earth, winning a livelihood by the sweat of his brow, till the time should come when he must die. The promise is a reversal of the sentence of death by sin. The disobedient Adam and all his disobedient children, being overcome of evil, are shut out of paradise as by a flaming sword; but the obedient Son of Man not only Himself lives, but grants to His obedient followers who have overcome evil admission to the garden of God's pleasure, so that they may "take of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever."

We know from other scriptures that evil men have an existence after what is commonly called death; but this is very different from the paradisaic life, which carries with it conditions of moral welfare and spiritual capacity and sensibility that lift it far above the bare conception of prolonged being.

The mention of "the paradise of God" indicates the state of the faithful departed waiting for the resurrection and the kingdom of glory. The garden in Eden was not the inheritance provided for man, but the prepared and enclosed place in which he was to be kept till God should lead him forth as "the heir of the world." In harmony with this the paradise revealed in the New Testament is the place or sphere of holy refuge and rest where the "joint-heirs with Christ" are kept in life till the day arrive for their manifestation with Him in glory, and their inheritance of the world to come. The robber on the cross prayed the Saviour to remember him when He should come in His kingdom; but the Lord answered, "To-day"—for His coming in His kingdom was far off—"thou shalt be with Me in paradise."

"O calm safe rest! All sorrows passed away,
O blessed close to this life's troubled day!"

But the close of the day is by no means the close of life. Over the life which Jesus Christ imparts

death has no power. And in the disembodied state it will not merely continue, but surely grow more full of strength and blessing, as the overcomer dwells under the shadow and eats of the fruit of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Second Promise.

“He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”

—*Epistle to Smyrna.*

WHAT was it that a Christian at Smyrna was expected to overcome? No fault is found with the Church in that city. It was a congregation of poor people in a busy seaport, receiving hard treatment from the heathen on the one hand, and the resident Jews on the other. The latter were peculiarly bitter in their “blasphemy,” or reviling of Christ and the Christians. Every true follower of Jesus had in such a community to overcome the natural shrinking from tribulation and imprisonment, and to be “faithful unto death.”

The story of Polycarp, a disciple and friend of the Apostle John, at once suggests itself. He presided over the Church at Smyrna, and suffered martyrdom there about the middle of the second century. His epistle to the Philippians is still extant, and attests his piety. We also have a letter purporting to be from the Church at Smyrna to the Church at Philomelium in Phrygia, narrating in detail Polycarp's

martyrdom. Eusebius has engrossed much of this narrative in his "Ecclesiastical History." After many of the private Christians had suffered, search was made for the aged bishop. When arrested he simply said, "The will of the Lord be done!" Brought before the proconsul, he was required to swear by the fortune of Cæsar or the genius of the emperor, and to revile Christ. His memorable answer was—"For fourscore and six years have I served Christ, and He has never done me wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King and Saviour?" In vain the proconsul threatened him with wild beasts and with consuming fire. Then the populace furiously shouted—"This is the father of the Christians, the enemy of our gods, who teaches many not to pray or offer sacrifice to them!" At their demand he was condemned to be burnt alive. The mob hastened to gather wood for the pile, and it is told in the letter from the Church, that "the Jews, according to custom, eagerly assisted them." Those were the men who formed a "synagogue of Satan."¹

At his own request Polycarp was not nailed, but

¹ On a late visit to Smyrna we found Christians of the Greek Church and Jews in considerable numbers, and the Mohammedans in power, as were the heathen at the date of the Apocalypse. We had a Jew for our guide, perhaps a lineal descendant of some Jew who helped to burn Polycarp. He showed us the church with bitter scorn marked on every feature.

simply bound to the stake. He then offered up solemn prayer to God, giving thanks that he was counted worthy to drink of Christ's cup; and was thereafter suffocated and consumed in the fire. To the last the Jews showed their malice in striving to prevent any fragments of the martyr's dead body from falling into Christian hands. But they were foiled in this; and at the present day the spot is pointed out near the city of Smyrna, where his weeping flock deposited the calcined bones of Polycarp.

To prepare the Church for such tribulation as this was the chief object of the apocalyptic message from Christ. There were no Nicolaitans to sap the faith or corrupt the life of the Smyrnese Christians; but bonds, imprisonment, and death confronted them, and they had need to be warned and fortified.

In one respect it is surprising that the great God should allow His children to be maltreated and slain; and yet it is not more perplexing than that good people should be mangled in a railway collision or cast away in shipwreck, for surely the Divine power could have saved them from such calamities. But in another respect, it is not even surprising that a religion which centres in One who laid down His life for us should have among its witnesses men who laid down their lives for Christ and for their brethren. And indeed the fact of their temporal

life being thus required of certain chosen and faithful Christians, brings out into stronger relief the truth that it is eternal life which is the gift of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. It tells much for the Divine origin and power of our holy faith, that it dared to tell its adherents from the beginning that they must expect the hatred of the world, and be prepared for tribulation and even for cruel death.

It plainly appears that the overcomer at Smyrna was he who yielded nothing to the shrinking of the flesh from suffering, and counted not his life dear to him if he was clearly called to lay it down for Christ and the Gospel. This may seem to have no application to our modern circumstances. In England, any one may confess the name of the Lord Jesus without having to endure more than perhaps a little hollow mockery or badinage. But the Bible is written for other countries besides ours; and in some of these there have been, in recent times, actual cases of martyrdom for Christ's name and for righteousness' sake. How strengthening to those sufferers the epistle to the Church at Smyrna! And there is some application of it, even in England, to those who bear loss or pain for conscience' sake, or suffer because they are well-doers, or endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ rather than betray Christ and lead an easier life. Blessed shall they be who so endure to the end.

The thing promised to the Smyrnesse overcomer is that he will not be "hurt of the second death." The expression is a peculiar one, and is found in the Book of Revelation only.¹

Death menaced the poor defenceless Christians; not merely the inevitable stroke that comes to all, but sudden and cruel death at the hands of persecutors who had "power to kill the body." But this was only "the first death," which brings no hurt to any genuine Christian. To die is gain. Whether one dies by a hostile blow, or at the burning stake, or by disease, or slow decay, he is but fulfilling the universal appointment, "once to die." Then the corruptible body dissolves, and the released spirit escapes "the ills that flesh is heir to." That which kills the body has no more that it can do.

The stroke of death is ultimately to be reversed by resurrection from the dead. And those who have died in the Lord are to rise first. Especially the rising of the blessed martyrs who "suffered for the testimony of Jesus and for the Word of God," is described as the first resurrection. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; over these the second death hath no power."

So the promise to the man who overcomes all unworthy fear of the first death, is that he will not be hurt of the second death. From the first death

¹ Rev. xx. 6, 14; xxi. 8.

all are to be restored by resurrection ; for all that are in the graves are to rise—first the just, and afterwards the unjust. The second death must be some doom that befalls after the resurrection.

“This is the second death, even the lake of fire.” The key to the interpretation of this appalling symbol is to be found in the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, as described in the Book of Genesis. Not only the fact, but also the manner of the overthrow, is taken to illustrate the condign judgment of Heaven on ungodly men. It is written that “the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire;” and “the smoke of the land went up as the smoke of a furnace.” This catastrophe filled the imagination of ancient Hebrew seers, and governed their announcements of the penal severity of Heaven. So David writes concerning Jehovah—“Upon the wicked He shall rain snares ; fire and brimstone and burning wind shall be the portion of their cup.”¹ So also Ezekiel gives the word of the Lord regarding the destruction of Gog, the invader of the land of Israel—“I will rain upon him, and upon his hordes, and upon the many peoples that are with him, an overflowing shower, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.”² In the same vein we have it in the Book of Revelation, that a worshipper of the wild beast “shall be tormented with

¹ Psalm xi. 6.

² Ezek. xxxviii. 22.

fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels; and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever.”¹ In all these passages the language of Genesis is recalled. The power of imagination could no further go.

St. Jude says that those wretched cities of the plain “are set forth as an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire.” As every one perceives, this does not mean that they are kept perpetually burning; but their ashes are covered by that dismal Dead Sea in which and around which no life shows itself. This is, so to speak, impregnated with judgment, and has suggested the apocalyptic lake of fire and brimstone.

To be cast into such a lake is to suffer a death from which there is no restoration—“the second death.” It is the punishment of eternal fire.

In the Book of Revelation, we first learn that the devil, the wild beast, and the false prophet are to be cast into that lake. And they, only they (with the worshippers of the wild beast, above mentioned) are described as conscious of protracted suffering—being “tormented day and night unto the ages of the ages.”² But further we learn, that after the judgment from the Great White Throne, Death and Hades will be “cast into the lake of fire;” and the same doom will befall every one who is “not

¹ Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

² Rev. xx. 10.

found written in the Book of Life." We also have a more detailed description of those who incur this punishment after the resurrection. They are "the fearful (the very opposite to the overcomers at Smyrna), and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars."¹ Indubitably this lake of fire in the Revelation means the same doom as our Lord Jesus indicated by the "eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels," and into which those who are condemned in the last judgment must depart—"These shalt go away into eternal punishment."

It is quite astounding to hear the question bandied about among present-day Christians: "Do you believe in eternal punishment, or not?" No such question is open to those who respect the authority of Christ. He distinctly said: "These shall go away into eternal punishment." But the import of this terrible phrase is an open question; and it is to be ascertained not by reference to popular or unpopular beliefs, but by careful study of all the passages of Scripture which bear upon the destiny of the lost. Thus there is no authority for using the term "eternal torment" or "eternal misery" as synonymous with "eternal punishment." There is no sanction for the expression "endless agony," or "an eternity of woe." The phrase "eternal death" is unscriptural, and per-

¹ Rev. xxi. 8.

haps involves an impossibility. Life may be eternal, but death or extinction of life not. All we can conceive is that death may have eternal or interminable consequence and effect. What is held up as a terror to wicked men is not eternal death, but "the second death" which is without remedy.

Speaking with great reserve on a topic so difficult, we should describe what follows the first death thus. The Christians who have been faithful shall have in the disembodied condition access to the tree of life in paradise; or, as it is otherwise expressed in regard to a pious Jew, shall rest in Abraham's bosom. The selfish and ungodly are dead but not extinct, for a Jew in Hades is described by our Lord as "tormented." Then after the resurrection and the judgment, the righteous shall go into eternal life, which, because it is life, is continuous and conscious; the wicked shall go into eternal punishment, being cast into the lake of fire. The fire, because it denotes God's punitive justice, is not quenched, is unquenchable. If any choose to say that the lost ones who are enveloped in that fire are never consumed, but kept in perpetual conscious pain, a hideous maddening woe, let him think so if he can. We do not find it in Holy Writ. We believe that there is for the wicked after death a fearful looking for of judgment, and after judgment a condign, and, so far as we can tell, quite irremediable and absolutely final perdition,

from which they can no more emerge than the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah can reappear from the depths of the gloomy lake that covers their destruction.¹

But our topic is the promise to the overcomer. He need have no fear either of the troubles of this life or of the stroke that ends them and sends his spirit up to God. There is nothing to hurt him in that first death, which is a departure to be with Christ; and there will be nothing to hurt him in that second death, which after the judgment is to be the punishment or "everlasting destruction" of wicked and ungodly men.

¹ Possibly some one, remembering St. Matt. xi. 24, will say that "the land of Sodom" is to reappear for judgment. But obviously the expression is used metonymically for the ancient inhabitants of the district. No one supposes that Capernaum, which is compared with Sodom, is to rise from its ruins. The last judgment will be of men, not of lands or cities.

Third Promise.

“To him that overcometh will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.”—*Epistle to Pergamum.*

THERE is little difficulty in specifying the kind of evil which a good Christian at Pergamum was bound to resist and master. It was not the fear of death. The Church had been tried by persecution, and not found wanting. It had produced at least one martyr or witness faithful unto death. And it appears that this had been a directly heathen persecution. It came not from the Jews or “synagogue of Satan,” as at Smyrna, but from the heathen power or “throne of Satan,” for at Pergamum sat the Supreme Court of Judicature for the Roman province of Asia. This, however, did no real harm to the Christian community. But, alas! there was an infection of immorality. Some held the insidious teaching of the ancient seer Balaam which ensnared the tribes of Israel. They persuaded Pergamane Christians to conform to heathen usage so far as to join in

idolatrous festivals, and indulge in the licentiousness which such occasions were supposed to sanction. Others held "the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner."

Of the sect so named we have no trace in Church history, and it is probable that the designation is a kind of cryptogram. Even the name of the martyr Antipas may be so explained. No such person appears in any Martyrology. And as the word signifies "against all," it may be not a proper name, but a word-lesson to the effect that Christ's faithful ones must stand at all hazards and against all adversaries. Balaam is an historical name; but, as a Hebrew word, means "subduer of the people," and such also is the meaning of the Greek word *Nikolaos*. Accordingly we find Balaamites and Nicolaitans working at Pergamum in the same manner and for the same ends. Their device was to overcome the people of Christ by counsels of sensual indulgence; and the Lord had this charge against the Church, that it held, in more or less close relation to it, persons who inculcated those pernicious teachings, and in all probability exemplified them in gross and shameless practices.

The later books of the New Testament—2 Tim., 2 Peter, and Jude—inveigh against the moral confusion and corruption which crept into the Christian communities. The early glow began to fade, the

zeal for holiness to decline. When the Christians had made good their position as quite distinct from the Jews on the one hand and the heathen on the other, and the hard struggle for this separation was over, some of them gave way to a kind of reaction of feeling, and began to question the necessity for a morality so very strict, and a purity of life so jealously guarded. Might it not be safe and even kind to waive some of their scruples in order to humour and conciliate their neighbours and kinsfolk? The same temptation is felt in our own time at mission stations among the heathen. Baptized Christians are in danger of relapse at the great religious festivals of their tribe or nation—and that not so much through any returning belief in the heathen gods as through the allurements to licentious indulgence.

In this manner were the Christians tempted at Pergamum; and the Lord Jesus warned those who had in any measure yielded, that if they did not repent, He would make war against them “with the sword of His mouth.”

Though our circumstances are very different in modern Christendom, we are not free from similar temptations. Indeed, after all that is said of the intellectual and social difficulties of the existing Church, we feel that the moral danger is the most serious. Persecution may die out, error may be

refuted, social obstructions may be removed, but fleshly lusts continue to "war against the soul," and men are secretly solicited to believe that they may now and then give some license to their passions, and yet suffer no spiritual detriment. We believe this to be one of the most insidious wiles of the devil; and we regard it as a healthy sign of English Christianity that much more than was formerly customary has of late years been said and printed on the solemn obligation of purity, sobriety, and chastity. Certain it is that no theological accuracy can save the credit or support the influence of Christianity if it fails to moralise the lives of its people, and to train them in principles and habits of self-control and self-denial.

Blessed in every city is the man who overcomes the teaching of moral laxity and the passions which those teachings sanction and encourage. "Keep thyself pure."

To understand the reward which is promised to such an overcomer, we must revert to the days of Balaam and the history in the Book of Numbers.

1. *The hidden manna.*—It will be remembered that Balaam on his way to King Balak, encountered an angel of the Lord with a drawn sword. Slighting the omen or warning, he went on to do what mischief he could to Israel. Unable to curse, he

fell on a device for corrupting the holy nation. In the end he was miserably slain by the sword; and there is some allusion to this in the circumstance that the epistle which condemns the Balaamites proceeds from Him "who has the sharp two-edged sword."

Balaam was the anti-Moses of the period. His policy was to weaken Israel by excesses, revellings, and such like. Moses, on the contrary, kept the people from idols, and taught them to be content with the manna which God sent them as daily bread. By divine direction he laid up a golden pot full of this manna in the ark of the covenant.

The followers of Balaam at Pergamum tried to seduce the Christians to share in idolatrous feasts and excesses. On the other hand, Jesus, the "prophet like unto Moses," would keep them firm by promising to the faithful that they should eat of "the hidden manna." They would lose nothing by abstinence from pleasures of sin. They would obtain bread of health and joy in the most holy place—in the presence of the King.

In the synagogue at Capernaum, our Saviour spoke of the manna given to Israel in the wilderness as a type of Himself, the spiritual food and support of all believers. He is the true bread from heaven freely given to us in the dispensation of grace and truth. The promise before us is of what He will

be to the faithful when they obtain their full reward. He will be to them as the hidden manna laid up within "the holiest."

The manna which lay on the ground about the tents of Israel melted when the sun grew hot, or, if kept in a shady place beyond the day, became corrupt; but that which was hidden in the ark never decayed. So now there is heavenly bread for us during the time of endurance and warfare, but it profits only those who receive and eat. But there is also something better laid up in heaven for the faithful; an everlasting portion—the bread incorruptible of a life that is eternal—the inexhaustible support and unwearying satisfaction of all pure-hearted ones—the hidden manna.

2. *A White Stone.*—The latter part of the promise has been sadly obscured by expositors and preachers who have looked for the clue in ancient heathen customs, instead of searching that part of Scripture which the mention of manna, as well as of Balaam, has already indicated. Some have referred to the voting methods of the Greeks, who, in public trials, used a white pebble as a token of acquittal, and a black one for condemnation. Others have thought of the small stone tablet which was given to every winner in the public games, as a token of the prize he would receive at the end of the day. Now, there certainly are allusions to those contests

in the writings of St. Paul,¹ who uses them to illustrate the agonistic character of the Christian life; but this is no reason for finding them in the Book of Revelation, which is full of Old Testament reminiscence and Hebrew imagery. Nay more, even if heathen illustrations were to be found in this book, we should hardly look for one here incongruously combined with another symbol which is unquestionably and exclusively Hebrew. Surely it is far more reasonable to take the white stone from the same period with the manna—the days of Moses and his opponent Balaam.

The stone has a name inscribed on it—a hidden name in consonance with the hidden manna. This suggests two things—(1.) That the stone referred to was in or about the sanctuary. (2.) That the inscription on it could not be seen by the people of Israel.

This last point shuts out an explanation which some good interpreters have favoured, viz., that the reference is to the jewelled breastplate or else to the golden frontlet of the High Priest. What was engraved there was visible to all. The explanation is right as respects the service of the sanctuary, but fails in the element of secrecy.

Look again at the official accoutrement of the High Priest, the guardian of the hidden manna. He

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 24-27.

possessed and carried something which no one but himself might look upon. Not till Aaron died did his son Eliezer see it when he succeeded to the official robes, and each High Priest transmitted it to his successor; so that only one man in all Israel at any time knew what was inscribed thereon. This was called the Urim and Thummim, and was enclosed within "the breastplate of judgment." By means of this oracle, in some way not known to us, the High Priest consulted the Lord in emergencies and learned His will.

The interpretation is clear if we may assume that the thing enclosed within the breastplate or jewelled breast-cloth of the priest was a white and very precious stone bearing an inscription. The colour is not dull but glistening, like the white robes of the saints, the white horses of victory, and the white throne of judgment. The name engraved only the High Priest who received the white stone was allowed to see and read.

Thus the two parts of the promise correspond with each other, and both relate to priesthood. The overcomer will have the hidden manna, and the hidden stone with its hidden inscription. The manna is for his spiritual nourishment, a heavenly bread. The stone of Urim and Thummim is for his swift understanding of the will of God. Both together are an assurance of the full promise and enjoyment of holy

priesthood which has nearness to God with sanctuary bread that never fails and never satiates, and a sacred oracle that never confuses or deceives.

The name on the stone is not a title given to the overcomer by whom the stone is received. It is, if we may conjecture, a new name of God or of Christ, *i.e.*, a further revelation of the character and glory of God or of Christ. We shall learn more of this from the Epistle to Philadelphia. Meanwhile let it be observed that the new name harmonises with the "new song," "new Jerusalem," "new heaven and new earth," "all things new."

This third promise makes no reference to the separate or disembodied state of the human spirit; nor does it point in any definite manner to the last judgment and its issues of life and punishment. It simply carries our thoughts to the future blessedness of the faithful without even a glance at those who perish. And as to the period when these things shall be fulfilled, there is amplitude enough in the boundless future for the enjoyment of all the blessings and dignities awarded to those who overcome.

Let not any turn away from the study of such promises under the plea that they apply to none but splendid and superlative Christians. The lesson of the relation and proportion between fidelity in this world and reward in the world to come is for all of us. What is promised in its fulness to the heroes in

Christ's army will be given in part to all those who in some fair measure acquit themselves as good soldiers.

Therefore may all Christian people take thoughts and hopes of future recompense to confirm and fortify their hearts when they are tempted. If you let the flesh master you, not only do you lose moral strength and a good conscience in the present time, but you forfeit something in the life to come. But "abstain from fleshly lusts," disdain the counsel of Balaam, keep a firm rein on your passions, hold yourselves aloof from "the corruption that is in the world through lust," abhor the evil, cleave to the good, and you not only gain strength and consolation here, but are also to obtain hereafter "a full reward." In this time you have bread to eat that the world knows not of; and the secret of the Lord is with you, and He shows you His covenant. When the time is accomplished, and your conflict is ended, you will receive hidden manna in the most holy place, and the Urim and Thummim of the all perfect counsel of God.

NOTE.—In the ceremony of a boy's initiation into manhood among the Australian aborigines, the novice or "boombat" receives a new name to show that he is twice born, and white stones to be worn in his belt as talismans. So Dr. John Fraser recently stated in a paper submitted to the Victoria Institute. The coincidence with the language of our Lord's promise is of no value for interpretation, but illustrates the wide diffusion of such forms of symbolical expression.

Fourth Promise.

“ To him that overcometh and keepeth My works unto the end will I give authority over the nations ; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers ; as I also have received of My Father ; and I will give him the morning star.”—*Epistle to Thyatira.*

WHILE the Lord acknowledged good works and qualities in the Church of Thyatira, His searching eyes detected at the same time an element of moral degeneracy similar to that which He had reproved at Pergamum. It was difficult to maintain—it was easy to sap—the purity of Christian life in those Asiatic congregations, surrounded as they were by the licentious practices of the heathen, and exposed to the wiles of insidious and unprincipled teachers.

Thyatira is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. Lydia, who was St. Paul's first convert at Philippi, was not a Macedonian, but “ a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira.” It cannot be doubted that on her return home she bore witness to that gospel which she had received into her heart ; and the Church at Thyatira may have gathered around Lydia and her baptized household.

Alas ! there was a counter influence at work, and it was that of a woman who is designated as "the woman Jezebel." It is a symbolic name, like that of Balaam in the previous epistle, and recalls the same kind of moral danger. As Balaam the adversary of Moses, so also Jezebel the adversary of Elijah, endeavoured to heathenise Israel. This infamous queen came from Sidon, where her father reigned ; and she seems to have brought with her to the court of Samaria a passionate zeal for the worship of Baal. With that worship were associated gross excesses ; and therefore Jehu's stern denunciation of Jezebel's "witchcrafts and whoredoms." In like manner the wicked prophetess at Thyatira taught the servants of Christ "to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols." The expressions in regard to her are so definite that we can hardly doubt this second Jezebel to have been a crafty and unscrupulous person commonly known as a prophetess or sibyl. Just outside the city of Thyatira a temple was dedicated to a sibyl named Sambatha ; and it is possible that she may have been the person who beguiled unstable Christians. But whatever we may conjecture regarding the individual leader, it seems plain that Nicolaitans, Balaamites, and Jezebelites all denote those Libertine or Antinomian sects which infested Christian communities in the province of Asia.

Now the wiles of a Jezebel are never defeated but by the uncompromising spirit of an Elijah or a Jehu. Therefore the fourth epistle takes a more stern and resolute tone than any other of the seven. It issues from the Son of God, whose eyes are "like a flame of fire," and "His feet like burnished brass." This announcement introduces a message and warning that must not be trifled with. Severe judgment is threatened against the prophetess and her dupes. As Elijah killed Jezebel's favourites, the discomfited prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, so the Lord gives warning, "I will kill her children with death."

Then follows an appeal to "the rest in Thyatira" to hold fast their integrity. These were in a similar position to the seven thousand in Israel known to the Lord, even under Jezebel's reign, who had not kissed the image of Baal or bowed the knees to that idol. They were so happy as not to "know the deep things of Satan." This expression somehow corresponds to the synagogue of Satan, and the throne of Satan in the foregoing epistles, but is not so easy of interpretation. We take it to be an allusion to the vile sophistry of the Libertine teachers, and especially of that false prophetess who talked swelling words about disowning the flesh and sounding deep mysteries—all the while under pretexts of a greater range and liberty dragging down the souls of men to a hideous abyss.

The overcomer at Thyatira was he who renounced "her works," *i.e.*, the practices of the new Jezebel, and "kept the works" of Jesus Christ, *i.e.*, the path of Christian well-doing. Substantially we all have to pass through the same or a similar ordeal. The works and wiles of Jezebel are in every city; and they have their attraction for the flesh. In the "Pilgrim's Progress" we read how Faithful at the outset of his Christian career was tempted by "one whose name was Wanton;" and Standfast, in the maturity of his experience, was nearly entangled by "Madam Bubble," who spoke smoothly, "smiled at the end of a sentence," and was "no better than a witch." This form of temptation is especially perilous, when it is made to appear that one may indulge the flesh without hurting the soul, or forfeiting the standing and credit of a Christian. It was this combination of licentiousness with religion that gave strength and success to the cursed devices of Balaam and of Jezebel, and that has plunged many souls in disgrace and perdition.

Faithful, in the allegory, overcame by remembering words of Scripture, shutting his eyes against allurements, and going resolutely on his way. Standfast overcame by betaking him to his knees, and praying "to Him who has said He will help." And such are the methods by which we too must resist and vanquish our temptations, recalling to our minds

the warnings against sin which abound in the Bible, praying for sanctification of the Spirit, and going on our way of Christian duty with a single eye and an intent purpose.

The promise made to the overcomer in this instance is one of lordship and dominion with Christ. It reminds us of the reward assigned to a faithful servant in one of the parables, "Be thou ruler over many things."

At Pergamum, the promise was of priesthood in its full privilege. At Thyatira it is of kingly conquest and rule.

As before, we shall find the clue to the interpretation at the period of Old Testament history alluded to. Baal means lord. Queen Jezebel insisted on his supremacy. Scorning the half heathenism which had satisfied Jeroboam and his successors—a worship of Jehovah at the shrine of the golden calves, she demanded that Baal should be the spiritual ruler of Israel, and that all power in the kingdom should be vested in his votaries. Her husband Ahab, ruling in the name of this god, must have an absolute authority. He might not be balked of his pleasure in the matter of Naboth's vineyard. The law of inheritance enjoined by Jehovah must give way before the authority of a king who honoured Baal. Ahab's sceptre must be a rod of iron.

It was also part of Jezebel's policy to persuade the people that the old Jehovistic law was an unreasonable yoke, and that under Baal they would have more scope both of pleasure and of power. But, as Baal's lordship was hollow and base, the result of the perversion of the kingdom of Israel to his worship was only to weaken it among the nations, and to make the Ten Tribes slaves of vice and superstition.

It is so with those in every time and every city who are seduced from the law of Christ to serve the flesh or idolise the world. They are deluded by some phantom of power and liberty. Just as men who believe a lie call it "free thinking," so also those who yield themselves to the degrading service of sin call it getting rid of strait-laced notions, doing as they please, having their fling. But in truth there is no strength in unrighteousness, and liberty has no value or safety except on a moral basis. The effect of indulged sin is inevitably to weaken and enslave. Jezebel's counsels can make no man strong or free. On the contrary, her disciples, Baal's votaries, are a generation of weaklings, and bondsmen to iniquity. It is the overcomer of Jezebel, the conqueror of vicious temptations, who has power and liberty; and it is he who is destined to inherit the dominion as well as the glory with Jesus Christ in His kingdom. He will be reckoned worthy to bear

rule over others who has first obtained command of himself.

It was when our Lord had endured all things, and overcome the Wicked One, that He received from the Father authority over the nations. He was tempted of the devil to snatch at possession of the kingdoms of the world and all their glory without passing through the appointed ordeal; but He repelled the glittering bribe. His reward was that He obtained this authority worthily from the Father in heaven. Then He watched over His people at Thyatira passing through their ordeal of temptation, and promised to every one who should overcome a delegation of His own authority, *i.e.*, a share of His own reward.

Then the second psalm is quoted, showing that the dominion of Christ, so bright and blessed for such as obey Him, will have a dark and terrible aspect for those who rebel and fight against Him. For them His golden sceptre will change into an iron rod—the emblem of strong and crushing energy. The Lord will arise and scatter His enemies, as one might toss aside the fragments of a broken potsherd. We have this again in the vision of the “Faithful and True” warrior, who “in righteousness doth judge and make war.” “He shall rule the nations with a rod of iron.”¹

In the vision referred to, white-robed saints follow

¹ Rev. xix. 11, 15.

the Captain of their salvation as a heavenly army mounted on white horses. From which statement, as well as the promise now under consideration, we gather that Christ's faithful followers are to take part with and under Him in the subdual of His enemies on the earth, and in the functions of judging and ruling at and after His second coming. One may obtain "authority over five cities," another "over ten." All who endure "shall reign with Him."

The remaining words of the promise emphasise this dignity—"I will give him the morning star." Many interpreters have tried to explain this by reference to St. Peter's contrast between the lamp in a dark place and the day-star of the dawn.¹ They have assumed that this is a promise of augmented light, and means that Christ will shine more brightly on His faithful followers in the world to come. But it must be evident that this is not likely to be the meaning of the latter part of the Thyatiran promise, because such a statement about light would have no conformity with what goes before. And this is a strong argument in construing these epistles to the Seven Churches, for each of them exhibits to the student's eye a fine balance of parts and close tissue of thought.

Here again let us revert to the Old Testament,

¹. 2 Peter i. 19.

and to the ancient alliance of the star with the sceptre as the emblem of royalty. The thing suggested is not light, but kingship. Remember Balaam's prophecy—

“There shall come forth a star out of Jacob,
And a sceptre shall rise out of Israel,
And shall smite through the corners of Moab.”¹

Recall also the alarm of Herod on hearing that a star had appeared in the East. It indicated the birth of “the King of the Jews.”² We have it also in the end of the Apocalypse, that He who comes quickly is the Davidic King. “I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star.”³

In harmony with these Scriptures, we understand “the morning star” as the sign of our Lord's royal dignity, while the rod or sceptre is the emblem of His power. As the overcomer is to reign under and with Christ, and by authority which He delegates, so to the overcomer will be given not only the rod of iron, but also the morning star—the sceptre of strength, the star of renown.

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.” And the fourth

¹ Numb. xxiv. 17.

² St. Matt. ii. 1-9.

³ Rev. xxii. 16.

epistle, by its historical allusions, seems to teach a solemn lesson, and confront us all with a grave alternative. It was fatal to "halt between two opinions," when the question was—"Is Jehovah God? or is Baal?" Many appear to be irresolute. They have convictions but stifle them, have good impulses but give them no effect, and are in a kind of chronic suspense between conscience and inclination. "How long halt ye?" It is a matter of life or death. Jezebel, and all who are on her side, must perish. Who is on the Lord's side? Who?

Fifth Promise.

“ He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments ; and I will in nowise blot his name out of the book of life ; and I will confess his name before my Father and before His angels,”—
Epistle to Sardis.

AMONG the Christians at Sardis there seems to have been no false doctrine, nor any seducing influence of Libertine teachers, nor any persecution for the sake of the Gospel. So far as we know, the Church in that city was orderly in its worship, orthodox in its creed, and in good repute among the citizens. Yet it was in evil case. It suffered from a deadly chill, and betrayed a numbness of life and feeling. To appearance it flourished, but at heart it perished. It had a name to live, but was virtually dead.

The censure on its condition came from Him who held the Seven Spirits, *i.e.*, dispensed the quickening Spirit in all His variety and plenitude of grace, and the Seven Stars or angels of the Churches, as ruling and controlling all Churches of the saints. He needed not that any should tell Him of the state of the Sardian Church. He knew it: He saw for Himself,

and testified what He saw. The Church was not fulfilling the high ends for which it had been called into existence. It had grieved the Spirit, and lost His life-giving presence. It looked perhaps well enough, but it lacked the breath and pulse of spiritual life, and the capacity of energetic action in the Redeemer's service. The Church may have said prayers, but did not pray; may have sung psalms and hymns ever so sweetly, but did not really offer its sacrifice of praise; may have held up the Christian creed as any column of stone or brass tablet might, but had no energy of faith, no fervour of spirit, no missionary zeal. Here was salt, but no savour in it. Here was a form of godliness without the power thereof. Here was the reputation of Christian life spread as a mantle over the reality of death.

The Lord said—"I have found no works of thine fulfilled before my God." Such service as this Church attempted was defective, broken off, or left unfinished. Indeed it is always so with Christians of the Sardian type. They are not thorough in obedience. In a languid fashion they begin work, but leave off before it comes to any practical issue. They are fond of saying that they leave all results to God.

Now this state of languor at Sardis did not affect feeling or sentiment only. It weakened the whole moral life. Although the Antinomian teachers, who

made perverts in some of the neighbouring cities, do not seem to have infested the Church of Sardis, mischief of the same sort ensued on the spiritual lethargy into which that Church had subsided. From the statement that there were "a few who did not defile their garments," we are obliged to infer that the majority of the local Christians had done so. Enfeebled in the spiritual life, till they were virtually devoid of it, or dead, they had no sufficient force of conscience, or desire of holiness, to lift them above the moral corruption of surrounding society. Vigilance was relaxed, for prayer was hindered; and most of the Christians in Sardis were like men who carelessly let white robes trail through the mire. They were inconsistent and immoral.

It cannot be denied that men who have appeared to be quite fervent in spirit have been capable of secret sensuality and vicious intrigue. But every one considers this to be, as it is, gross inconsistency, and a blot on the spiritual earnestness, not a result of it. It is no argument against such earnestness, but a deep device of Satan to bring discredit on the Christian name. And whatever the imperfections of true Christians, or the misdeeds of pretended Christians, it can be abundantly shown that the proper and uniform tendency of vital piety is to strengthen the moral nature, and produce a love of goodness, purity, and righteousness.

On the other hand, the lack of earnest piety, as at Sardis, leaves the moral principle without encouragement or support from those considerations and motives which are religious, and lets the tone of life among professed followers of Christ fall to the level of current morality.

The connection between spiritual religion and the life of virtue and holiness has been, perhaps, too little dwelt upon. It is to be maintained not merely that Christianity excels all other forms and systems of religion in respect of ethical teaching and influence, but also that the more lively and fervent the Christianity is the stronger and healthier the moral power which it exerts. Most certainly the less lively it is the less its influence for elevating and purifying the lives of men. Survey those districts of Great Britain where the Gospel has been preached in a confused or feeble manner, and the Church has been of a dull and formal spirit, emitting a very dim religious light. You will find a few earnest souls as there were at Sardis, but the mass of the people in such localities morally inert and feeble, and disposed to regard any anxiety about a spotless life as a Puritan rigour, and righteousness overmuch.

The faithful at Sardis, who kept their habits of living clean, were few in number, but of great price in the eyes of the Lord. He recognised them as standing firm and watchful, not only against the

evils which impregnated the heathen population of the city, but also against the dead slumber of the Church. We do not read that they seceded and formed a separate meeting of their own, as some do nowadays with far less reason; but they continued in the Church as witnesses for a higher life and warmer zeal than prevailed. It was pleasing to "the Lord who bought them" to see them, amidst such surroundings, leading holy lives, keeping their garments undefiled.

Each of them was a champion; and every one of them who should endure to the end was to receive reward as an overcomer. True, that the fight had not the same excitement as in some other Churches. It did not evoke the heroism which defied a deadly persecution, or the animated controversy in which false teaching might be refuted: but probably it was a more arduous task to overcome the spirit of torpor, the creeping paralysis of death. It required in those who would be faithful a vigorous inward life, habitual recollection of a high ideal, fortitude that no ridicule could shake, and much prayer, individual and collective, for enlivening and supporting grace.

Because victory at Sardis was difficult, the reward was rich and large. It is in three parts—(1.) White garments. (2.) Inscription in the Book of Life. (3.) Open acknowledgment in heaven.

I. "Shall be arrayed in white garments." "Shall walk with Me in white."

To walk in Sardis and not defile his garments was the overcomer's career. To walk in the better land in white garments with Christ is the overcomer's recompense. The lesson is most significant. The reward of saintship is a higher and more confirmed saintship. Those who have striven to keep themselves pure are to be blessed hereafter in a stainless purity. In a later vision,¹ already referred to, they appear as heavenly armies following the victorious Prince and Saviour, all of them "clothed in fine linen white and pure." No more need of the armour which is so necessary in this evil day. They are sufficiently armed in heavenly purity.

The white colour is that which gleams and shines, and suggests the incorruptible bodies of the saints fashioned to the likeness of the body of our Saviour's glory. It was an anticipation of that glory which was shown to three select apostles on "the holy mount." "His face did shine as the sun, and His garments became white as the light."² It was a fleeting vision of a glory that is to be revealed and to be permanent. And the overcomer of Sardian formalism is to be wrapped in this glory with the Lord, to be made like Him on seeing Him as He is,

¹ Rev. xix.

² St. Matt. xvii. 2.

and to walk with Him and with the saints, all "decked in glorious sheen."

2. Shall be written in "the book of life," and not blotted out. The book of life is of course a symbol, like the tree of life, bread of life, water of life, and light of life. It suggests a register in heaven of those who receive in Christ "the grace of life." No creature can even number them, far less name them; but the great God who counts and names the stars knows those that are Christ's, and (in a figure) writes all their names in a book. "Rejoice," said our Saviour to the seventy, "that your names are written in heaven."

It is worthy of notice that the Bible makes no mention of a book of death, or roll of doom. God has not put any men under a yoke of fate, and then asked of them, "Why will ye die?"

The book of life undoubtedly contains the name of God's elect, and the question rises—what force is there in a promise not to blot out names from that book, *i.e.*, not to reverse a decree of God concerning them? Surely His purpose must stand. God may blot out sins from a book of record, but it is hardly conceivable that Christ can blot out names once written by God's own hand in a book which is the roll of His chosen ones—the heirs of glory. On this we have two observations to make—(1.) It is neither necessary nor reasonable to interpret such an expres-

sion in the Apocalypse in a severely doctrinal sense. The question of divine election does not arise here any more than it does when we find Moses praying that if Jehovah would not pardon Israel, He would blot his name out of the book that He had written.¹ There is no thought of a reversal of any divine decree; but in the case of Sardis a form of expression is adopted which shows that yielding to the prevailing temper of that Church would have fatal consequences. And solemn warnings of this kind are among the means by which God keeps His elect from falling. In connection with this let the negative form of the expression be noted. It is nowhere said that Christ has erased any name once written in the book; but He is pleased to give a pledge to the faithful that He will not do so to them. (2.) The purport of this part of the great promise is to give assurance of our Lord's absolute concurrence with the Father in regard to those who overcome. It is to be explained by those passages in St. John's Gospel in which our Lord shows that inasmuch as the Father has given "the sheep" to Him, He will not let any of them be snatched away;² that those who should come to Him, being given by the Father, He would "in no wise cast out." Of all that the Father had given to Him He would "lose nothing."³

¹ Exod. xxxii. 32.

² St. John x. 27-30.

³ St. John vi. 37-39.

The security for the overcomers is in the perfect accord between the Father and the Son. God has written their names in the book of life, and Christ will not blot them out.

But now the negative is carried further into a positive form.

3. Open acknowledgment. "I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels." Those who have a name to live and are dead, may confess the name of Christ formally and call themselves Christians, but the Lord comes under no engagement to acknowledge them as His. Of them will the Son of Man be ashamed. On the other hand, He will openly confess and claim as His own every one who by grace overcomes.

It is the repetition of a promise which our Saviour, in course of His earthly ministry, gave to loyal and courageous disciples.¹ And how keen was the trial of faithful confessors of Christ at such a place as ancient Sardis! They must have been well laughed at for their strictness of life, and for their zeal derided as fanatics. Not only did the world around make light of them, but the Church, in which they ought to have found sympathy and encouragement, disliked and disowned their ardour, because it was itself so lifeless. "Why could not the 'few' be content with the average Christianity of Sardis? Why

¹ St. Matt. x. 32, 33.

need they be (to use the term of later days) such pietists, such Puritans, such Methodists, such enthusiasts?" Against all this scorn, the faithful had to stand true to their convictions and principles, and, constrained by the love of Christ, to persist in open and ardent confession of His name. To every man who so endured and overcame, it was promised that when the Son of Man shall come in the glory of the Father with the holy angels, the conqueror's name will be announced and acknowledged by the Supreme Conqueror in that august and sacred presence.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear." He that would be acknowledged hereafter, let him be faithful here and now. He that would dwell with God and walk with Christ, let him shake off spiritual lethargy and live in earnest during these passing years. He that would wear a white robe in the world to come, let him seek in this world the blessedness of the undefiled.

Be they many or few that fight against the death of faith and fervour in the Church, happy are they, for their record is on high. They may be slighted and even hated here. Scorn may be hurled upon their names. It is an old story that Prejudice and Ill Will cast mud on the white raiment of Mr. Godly-man; but it quickly fell off, and still his garments were clean.¹ So the Lord will vindicate

¹ "Pilgrim's Progress," Part II.

His faithful ones; and they shall walk with Him in white. Their names are in that book of life from which no man can, and the God-Man will not, blot them out. This is indeed renown. One may have his name written in the chronicles of empires, yet be soon forgotten; may have it inscribed on durable marble or bronze, yet himself perish miserably; may have his titles and possessions and dignities emblazoned on the gates of fame, and yet lose his own soul. But he who is written in the book of life shall never perish, never die. And he is to shine with Christ in the glory on the mount of God, there to abide, and never descend again to fight with the powers of darkness on the plain.

Sixth Promise.

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out thence no more ; 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 heaven from My God, and Mine own new name.”—*Epistle to Philadelphia.*

IN this, as in the previous instances, the evil which the overcomer had to encounter and conquer is to be ascertained from the description which is given of the local Church and its perils. Yet it appears from the Lord's own testimony that this Church at Philadelphia, distant only a few miles from Sardis, was in good spiritual condition. While free, as that of Sardis was, from heresies, controversies, and persecutions, it did not fall like that neighbouring Church into heartless formalism. The little congregation at Philadelphia was steadfast and obedient. Still there is enough in the epistle to indicate that there were inducements to waver and falter, and that such were the influences which the heir of this promise must overcome.

Again the epistle throws us back on ancient his-

tory. One recalled the times of Moses: another those of Elijah: this refers to the days of Hezekiah, when the adversary was no prophet like Balaam or prophetess like Jezebel, but the imperial power of Assyria menacing with its armies the little kingdom of Judah. It was in the Temple that the devout King of the House of David spread the matter before God, and obtained deliverance: and this epistle makes significant mention of the doors and pillars of the Temple of God.

King Ahaz, of infamous memory, "cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the Lord."¹ It was one of the first works of his son Hezekiah to undo this piece of profanity. "He, in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired them."² But when the Lord Jesus opens, none can shut; and when He shuts, none can open.

The designation which our Lord assumes—"He that hath the key of David"—reminds us of a high officer in the Jewish court who bore the key, as not merely a badge of stewardship, but also the symbol of his dignity as a kind of executive royal deputy. His post was not unlike that of the Mayor of the Palace in the early court of France.

In the Book of Isaiah we read of the deposition

¹ 2 Chron. xxviii. 24.

² Ibid. xxix. 3.

of one Shebna from this office under the House of David, and the elevation of Eliakim in his room.¹ To this there is an obvious allusion in the beginning of the Epistle to Philadelphia. The Lord Jesus, Himself the King, is pleased to make it known that He holds in His own power the key of the holy places. True, that He committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven (not of the Church, and certainly not of heaven) to St. Peter and the other apostles for the initiation of that kingdom on the earth, and the opening of the door of salvation to Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles in appointed order; but He has never parted with His own prerogative. The "power of the keys" is and must always be in His own ultimate and absolute control.

Holding such an office, and wielding such a power, the Lord cared for the Church at Philadelphia, and set before it an opened door which no Ahaz could shut. At the same time, He was displeased with the opposition to the Church and its usefulness, which came, as in other cities, from the Jewish residents. At Philadelphia, as at Smyrna, this was so virulent that the synagogue is stigmatised as a "synagogue of Satan." Similar language was used by our Saviour to the Jews in Jerusalem who sought to kill Him. They were of their father, the devil, who had been "a murderer from the beginning."²

¹ Isa. xxii. 15-25.

² St. John viii. 44, 45.

And everywhere the cruel malice shown to His Church was instigated by that arch-enemy.

It is promised that some, but not all, of those anti-Christian Jews would be brought to repentance and submission; but a wider persecution was drawing near—an “hour of trial” which was to “come upon the whole inhabited earth.” The good Lord engaged to keep the Philadelphia Christians unhurt in that dread hour: and historians tell that this was the only one of the Seven Churches that passed unscathed through the fire of Trajan’s persecution.

The good quality for which this Church was distinguished was quiet steadfastness. It could not be shaken or moved from its loyalty to Christ. Erroneous doctrine was not admitted to spoil its sobriety of mind, nor any temper of speculation and restlessness allowed to disturb its patience; nor did the hostility of the synagogue, or the threatening approach of imperial severities, cause it to vacillate or hide its testimony. The word “keep” is frequent in the epistle—“Thou didst keep My word.” “Thou didst keep the word of My patience.” The exhortation is, “Hold fast;” and the promise to the Church is, “I will keep thee.” It is a word quite precious to all Christians who desire to be faithful, but know their own weakness and inconstancy. “The Lord is able to keep.” “Holy Father, keep them!” “Kept by the power of God.” “Keep me as the

apple of the eye." "O keep my soul and deliver me!"

It is thus easy to recognise the overcomer at Philadelphia. He was one who by grace subdued in himself all temptation or tendency to indecision, laxity, or compromise. He kept the word of Christ with unfaltering mind, and did not, under whatever stress, deny the blessed Name.

Now behold the reward—how kind and how suitable. At Smyrna, one who fearlessly braved deadly persecution was assured of immunity from the second death. At Sardis, one who walked circumspectly, keeping his garments undefiled, was encouraged by the prospect of walking with Christ in white. At Philadelphia, a steadfast witness for the Gospel was to be rewarded with a more glorious steadfastness, as of a pillar in the temple of God.

The Jews met in a synagogue. Their temple was overthrown. Their "house" was left desolate. And from that woful time till now they have not even tried to restore their temple anywhere. The heathen had many temples in many places, and for many gods. Christians have many places of worship commonly called churches, yet only one temple. But it is not built with hands like that which was so long the glory of Jerusalem. It is spiritual, and consists of the Christian people themselves in every place.

They are the temple of God; and the Spirit of God dwells in them. Every real Christian is a "lively stone" of some description, and of some use and value in the vast edifice. An eminently steadfast Christian is and will be a pillar.

A phrase this, of which an unworthy application is frequently made. It is common to hear one or two rich men who give important contributions to the treasury of a congregation described as pillars of the Church. But it is not good for the Church to laud and magnify rich men—not good for the rich men themselves. It is proportionate giving that is due to Christ and His cause. And whosoever gives as he has prospered, be it in little or in much, is worthy of honour. But let us reserve the title of a pillar for such a man as the Lord would give it to—a Philadelphian overcomer, of definite convictions and staunch Christian principle. Such a man may be rich or poor; but the important point is that he may be always relied on in his place. His mind is settled in the truth; his heart is fixed upon the Lord; his judgment is matured, and his character moulded into some kind of permanent shape. Such a man is not like a tree shaking in the wind, or a curtain waving and flapping in every current of air, but is already like a pillar, calm and strong.

The words, "He shall go out thence no more," take us back again to the case of Shebna, of whom Isaiah

wrote that the Lord would hurl him forth, roll him up, and toss him as a ball into a far country. Nay more. Eliakim, his successor, was also in the end to fall from his high office. Neither one nor the other was a pillar. Eliakim is compared to a nail or peg driven into the wall, on which hung all the vessels of his father's house. In other words, all the relatives of Eliakim would be advantaged by his elevation. But a nail in the wall is not like a pillar resting on the floor. This nail was to fall out of its place, and all the vessels that hung on it were to fall in a crash to the ground.¹ In contrast with this, the faithful Christian, promoted by the Messianic Son of David, is to stand upright as a pillar in the temple. "He shall never be moved."

Every such pillar will carry an inscription, not in praise of the pillar, but in honour of Him to whom the temple is consecrated. It is the name of God, and of the Holy City, and of Christ. Neither in this world nor in that which is to come, is a good Christian to exhibit himself or set forth his own renown. He is to glorify God and enjoy Him.

It must be remembered that all this is "in a figure." When we read that the pillar-like saints are to bear the Divine name, or to have the Lord's mark upon them, we are not to think of men and women with a physical mark scored or tattooed upon

¹ Isa. xxii. 25.

their foreheads, as one sees them in the East with hideous signs upon their brows in token of the deity they serve or the caste to which they belong. The mark of a Christian is on his character, not on his skin. But let us keep to the illustration of a pillar in the temple—a pillar with an inscription on it. This at all events is intelligible, and there is no confusion of metaphors.

The inscription begins with the name of God. The Lord Jesus says—"My God." So He said on earth after He had risen—"I ascend to My God and your God." In the present instance, He expresses Himself as a Steward under God; and while His suffering on earth was in order to bring men to God, now His administration of the kingdom of heaven is with a view to fit men for the Divine presence, and stamp on them the name of His God—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then "the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem." This thought has further development in later visions which are related in this book. A woman (or Apostate Church), proud, cruel, and impure, is seen riding on the Wild Beast of Imperialism; and "upon her forehead a name written—Mystery, Babylon the Great."¹ In contrast with this, the faithful are to have inscribed on them the name of the opponent of Babylon the Great, viz.,

¹ Rev. xvii. 3-6.

the Holy City, new Jerusalem. They belong to it so exclusively, that the mystic Babylon has no part in them, or power over them. And what rich blessing flows from this we learn from that passage of this book, where the new Jerusalem is disclosed to the wondering seer. "They shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God; and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more; the first things are passed away. . . . He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son."¹

The inscription on the pillar is completed by Christ's "new name." About this it is not intended, it is not possible, that we should speak positively and precisely. It is certainly not meant that a new word is to be found which will supersede "the precious name of Jesus." In Holy Writ a new name means something more than a vocable compound of so many Hebrew or Greek letters. It denotes a new manifestation of being, a new dignity, an accession of power and glory. And it may include many words. So it was in the name of Jehovah as proclaimed in the ears of Moses.² So it was in the name of the Messiah, as recorded through the prophet Isaiah.³ When, therefore,

¹ Rev. xxi. 3, 4, 7.

² Exod. xxxiv. 5-7.

³ Isa. ix. 6.

we read of a new name of Christ, which is to be borne by the Philadelphian overcomer, we are taught to expect a further and brighter disclosure of His glory. There is more in Him than even "His loved ones know." And they are to be sealed for Him in all that is yet to be discovered of His excellence, and His heavenly lustre. He will write upon them His new name. "He hath a name written, which no one knoweth but He Himself." ¹

No other name may appear on the pillar in the temple of God. No founder of a party, no father or teacher in a church, but Christ only, and the God and Father of Christ. And no "Denomination"—but "the new Jerusalem."

Oh, let us be Christians to some purpose—steadfast Christians! Let us keep the Word, and the Lord will keep us. It is the only secret of a blessedness which is lasting, and even everlasting. In this world is no stability. Its pillars must fall, and the inscriptions on them perish. Its illustrious names grow dim, and ultimately fade from memory. But in the temple and city of God the pillars never decay, the inscriptions never fade; and those who are once established in those sacred courts shall never, never go out. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches."

¹ Rev. xix. 12.

Seventh Promise.

“ To him that overcometh will I give to sit down with Me in My throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with My Father in His throne.”—*Epistle to Laodicea.*

IN the seventh epistle everything is superlative. The reproof is very full; the threat very severe; the appeal very persuasive; the promise very precious.

Laodicea was a large and prosperous city, and the Church was one of considerable standing. It is mentioned in the epistle to the neighbouring Church at Colosse, and had itself received a letter from St. Paul.¹ It certainly continued an important Church—at least in appearance—up to the close of the fourth century, for it was at Laodicea, A.D. 361, that the Council was held which settled the Canon of Scripture.

At the end of the first century, when the Lord sent a message to the angel of the Church by His servant John, there seem to have been no controversies, no divisions, no false apostles, no persecutors

¹ Col. iv. 13, 15, 16.

at Laodicea. But the Amen, the faithful and true Witness was not imposed on by the surface aspect of things. He looked on the heart of that Church, and found it far from right with God.

The first, fifth, and seventh Churches of Asia are all charged with the same kind of defection. They failed in earnestness. The first is disapproved on account of the decay of spiritual affection; the fifth for its want of spiritual life; and now the seventh for its lukewarm and self-complacent habit.

It is easy to lose religious earnestness; not at all easy to recover it. Give a congregation anywhere that is peaceful and prosperous, with ample funds and fair repute, and nothing is easier or more probable than the growth of a self-satisfied temper, accompanied by languor and lukewarmness. "We are doing remarkably well; all our appointments are in good order; our influence is wide, and our orthodoxy unimpeached. Why should we go in for fire and sacred rapture? Enthusiasm is very well in its way, but it is a dangerous thing, and apt to go to excess. Better to be calm, discreet, moderate!" Neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm.

Water is tepid, either because it has been removed from the fire before it has been sufficiently heated, or because, after being heated perhaps to the boiling point, it has been allowed to cool down again to the midway condition of lukewarmness. So were Chris-

tian people tepid at Laodicea, so are they tepid in London, either because they never were sufficiently fired by the love of God, or because, after a season of earnestness, they have been exposed to a chilling air, and lost their spiritual warmth. This fall in temperature comes on quietly and insensibly. No one needs to make an effort to fall short of an ardent zeal, or to fall away from it. Take the hottest water off the fire, or take the fire from under it, and it will become lukewarm without giving you any further trouble. So easily, so unconsciously, may a Christian, drawing off from Christ and His love, grow lethargic and lukewarm.

It is a condition of soul most offensive to the Lord. For this, He threatened to "spew out,"¹ or reject the Laodicean Church with moral disgust, as one might from his mouth cast out tepid water with nausea. No wonder! The thing is so unreasonable. With such a Saviour to befriend us, and such a heaven to receive us, and so short a time in which to serve that Saviour and prepare for that heaven, to be dull and heartless—no depth in our conviction, no thoroughness in our repentance, no emphasis in our belief, no ardour in our desire! It is a condition egregiously unreasonable. It is also so ungrateful! Think of His great love to men, and all His zeal and endurance for their redemption, and

¹ Compare Lev. xviii. 28; xx. 22.

say whether there can be ingratitude more base than the return of a half-hearted homage, a lukewarm affection to the Lord that bought us. Under the Old Testament, the ingratitude of Israel and Judah was offensive and grievous to Jehovah, and received through His prophets terrible reproofs. So offensive so grievous to the Lord Jesus is the ingratitude under the New Testament of lukewarm Christians. And then, it is so discreditable to the Gospel! Men who are cold do not, to any serious extent, compromise the Christian name, because they are avowedly non-religious. But those who are of the Laodicean type profess the faith of the Gospel, and yet virtually say that it is not in their eyes of much moment or value. They find in it no kindling, elevating, or enthralling power. So far as their testimony goes, Christianity must be a weak and nerveless thing. Little wonder that Jesus Christ is ready to reject men who thus expose His holy Gospel to misconception and contumely.

It is comparatively easy thus to expose lukewarmness, but very difficult to remove it. Once that evil has entered a church, and taken hold of leading officers and members, the fashion quickly spreads, and almost every one is affected by the reduced temperature. There is nothing to alarm the conscience; nothing is openly done at variance with the law of Christ; the proper routine of worship is

observed: and, if any one sighs for a little more fervour, he is defeated by the collective inertia, and by the self-complacence which says, as at Laodicea, we "have need of nothing."

We have pointed out the severe threats of rejection by the Lord, as marking how serious and odious this evil is in His sight. The Church at Ephesus, which had left its first love, was menaced with a removal of "the candlestick out of its place." The Church at Laodicea, which was so satisfied with itself, is threatened far more severely—"Out of my mouth!"—an absolute and vehement ejection. But with this the Lord gives a most tender message of grace, and then cheers the individual Christian who struggles against the surrounding lukewarmness by a magnificent promise—"I will give him to sit down with Me in my throne." Here is some index to the Lord's regard for a fervent spirit. Whatever men may think of it, however they may decry it as fanatical, it must be very welcome and honouring to the Divine Saviour, since He assigns to it the most signal and lofty reward.

The promise is of enthronement with Christ. The prospect of it cheered St. Paul in his old age, for he wrote to Timothy: "If we endure we shall also reign with Him."

It is proper and useful to bear in mind that while

all who are saved will have a heavenly elevation with the Lord, only the most approved and faithful among them may reach the full reward. Thus all are redeemed to be a royal priesthood in conformity to their Redeemer, who is the supreme King-Priest, Melchizedek. But there are, in all likelihood, as many degrees of reward hereafter as there are degrees of devotion and loyalty in the present world; and only those who have fought a good fight will rise to the height of future recompense.

Thus all are to be priestly intercessors with God. All who rise in the first resurrection "shall be priests of God and of Christ."¹ But not all in the same rank. At Pergamum, all the Christians were called to this priestly dignity; but only the overcomer was to rise to the height of the privilege, having for his food the hidden manna of the sanctuary, and bearing the oracle of Urim and Thummim. In like manner, all the redeemed are to reign upon the earth, but not all with equal rank or dominion. Not all the companions of Jesus, but the twelve apostles are to sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Not all the Christians at Thyatira, but the overcomer was to rule the nations with Christ. So also at Laodicea, it is the overcomer who will be exalted to share Christ's royal dignity, sitting with Him on His throne.

¹ Rev. xx. 6.

It can hardly be necessary to observe that such a saying as this is not to be taken in a literal and material sense. Let no one conjure up in his thoughts a huge throne of gold or ivory, on which might actually sit the Son of Man, and all the best Christians of all generations, and all countries grouped around Him. This is what some consider to be mental realisation; but it indicates a defect of truly spiritual imagination, and an incapacity to receive and construe symbolic teaching. Crowns, thrones, robes, swords, harps, trees, pillars, rivers, cities, all these are figures taken from things visible and familiar to help the conception of things unseen; but we are no more to take them for literal objects in the world to come than we are to literalise the wild beast, the cruel "mother of harlots," or the bowls of wrath.

The seventh promise, apart from figure, assures the overcomer of lukewarmness, that he will be lifted high in the confidence of the Lord, and admitted in some measure to share His royal dignity.

Remarkable words are added—"As I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in His throne." The idea, therefore, is not of a mystic union with God, but of conformity to and identification with the Lord Jesus, who passed through suffering to glory, and on the cross obtained the throne. "Who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising

shame, and hast sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”¹

The reference in the promise is to the act of sitting down which followed our Saviour’s ascension into heaven. And the overcoming which was thus rewarded was the victory which He achieved in His previous state of obedience and suffering. What this was we learn from His own lips—“I have overcome the world.”² “The prince of the world cometh, and he hath nothing in Me.”³

At root the temptation of Christ was the same as that which proved the faithful at Laodicea. He was solicited to spare Himself, save His own life, evade shame and pain, take ease and honour as the Son of God. Why should He hunger in the wilderness when He could turn stones into bread, if He only put forth His power as Son of God? Why should He be in the place of a servant when He might be king of all the earth? And to this point it came at last. Why should He let Himself be mocked and killed by those wretched caitiffs at Jerusalem? The world, or its prince, said to Him—“Men will take Thy meekness for feebleness. If no man has the power to take Thy life from Thee, prove it by refusing to die. Be content with what Thou hast endured. Let not Thy zeal devour Thee!” Thus it was to lukewarmness in the service of His heavenly

¹ Heb. xii. 2.

² St. John xvi. 33.

³ Ibid. xiv. 30.

Father, and to self-complacence as against self-sacrifice, that Jesus Christ was tempted; and He spurned the temptation. He overcame it by virtue of His loyalty to His mission, and His love to the children of men. He endured all things, refusing selfish ease, and steadfastly set His face toward Jerusalem, where He knew that He would be seized and crucified. The prince of this world, who understands nothing but selfishness, had nothing in Him; and no weakness of the flesh could dissuade Him from taking the cup of bitterness when it came to Him in His Father's hand.

Therefore the Father loved Him, because He laid down His life when no one had power to take it from Him. And therefore also the Father highly exalted Him, and enthroned the Overcomer at His own right hand. "Jehovah said to my Lord: Sit Thou at My right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool."¹

Now we perceive why He exhorted His disciples to be of good cheer when they had tribulation in the world—"I have overcome the world." Tribulation in His case brought temptation, and so it would in theirs. They would have strong inducements to prefer ease in the world to duty, and to escape suffering by compromise. But this would bring to them the very opportunity to show that they were not of the

¹ Ps. cx. i.

world, and through the force of His example, and the sustaining grace of His Spirit, to win royal seats in heaven. For as He had overcome, so also should they.

And what a recompense of reward! How poor a thing would be the loftiest of the thrones occupied by the kings of the earth when compared with a seat along with Jesus Christ on His throne! To be with Him where He is, to behold, and even in some manner share His glory which the Father has given to Him, what a mark of approval, what a joy ineffable!

And yet, while our Saviour is pleased to cheer the hearts of the faithful by the prospect of their being co-heirs with Him, and being united with Him on the throne and in the kingdom, it is not for them to put their own future exaltation in the foreground of their hope and desire. It must be their chief joy that He is on the throne, crowned with glory and honour. Assuredly the promise of seats on the throne will in no wise cause the overcomers to forget that they are to worship before the throne, and cast their crowns at the Redeemer's feet. To be within the halo of His glory, and see how the once Rejected One is extolled and made very high, this for the hearts who love Him is the highest reach of bliss. Hallelujah.

And lukewarmness forfeits all this! Oh shake off

supineness of soul. Contend with and overcome self-complacence. Study the love of Christ. Draw near to that Sun of Righteousness, and drink in His radiance that you may glow. Be companions also of those who have received the baptism of fire. And yield yourselves to the powerful teaching and grace of the Holy Spirit, that your hearts may burn within you, and you may be, and show yourselves to be, in earnest for the Gospel and the things which are above.

Overcoming the Accuser.

“The accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accuseth them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death.”—REV. xii. 10, 11.

THE fight between Michael and the Dragon (ver. 7, 8), which has been so vigorously treated by some of the masters in painting, is a figure of some great struggle in the sphere of religious belief and life. War in heaven is the apocalyptic index to conflict and trial through which first the Israel of God and then the Church of God must pass—discomfiting its adversaries.

The arch adversary is the Dragon or Satan. He is the serpent that tempts to disobedience, the liar that deceives through the mouths of false prophets, the murderer who instigates hatred and persecution —“a roaring lion, which goes about seeking whom he may devour.” He is also represented as the accuser of the people of God. It is nowhere affirmed that this evil spirit arraigns or in any way molests

those who work iniquity. He has nothing to say against sinners who are led captive by him at his will, nor does it suit his fell purpose to have them alarmed by any accusing voice. Let their consciences slumber. Let their souls lie "dead in trespasses and sins." He accuses "our brethren." He hurls imputations upon the saints, in order, if possible, to mar their peace with God, and cast them down into despair.

The name Devil (*Diabolos*) means accuser or traducer. It occurs in the New Testament only; but we shall find the best keys to the interpretation of this, as well as other passages of the Apocalypse, in the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

I. The accuser charges the servants of God with guilt. They are not worthy, as he alleges, to stand in the Holy Presence. To this, however, they have a triumphant reply. They do not deny that they have sinned and are unworthy; but they have God's free gift of pardon since Jesus has died and shed His blood for the remission of sins. Apart from this they have no defence; but "because of the blood of the Lamb they overcome."

There is a Rabbinic tradition to the effect that Satan is compelled to refrain from accusations against Israel, and keep silence, on one day of the year—the great Day of Atonement. Though it be a mere legend, it indicates some true perception of

the only ground on which the charge of guilt before God can be successfully met. But let us extend the statement. There is no respect of days. The peace of conscience which rests on "the blood of the Lamb" is not for one day, but for all the days of the year. There is a continual and unfaltering answer to the Satanic accusation.

The Old Testament scripture which supports and illustrates this text is the third chapter of Zechariah. There the high priest of the period is seen standing, as though to minister in his office, before the angel who represents Jehovah. But, lo! Satan standing at his right hand, for in a Jewish court of justice the plaintiff stood at the right hand of the defendant.¹ It is not recorded, but, from the judgment given, it is quite evident that Satan's plea against the high priest impugned his moral fitness for such privilege. Joshua and the people whom he represented were sinners. Nor could that charge be disputed, for the garments of the high priest were "filthy." And this was a violation of all sacred propriety. They should be clean who bare the vessels of the Lord.

Yet Satan was put to silence. The Lord rebuked him. It was true that priest and people had sinned, and that any righteousness which was their own was "filthy rags:" but it was also true that in free grace God pardoned and accepted them. This is

¹ Psalm cix. 6.

what Satan, and those who are under his blinding influence, cannot understand. He cannot bear the doctrine of free pardon, because it spoils his cruel devices. But God delights in mercy. The Jehovah-Angel "spake unto those that stood before Him, saying—Take the filthy garments from off him. And unto him He said, Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with rich apparel."

It is the same lesson that comes from the vision of Zechariah the prophet, and from that of St. John the Divine. Accusations of guilt before God are to be met not by denial but by confession. And on confession follows forgiveness. The Old Testament scripture traces this to the sovereign mercy of God—"I will." The New Testament shows us further on what ground the pardon proceeds. "Because of the blood of the Lamb." We have redemption through that blood, the forgiveness of sins. The whiteness of the garments put upon us is due to the blood of the Lamb; and therefore, those who are so apparelled are before the throne of God.

Thus our plea against all imputation of guilt is not, we have sorrowed, or we are trying to do better, or we have prayed, but "Jesus has died." St. Paul gives forth the true doctrine with a note of triumph—"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that

shall condemn? It is Christ Jesus that died; yea, rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." ¹

2. The accuser rails against the servants of God, as mere self-seekers.

As Satan is unable to discern the glory of Divine grace and mercy to sinful men, so also is he unable to appreciate or even to credit any high or worthy motives for human conduct. He not only does not love any sort of virtue; he cannot understand it, or take it to be an honest reality. It is part of his doom that he can only mock at goodness as an absurd and hollow thing.

In this respect, wicked men are very like their father the devil. Their base instinct is to suspect and jibe at goodness. All virtue is in their eyes humbug. People who pray are hypocrites. Preachers of the Gospel are hirelings. Missionaries are impostors, thinking of nothing but their salaries. All who seem to be in earnest for any moral or religious object are seeking praise for themselves, and perhaps money also. In short, all men, especially all religious men, are selfish, wholly selfish. Disinterestedness is a dream, and holiness a fraud. So says the devil; and so say his followers.

Now it may be impracticable in many instances

¹ Rom. viii. 33, 34.

to meet this odious charge with a complete refutation. A good man cannot prove his inward motives to all the outside world, least of all to those who wish to think the worst. His actions, at least some of them, are open to view. But if any choose to impute to him secret motives that are bad or selfish, and refuse to give him any credit for sincerity, he has no perfect remedy in this world. He cannot prosecute or punish such traducers as these. But he has his appeal continually to the Divine Searcher of hearts, who sees every motive as clearly as every action, and will yet vindicate every one of His servants who has been misconstrued or unjustly accused.

To some, however, both in early and in later times of the Church, opportunity and power have been given to make a triumphant answer to the unworthy accusation of selfishness. They were exposed to cruel persecution, and obliged to show whether their hearts were so knit to Christ that they would lay down their lives for His sake. These overcame "because of the word of their testimony." Far from shirking the ordeal, they conquered by their firm endurance. The jaws of wild beasts, the torture of fire, the horror of being stoned and mangled, none of these things deterred them. They carried their not-love of life "even unto death" rather than deny their Saviour. What then could Satan allege? Was Stephen a

lover of his own life, or a seeker of private ends, in becoming a disciple, and a witness of the Lord Jesus? Or any other "faithful martyr" who cheerfully lost his life for Jesus' sake, and has found it again according to Jesus' promise, enriched, and "lustred with His love?"

Again we find support and illustration in the Old Testament. The prologue to the poem of Job shows that this impeachment of motives is an old device of the accuser of our brethren. The opening scenes which lay a basis for the poem are idealised expressions of a very actual and serious trial, under which a good man's motives, after being bitterly traduced, are finely vindicated. The adversary is heard imputing selfishness to Job. "Satan answered the Lord and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth Thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will renounce Thee to Thy face."¹ So "the sons of Belial" are always ready to say of a servant of Christ, "He makes a good thing of it; it is his well-filled pocket that keeps up his piety." But lo! when Job was stripped of all his possessions, and was bereaved of his children, though he lived in a time when prosperity was regarded as a sure sign of Divine favour, and adversity as an equally sure evidence of Divine disap-

¹ Job i. 9-11.

proval, this afflicted man never dreamed of renouncing his faith or his testimony. "Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

But Satan was not yet put to silence. With relentless cruelty he returned to the charge. "And Satan answered the Lord, and said: Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth Thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will renounce Thee to Thy face."¹ So the ordeal was allowed to go as far as could be without killing the patriarch. A disease fell upon him which made him long for death; and still he sinned not with his lips. He was wounded in spirit and "exceeding sorrowful," but had no thought of drawing back from his religion or renouncing God. His own wife in a fit of frenzy at the sight of his sufferings tempted him in vain. Then three friends harassed him with fluent speeches, in which, though they said many good things, they played Satan's game in assailing Job's integrity and condemning him without cause. But the hard pressed sufferer constantly appealed from their harsh and shallow judgment to the just and unerring judgment of God. And whatever correction Job needed he received from God, and received with humility; but against the adversary that had maligned him, and the "miserable comforters" who had played the part of bitter

¹ Job ii. 4, 5.

accusers, Job's vindication was complete. He proved that his fear of God had not been selfish or mercenary, but was sincere and deep rooted in his heart. Against all who misrepresented him the Lord maintained His servant's cause. What a discomfiture for the three censorious "friends" when the Lord said to them twice, as we read in the epilogue, "Ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as *My servant Job hath.*"¹ It was a signal instance of the overcoming of the dragon, "because of the word of testimony" steadfastly maintained.

We may be conscious that the strain of such scriptures as are here quoted is far above us. We are not of "the noble army of martyrs." Yet are we certainly called to be martyrs in the proper meaning of the term, which is witnesses. Those who are commonly so designated are only so many of the witnesses as have been honoured to go to prison and to death rather than withdraw their testimony or deny their Lord. But all Christians are called to be martyrs in the sense of witnesses, and all are subjected to some test of fidelity. Yet every one in his own order, and according to the measure of grace which he has received; not the least effective being the little ones that honour the Lord Jesus. Their praise in the temple was pleasing to Him, just as it was annoying to His enemies,

¹ Job xlii. 7, 8.

and baffling to the devil himself, for it was written of old—

“Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou established strength

“Because of Thine adversaries,

“That Thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.”¹

Let our little book close with two earnest counsels to our brethren in this time of the Church's trial, and of the dragon's “great wrath.”

1. *Have faith in the blood of the Lamb.* Without it you have absolutely no answer to the accusation of guilt proceeding either from an adversary or from your own conscience. Your self-reproaches, prayers, tears, and good intentions for the future cannot obliterate past sins, or turn filthy garments into snow white raiment before God. Only “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son” can cleanse you from all sin.

2. *Maintain the testimony of the Gospel.* If you play fast and loose with this, confessing Christ only when it is easy for you and redounds to your credit, but keeping silence when the confession of His name might cause you inconvenience or expose you to derision, you give ground for the imputation that you are a self-seeker and not an honest believer.

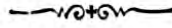
Be true to your best convictions. You are not

¹ Ps. viii. 2 ; St. Matt. xxi. 15, 16.

likely to be required ever to hazard your lives as did "the beloved Barnabas and Paul" for the name of the Lord Jesus, but you are required and expected so to lay out and spend your lives for Christ and His cause as to put detractors to silence. If you are real, show that you are. Pretexts are vain; shams in religion deserve all the scorn they receive; a self-seeking Christian profession is a foolish, feeble thing. But truth stands when the shadows flee away. Godly sincerity has nothing to fear. Let the word of the testimony have in your lips and your lives a support loyal and uncompromising, and it will be on your false accusers that shame and silence shall ultimately fall.

It is good to bear the dragon's hatred, for it is a sign of your being in the Redeemer's love. O miserable captives of the devil, dupes of the arch-deceiver, breathing, if not threatening out slaughter, scorn and suspicion against all such as are godly! O happy servants of God, whom the dragon calumniates, but whom the Holy Spirit consoles and fortifies!

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