

# The Great Text Commentary.

## THE GREAT TEXTS OF REVELATION.

### REVELATION XXII. 3, 4.

'And there shall be no curse any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein: and his servants shall do him service; and they shall see his face; and his name shall be on their foreheads.'

THERE is a striking contrast, says Anderson Scott,<sup>1</sup> between the Christian anticipation of heaven as here portrayed and the non-Christian pictures of Paradise. And this is true not only of the pictures painted by the fancy of the Greeks, or by the ingenuity of Muhammad, but also of those which would be most familiar to St. John, the pictures of Paradise which are found in the later Jewish literature. Without being sensual in the evil significance of the word, as are some of the other extra-Biblical anticipations, those of the Jewish Apocalypses are largely, if not mainly, sensuous; that is to say, they delight to represent the righteous as enjoying in Paradise the pleasures of physical life which may have been denied to them on earth. In contrast with this, in the Apocalypse of St. John, while the judgments are depicted in terms of events which had actually occurred in history, or which do occur in human experience, the description of the joys and glories of the redeemed is remarkable by the *omission* of nearly everything corresponding to the experience of enjoyment on earth. The features of the heavenly condition are either negative (no more sea, no more night, no more death, no more curse), or spiritual and religious (the tabernacle of God is with men, His name shall be on their foreheads).

In our text we have the New City characterized both negatively and positively—negatively in the absence of any curse, positively in the presence of the throne of God and the occupation of His servants.

We find that in the Old Testament Cain is a natural foil to the saints mentioned in the text. 'There shall be no curse any more,' says John. Of Cain it is said, 'Cursed art thou from the ground' (Gn 4<sup>11</sup>). In the text there is stability of the saints in the city of God; Cain is a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth. Once more, it is written, 'His servants shall do him service.' To Cain even the service

of the earth will be unfruitful. The saints in the New Jerusalem are to see the face of God; Cain says of himself, 'From thy face shall I be hid.' Lastly, God's name is to be on the foreheads of the inhabitants of the city with the foundations. On Cain's forehead is a sign that he is an outcast. The toilers of the city rejoice and labour in the presence of God always; Cain must go out from the presence of the Lord.

### I.

#### THE CURSE.

St. John uses an unusual word (*κατάθεμα*) for 'curse,' a word which occurs nowhere else in Biblical Greek, although the verb formed from it is found in Mt 26<sup>74</sup>. Swete thinks it is somewhat stronger than the ordinary word *anathema*—an execration, and not simply a ban. 'No execrated or execrable person or thing shall be found in the Holy City.' The sentence would then be equivalent to, and practically a repetition of, Rev 21<sup>27</sup>, 'And there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie.'

Macdougall, in his book on *The Fields of France*, tells how the game preserves become annually impracticable for the chase owing to the presence of sweet flowers. Every May a beautiful fault frustrates the sport, for, thick as grass, the lily of the valley springs in all the brakes and shady places. The scent of the game will not lie across these miles of blossom. The hunters are in despair, and the deer, still deafened with the winter's yelp of the hounds, beholds himself at last befriended by an ally more invincible than water or forest oak, by the sweet and innumerable white lilies that every May-time send the huntsmen home. Feeding among the perfumed flowers the gazelle exults in delight and safety. Even so among the sweet flowers of the heavenly paradise no danger can come to the redeemed. 'There shall be no curse any more.'

But it is possible to take the words as expressing negatively the condition of the redeemed. To the citizens of the City of God there will be no curse any more, because—

1. There will be no indwelling sin. The flesh will no longer lust against the spirit (Gal 5<sup>27</sup>). When we would do good (Ro 7<sup>21</sup>), good and not evil will be present with us.

2. There will be no temptation. At least there will be no temptation for which a way of escape will be not only provided but also made use of.

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of the Revelation*, 306.

That old serpent the devil, the occasion of the great temptation, will be absent. And however there may be opportunity for the exercise of the will, the will of man will delight to do the will of God.

3. There will be none of the results of sin—no sorrow, no suffering, no disease, no death. All these are of the former things which now have passed away.

Lord Jesus, be our Guide;  
O lead us safely on,  
Till night and grief and sin and death  
Are past, and heaven is won.

## II.

### THE THRONE OF GOD AND OF THE LAMB.

1. *The throne of God.* The throne of God indicates the supremacy of God. The expression occurs in the Apocalypse thirty-six times. And God's supremacy will not only be actual as it is now, but universally recognized as it is not now. At present His reign is largely a reign of suspension, of waiting, of patience. This is true, as regards both those that oppose, and those that serve Him. He does not put forth all His power to deliver His servants, nor to restrain and punish His enemies. Hence much of the mystery and seeming contradiction of life. But there is a mercy in the mystery. If He does not crush and destroy His enemies, it is that He is 'not willing that any should perish' (2 P 3<sup>o</sup>); and if He does not immediately deliver His servants from all the seeming evil of life, it is because they need the discipline of pain and conflict, that they may be truly fitted for the perfect life. But to that life He will surely lead them; and even here we see a progress towards that consummation, as regards both the subdual of evil and the deliverance and victory of the good.

Many people more or less consciously recoil from the assertion of a claim so imperative as is necessarily involved in such a conception of the Supreme. Some actually reject religion on this account: they think, or speak as if they thought, that their independence would be compromised, their dignity insulted, by the recognition of a Sovereign in heaven, no less than by subjection to a master on earth; perhaps they go so far as to say that the very notion of a God claiming to have dominion over man's whole being is an invention of the governing orders, a piece of the machinery devised by their class-selfishness for the obvious purpose of 'keeping the people down.' Others, who cannot dispense with religion altogether, endeavour, as far as possible, to

keep the idea of Divine Sovereignty in the background. Perhaps they may in part be under the influence of a recoil from one-sided and repellent views of that Sovereignty, which were a stumbling-block to believers in the Divine moral perfection. But the reaction must be worse than extravagant which leads men to emphasize 'the Fatherhood of God' by detaching from it, in effect, the idea of paternal authority; as if there were no significance in the words of the last prophet, 'If I be a Father, where is Mine honour? and if I be a Master, where is My fear?'<sup>1</sup>

2. *The throne of the Lamb.* That is to say, the supremacy of God will be a supremacy of love. We can hardly mistake the connotation of qualities belonging to this name—'the Lamb.' John the Baptist used it, when he bore witness to Jesus, saying, as the young spring lambs were sporting in the fields around, the very symbols of innocence, patience, and gentleness, 'See, that is God's Lamb!' And was not this the character of Christ, as He was here among men? But the use of the expression has also a reference to the wonderful and precious incarnation of the Son of God. The people of God are familiarly known, in the Old and New Testaments alike, as God's flock; and how significant, then, that the Shepherd of the sheep should be spoken of as a Lamb—a Lamb of the flock of God—one of themselves, sharing their nature, and living their life! This comes out in that beautiful foretelling of the life of the heavenly ones, in which we read that 'the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life' (Rev 7<sup>17</sup>).

We know where John got that title for Christ—'the Lamb.' It is almost peculiar to himself. We catch the note in Isaiah; we hear the name in an Epistle of Peter, and in the Acts of the Apostles as a quotation from the evangelical prophet. But with John it is a most familiar term. John the best beloved of all the disciples of Jesus, loves this sweet symbol, and delights to speak of his Lord as 'the Lamb.' This John had been a disciple of that other John, the Baptist, whose chief and choicest sermon, which lingered most in his mind and memory, was couched in words like these—'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' John the Baptist struck a note which vibrated throughout the whole life of John the Divine. In Patmos John recalls his early impressions, for old men delight in the scenes and sayings of their youth.

<sup>1</sup> W. Bright, *Morality in Doctrine*, 131.

The power thus conferred upon Him, the Lamb not only possesses by right and title, but He exercises it in deed and in truth. 'All power,' said our risen Redeemer, 'is given unto me in heaven and in earth.' He rules now with unlimited sway: and the sceptre of His kingdom is a right sceptre. As Joseph was exalted in Egypt, and Pharaoh said, See, I have set thee over all the land; and the people cried before him, Bow the knee; and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt: even so we read of Jesus, God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

In one of the suburbs we met a shepherd and a flock of sheep. The shepherd had got a sheep upon his shoulders, its fore feet were held under his chin by his left hand, and his right grasped his staff. While his collie dog was driving the sheep aside to let our carriage pass, I entered into conversation with the shepherd, and said, 'That's a heavy load you've got there.' He answered, 'Oh! it's not so heavy when you're used to it.' I asked, 'What's the matter with the sheep?' 'It's lame, sir.' 'How far are you from home?' I asked again. 'About four miles, sir,' 'And will you have to carry it the whole way?' Looking at me with some degree of contempt for my ignorance, he said, 'He'd never get home if I didn't.'

3. *The throne of God and of the Lamb.* There is only one throne, God and the Lamb are not divided. The Lamb is God, and the interests of God and the Lamb are one. The one kingdom of God, even the Father, is identical with the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is upon the throne reigning there, clothed bodily with all the power of the Godhead. The Lamb is on the throne. Co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, very God He is, very God He always was. We do not forget the glory which He had with the Father or ever the world was, but it is as God-man Mediator that He is now, in His complex person, invested with heavenly honours.

The throne of God is the throne of an absolute monarch who doeth as He wills among the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of this lower world. From that throne the proclamation comes like a peal of thunder, 'The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble.' God's throne of sovereignty is not a throne of arbitrary power, for the Lord is perfect and holy, and His will is just and right. In acting according to the purpose of His own will, He abounds towards us in all wisdom and goodness. The

sternness of law is linked with the sweetness of love; because while the throne of heaven is the throne of God, it is still the throne of the Lamb. I fear that I fail to find the words that will express my thoughts; but this empire of God and the Lamb endears itself to our hearts. There is about it a kingly kindliness, and a majestic mercy most charming to the mind. Do any ask, What throne is that? To whom does it belong? We answer, It is the throne of the great and glorious God, and it is the throne of the lowly lovely Lamb. The glorious Lord is gentle as a child; the Lamb is lordly as a lion. Referring to the Book sealed with seven seals, described in the fifth chapter, St. Bernard said, 'John heard of a lion and saw a lamb; the lamb opened the book and appeared a lion.' But, behold here it is, 'the throne of God and of the Lamb.' Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, O seer; the place whereon thou standest is holy ground, for God is here. Come, little children, there is charm enough to entice you; for the Lamb is here. It is the throne of God, therefore fall down before it with awe and self-abasement; but it is the throne of the Lamb, therefore you may stand up before it without fear.<sup>1</sup>

### III.

#### HIS SERVANTS.

This is the third part of our text. First, we are assured that nothing cursed or having power to curse shall be there. Next, we are told that power and love shall be enthroned in the city. Then our eyes are directed to those who submit to this power, doing the commandments of God, the sum of which is always 'Thou shalt love.' They are called His servants, or rather His slaves; and three statements are made about them:

1. They shall do Him service. That is their occupation.
2. They shall see His face. That is their privilege.
3. His name shall be on their foreheads. That is the mark of their ownership.

Or if we wish to assist the memory, we might say that we have here Service, Satisfaction, and Sanctification.

#### I. HIS SERVANTS SHALL DO HIM SERVICE.

1. The two expressions for 'servant' and 'serve' are not related to one another in the Greek, as they are in the English, but are two quite independent words; the former meaning literally 'a slave,' and the latter being exclusively confined in Scripture to one kind of service. It would

<sup>1</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1576, p. 20.

never be employed for any service that a man did for a man; it is exclusively a religious word, and means only the service that men do for God, whether in specific acts of so-called worship or in the wider worship of daily life.

The Gospel reveals a new and special ground for the obligation of God's service; He has acquired a supernatural right over us in virtue of the fact of our redemption. If we have been bought, in the Scriptural imagery, at no less a price than the blood of God's own Son, it follows that 'we are not our own': we cannot be 'without law to God,' we must be 'under law to Christ.' Two phrases are employed in the New Testament in order to impress this thought upon us. In some passages a word is used which originally represented the condition of a hired servant, as when St. Paul speaks of the God whose he is and whom he 'serves,' or when he professes that he 'serves God in his spirit' or 'in a pure conscience';—or when the Epistle to the Hebrews describes the Christian conscience as 'cleansed by the blood of Christ, from dead works, to serve the living God' (*λατρεύω*, Ac 27<sup>23</sup>, Ro 1<sup>9</sup>, 2 Ti 1<sup>3</sup>, He 9<sup>14</sup>). But as if this term were not strong enough to stand alone, the relation between a bondservant or slave, and a master whose rights over him were absolute,—a relation which Christianity was to undermine, but which for the time was suffered to exist,—is utilised, so to speak, for the purpose of enforcing this great lesson. Four times does St. Paul, himself the Apostle, as he is called, of spiritual freedom, adopt the title of 'a slave of God' or of 'Christ': a title used also by St. Peter, by St. John, by St. James, and by St. Jude (*δοῦλος*, Ro 1<sup>1</sup>, Gal 1<sup>10</sup>, Ph 1<sup>1</sup>, Tit 1<sup>1</sup>, 2 P 1<sup>1</sup>, Rev 1<sup>1</sup>, Ja 1<sup>1</sup>, Jude 1<sup>1</sup>). We find St. Paul exhorting Christian slaves to carry into their whole routine of obedience to earthly lords the sense of duty to 'the Lord Christ,' and pressing upon earthly lords, in turn, the fact too that they are subject to the self-same Lord in heaven. We are still bondservants, he says, though [not in the old sense of Jewish legalism: our members must be presented as 'slaves to righteousness'; to be 'made free from sin' is to become, in a fuller sense, 'enslaved to God.'<sup>1</sup>

Given the idea of a living God, the conviction that we are bound to serve Him follows; and Scripture does but emphasize the conclusion which natural reason forces upon all serious Theists. 'I am thy servant' is the burden of all that intercourse between the human soul and its God which pervades and vitalizes the Psalter: and the prophet's language about 'the Lord's Servant' passes beyond an 'idealized Israel' to its fulfilment in the obedience completed on the Cross. And although the gospel is a 'law of liberty,' yet no delusive spirit from the pit ever uttered a deeper falsehood than that which could confound liberty with licence, or deny that moral

<sup>1</sup> W. Bright, *Morality in Doctrine*, 134.

law is involved in the relations between men and a moral God.

It is no unfit time just now to invigorate our remembrance of that truth. Even within the most living circles of the Christian Church, just now *the sense of duty* surely is not at its strongest. Life, and energy, and holy hope and gladness,—in many quarters these are indeed on the increase, not on the wane. But the will to do a divine Master's will—not our liking, but His bidding; the sober strength of Christian character; the weight and fixity of principle; the jealousy that conscience is kept void of offence in the plain duties of the common day,—this is not a thing so often to be found. Nevertheless, this thing is an essential in the seed sown here which is to issue in the life of heaven. 'For it is written that *His servants* there shall serve Him still.'

Take just one noble and beautiful instance of the combination of obedience and love, of service and joyfulness, in Polycarp who had apparently been consecrated to the episcopate by St. John, and who, when invited to save his life by uttering some form of renunciation of Christ, answered, 'Eighty-six years have I been, His servant, and He has done me no wrong: how, then, can I revile my King who saved me.'<sup>2</sup>

A company of monks, centuries ago, having read together the Book of Revelation, fell to discussing the relative attractiveness of the promises contained in it. One pointed to, 'God shall wipe away all tears' as the best of them all. Another selected, 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne.' But the third, who was Thomas à Kempis, claimed as the most glorious of all, 'His servants shall serve him.'

## 2. What are the characteristics of their service?

(1) *Continuity*. Death is not an end of the activities and energies which have been consecrated to God. It is not the great breaking off it seems to those who stand around and see its work, but the setting free of old powers for new developments. If one looks back it seems the end of a career; if forward, it seems a career's beginning: in reality it is neither, but an incident of continuous life. Those qualities which we recognize to inhere particularly in the soul or spirit of man attend him to the world beyond. 'He that has been righteous, shall be righteous still; he that has been holy, shall be holy still.' And so with other qualities of man's inmost nature—love, justice, generosity—whatever he has had here, wherewith he can claim or offer to

<sup>2</sup> W. Bright, *ibid.* 137.

serve God, remains part of his personality, and finds its function in the life to come.

(2) *Rest.* Some people suppose that this life of service is only for the earth, and that it will be no longer required when we pass into the other life. Heaven is thought of by many as a place of absolute rest, where the inhabitants will have nothing more to do for ever. Indeed, in one of the beatitudes of the Book of Revelation we are told of the blessed dead that when they die in the Lord they rest from their labours. But the word 'labours' here does not mean things we do in love for our Master. It has in it the idea of painful toils, cares, anxieties, sufferings.

The deepest rest and the highest activity coincide. They do so in God who 'worketh hitherto' in undisturbed tranquillity; they may do so in us. The wheel that goes round in swiftest rotation seems to be standing still. Work at its intensest, which is pleasurable work, and level to the capacity of the doer, is the truest form of rest. In vacuity there are stings and torment; it is only in joyous activity which is not pushed to the extent of strain and unwelcome effort that the true rest of man is to be found. And the two verses in this Book of Revelation about this matter, which look at first sight to be opposed to each other, are like the two sides of a sphere, which unite and make the perfect whole. 'They rest from their labours.' 'They rest *not*, day nor night.'

(3) *Altruism.* Heaven's service must be service for other people. The law for heaven can surely not be more selfish than the law for earth, and that is, 'Whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.' The law for the perfect man can surely not be different from the law for the Master, and the law for Him is, 'Even Christ pleased not himself.' The perfection of the child can surely not be different from the perfection of the Father, and the perfection of the Father is: 'He maketh his sun to "shine," and his blessings to come—on the unthankful and on the good.' So then the highest service for man is the service of others;—how, where, or whom, we cannot tell. We too may be 'ministering spirits, sent forth to minister' (He 1<sup>14</sup>), but at all events not on ourselves can our activities centre; and not in self-culture can be the highest form of our service to God.

We often see the words 'Divine service will be conducted' at such an hour, by such and such a minister. And without detracting from the special status of the ministerial office, or the sanctity of the service of praise and prayer, when truly rendered to the King of Glory, we may still, with enlightened hearts, widen the scope of the phrase, and say, 'Divine service will be conducted' in this and that home, by the Christian serving-maid or the mother who lights the fire and prepares the breakfast, as the incarnate Minister did by the lake-side so sacredly. 'Divine service will be conducted' in this and that workshop, by such and such a carpenter, even as it was performed so sacredly at Nazareth. Or in this office and on that wharf, in this warehouse or behind that counter, in yonder palace in the great city, in this tiny cottage along the country lane, will divine service be conducted daily for the King of Glory, with vibrating thoughts of harmonious love for organ, and the seraphim, who cry, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts,' for choir.<sup>1</sup>

## II. THEY SHALL SEE HIS FACE.

1. *They shall see.* In order that we may see there must be manifestation on the part of God, and there must be vision on the part of man.

(1) God has made four successive manifestations of Himself, of which this is the last and the highest. There is, first, the manifestation of God in His Word. In Ps 119<sup>130</sup> a parallel is drawn between the sun shining upon and lighting the material world, and God shining upon and enlightening the spiritual world by the illumination of His Word: 'The entrance of thy words giveth light.' There is, secondly, the manifestation of God in the incarnation of the Son. 'We beheld his glory,' says St. John. 'We beheld His glory is the testimony of every one to whom Christ manifests Himself as He does not unto the world. There is, thirdly, the manifestation of God in the gift of the Spirit. 'The love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Ghost which was given unto us.' There is, fourthly, the manifestation in fulness when, with unveiled face, the redeemed see God and the Lamb sitting upon the throne. To Moses God said, 'Thou canst not see my face and live.' But to His disciples Jesus said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' Now, however, we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Happy he who shall—

Gaze one moment on the Face, whose beauty  
Wakes the world's great hymn;  
Feel it one unutterable moment  
Bent in love o'er him;

<sup>1</sup> W. A. Cornaby, *In Touch with Reality*, 190.

In that look feel heaven, earth, men, and  
angels,

Distant grow and dim ;

In that look feel heaven, earth, men, and  
angels,

Nearer grow through Him.<sup>1</sup>

(2) Man obtains three visions, of which this, again, is the last and the highest. First, he has the vision of *Righteousness*. Righteousness includes all those attributes which make up the idea of the Supreme Ruler of the universe—perfect justice, perfect truth, perfect purity, perfect moral harmony in all its aspects. It is related of Bishop Butler that in his last moments he expressed it as ‘an awful thing to appear before the Moral Governor of the world.’<sup>2</sup> It is in moments of awe, when we commune with our own hearts and are still, that we have this vision. But the vision of Righteousness is succeeded by the vision of *Grace*. When Butler in his dying moments had expressed his awe at appearing face to face before the Moral Governor of the world, his chaplain, we are told, spoke to him of ‘the blood which cleanseth from all sin.’ ‘Ah, this is comfortable,’ he replied ; and with these words on his lips he gave up his soul to God. He only, says Lightfoot, who has learned to feel the awe, will be taught to know the Grace. Then the vision of grace melts into the vision of *Glory*. This is the final stage in our progress. Not with transient gleam of radiance, as on the law-giver of old, shall the light be reflected from us ; but, resting upon us with its own ineffable glory, the awful effluence—

Shall flood our being round, and take our lives  
Into itself.

Oh, think ! to step ashore, and that shore heaven ;  
To clasp a hand outstretched, and that God’s hand ;  
To breathe new air, and that celestial air ;  
To feel refreshed and know it—immortality.  
Oh, think ! to pass from storm and stress  
To one unbroken calm ;  
To wake and find it glory.

2. *His face*. Who’s face? I, for my part, says Dr. Maclaren, do not believe that any conceivable extension of creatural faculties, or any conceivable hallowing of creatural natures, can make the creature able to gaze upon God. I know that it is often said that the joy of the future life for men is what the theologians call ‘the beatific vision,’

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Rundle Charles, *Songs Old and New*, 59.

<sup>2</sup> Bartlett, *Memoirs of Bishop Butler*, 225.

in which there shall be direct sight of God, using that word in its highest meaning, as applied to the perceptions of the spirit, and not of the sense. But I do not think the Bible teaches us that. It does teach us, ‘We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.’ But who is the ‘Him’? Jesus Christ. And, in my belief, Jesus Christ will, to all eternity, be the medium of manifesting God, and there will remain, to all eternity, the incapacity which clogs creatures in time—No man hath seen God at any time, nor *can* see Him.

3. There are four striking passages which bring before our notice the face of Jesus. (1) Lk 9<sup>51</sup>, ‘He stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem’ ; (2) Mt 26<sup>39</sup>, ‘He fell on his face and prayed’ ; (3) Mt 26<sup>67</sup>, ‘Then did they spit in his face’ ; (4) the present passage. St. John in his loneliness recalled the face of Jesus which had become familiar to him in three years of intimate fellowship. He recalled the face which expressed every variety of emotion that passed over His soul, now expressive of infinite tenderness as He had compassion on the multitude ; now expressive of marvellous affection as He blessed the little children ; now expressive of wonderful power as He commanded the winds and waves to obey Him ; now expressive of truth as He taught His disciples ; and now expressive of His divinity as He healed the sick and raised the dead. The beloved disciple had seen the face of Jesus when He walked upon the waves, when He subdued the storm, when He healed those possessed of divers diseases, when He taught the crowds that thronged about Him, when He was transfigured on the Mount, when He instituted the Lord’s Supper, when He bore the cross, when He was crucified, when He gave the Great Commission, and ascended to glory ; and now, on the Isle of Patmos, as a lonely exile, John recalled the face of Jesus that he had seen so oft and longed to see it again in its wisdom and love, majesty and power.

4. What was the appearance of His face on earth? Every artist in painting the portrait of Christ depicts Him with the face and figure of one of the nation to which the artist belongs. Thus the German paints Him as a German ; the Frenchman as a Frenchman ; the Italian as an Italian, and the American as an American. It teaches us the valuable lesson that Christ is the desire of all nations and offers Himself as the Saviour of all men. There were no paintings of the face of Jesus Christ and no description of His appear-

ance left to the world—not a line to tell how the lowly Galilean looked when He walked amongst men. Was it because the disciples had forgotten how He appeared, or was it because they shrank from any material representation of Jesus, or was it because they never thought of Him after seeing Him glorified as the patient sufferer wandering upon the earth, or was the picture and description withheld for fear men would worship the seen, instead of the unseen, or was it because they had His presence with them, which no artist could paint, no pen describe?

It is an inspiration to see the face of a great man. Let it be announced that a King or a President is to appear, and excursions from afar bring thousands of people to the scene of his appearance that they may behold his face. Someone said it was worth crossing the ocean to see the face of Gladstone. When thinking of the departed ones we long to see their faces. We care but little about the texture of their glorified bodies, but we are anxious to see their dear, familiar, loving faces. The thought cheers and sustains us as we travel along the straight and narrow way that leads to eternal life, but there is a thought that is more cheerful, a desire more intense, a hope more elevating, an expectation more delightful—the seeing of our Saviour.

5. *What expression will His face wear then?*

(1) It will wear a look of welcome; 'Come ye blessed of my Father.' (2) It will wear a look of love: 'Who loved me and gave himself for me.' (3) It will wear a look of content, for He shall have seen of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied.

6. *And seeing His face they also shall be satisfied.* That may seem at first sight but a feeble presentation of the joy and the glories of life in heaven; but it contains, perhaps expresses, them all. To have a craving for love which only God can satisfy, and yet to be content; to have a desire for holiness not less than the holiness of God, and yet to be content; to have the infinite capacities of an eternal spirit set free from the trammels of earth, and yet to be content; to look back and see the meaning of it all; to look forward and know that time and change, grief and sin, are for ever left behind—is not that a heaven, one worth waiting for, one worth living for? 'I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness,' said the Psalmist; and when we ponder his words, we see that human language can express no higher bliss: 'I shall be satisfied.'

Throughout the long Christian ages, this hope of 'the beatific Vision,' of that Sight of the Lord

which makes absolutely blessed, has shone before the eyes of the Church on her pilgrimage, as the ultimate rest and glory. So it must be. Heaven is to be the scene of an endless life. The prospect, apart from the sight of God, would be even terrible; it would more than realize the sorrowful Tithonus—legend of the Greeks, the woe of the being who, asking for immortality, forgot to ask also for immortal youth. Nothing but the Vision can keep the finite creature new and young for ever. But that can; each for himself, all for one another, and for the Lord, the blessed shall be for ever crowned with an fading, yea, a blossoming life, seeing Him.'

It is told of an ancient sculptor's statue of the goddess of Love, that, if a riband was drawn over its eyes, the face had no charm, but when the riband was removed, it was lit with beauty like a landscape when the morning breaks. And how beautiful the Face of Jesus must have been in the Light of that Surpassing Love which shone through the windows of His soul! Though His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men, yet He would be the chiefest among ten thousand, altogether lovely.<sup>1</sup>

7. *They shall serve and they shall see.* These two, the life of work and the life of devout communion—the Martha and the Mary of the Christian experience—are antagonistic here below, and it is hard to reconcile their conflicting, fluctuating claims and to know how much to give to the inward life of gazing upon Christ, and how much to the outward life of serving Him. But, says the text, the two shall be blended together. 'His servants shall serve him;' nor in all their activity shall they lose the vision of His face. His servants 'shall see his face'; nor in all the still blessedness of their gaze upon Him shall they slack the diligence of the unwearied hands, or the speed of the willing feet. The Rabbis taught that there were angels who serve, and angels who praise, but the two classes meet in the perfected man, whose service shall be praise, whose praise shall be service.

The words, 'they shall see his face' suggest that this will be the inspiration of the heavenly service. We know what a benediction the face of a loved and honoured human friend is to us as we go out on any hard task or dangerous duty. There are men whose 'God bless you' makes us braver and stronger for days. One said, speaking of a dear and noble friend, 'To meet him in the morning and have his smile brightens all the hours of the day for me.' What will it be in heaven to look into Christ's face of love in the morning and to have His smile!

<sup>1</sup> D. Smith, *The Face of Jesus*, p. 26.

We know not when, we know not where,  
 We know not what that world will be ;  
 But this we know—it will be fair  
 To see.

With heart athirst and thirsty face,  
 We know and know not what shall be :—  
 Christ Jesus brings us of His grace  
 To see.

Christ Jesus brings us of His grace,  
 Beyond all prayers our hope can pray,  
 One day to see Him face to face,—  
 One day.<sup>1</sup>

### III. HIS NAME SHALL BE ON THEIR FOREHEADS.

I. The forehead is in itself an inscription ; it is the mark of Man. For no other creature bears the smooth-domed architrave and *metopon* over the portal of its communication with the world. The birds, with their swiftness and airiness of motion, lack the forehead altogether ; and the beasts, notwithstanding broad and heavy frontlets, designed, as it were, to push and thrust through the jungle or against the foe, have not the arched dome on which a name might be written. When there is the lofty dome of Shakespeare or of Sir Walter Scott, or 'the bar of Michael Angelo,' we estimate the genius which resides and works within by the stately span of the arched building. But even the humblest human brow is far removed from that of the noblest ape ; on the ape's brow nothing can be written, but on the man's is at least written this : that he is a Man. It is this meaning and mark of the forehead which gives the imaginative glory to Milton's figure, when he says that the Star

Flames in the forehead of the morning sky.

I had another conversation last night. The birds have come back again ; and I asked the robins what their idea was, anyhow, of going south every autumn. I had noticed their cessation of singing and their discernment of the weather, and their collection in mute flocks, and finally their sailing in the night on uplifted wing, in an unknown way, to a far distant summer. They were travellers and explorers ; and I told them of Humboldt, who had circumnavigated the globe and dwelt in all the sunny spots of South America and the tropics. I explained to them why he travelled and what knowledge he collected. The only answer which I got from my robins was, 'Have you any little crumbs of bread handy that we can eat? As to

<sup>1</sup> Christina G. Rossetti.

travelling, we travel ; but all the rest that you have been telling us of—trees, plants, astronomy, geology, etc.—we would rather have a crumb of bread than to know about these.' It was not my fault that I could not make the robins understand what scientific travelling is ; it was because they were robins, and not men. They were not big enough.<sup>2</sup>

2. Dr. Selwyn notices three stages of thought in the Apocalypse in reference to the forehead. (1) The servants of God are sealed on their foreheads (7<sup>3</sup>). (2) The name of the Lamb upon their foreheads (with no verb at all, 22<sup>4</sup>). (3) His name and His Father's written upon their foreheads (14<sup>1</sup>). After which comes 3<sup>12</sup>, adding 'the name of the city.'<sup>3</sup>

3. What does the name on the forehead signify ?

(1) *Ownership*. The face of God seems always to represent the revelation of Him by vision, and His name the revelation of Him by testimony. In our text, those who see His face are represented as bearing His impress, and carrying the sign of ownership upon their foreheads. The forehead is that part of the face expressive of strength. Under the old dispensation a frontlet was worn upon the forehead as well as upon the left arm. The frontlet upon the left arm was tied with a thong that was wound around the arm until it reached the tip of the longest finger. This seemed to indicate that the power of service on the part of the individual was consecrated. The frontlet placed between the eyes on the forehead, on the contrary, was intended to express the fact that the whole intelligence of the man was consecrated to God. Thus John, having already referred to the service rendered, now speaks of the impress of divine ownership which the noblest feature of man shall bear—'His name shall be upon their foreheads.' Yea, further, as the plate upon Aaron's forehead had the words written on it, 'Holy is the Lord,' so shall those who were once God's servants become His temple priests, and, seeing His face, shall also wear upon their foreheads the name of their God, and thus bear silent but eloquent and everlasting witness that they are His.

It is only the *name* that is written on the perfected saint's forehead. Not the 'Holiness unto the Lord,' but just the bare name. What does that mean? Well, it means the same as your writing your name in one of your books does,

<sup>2</sup> H. Ward Beecher in *Christian World Pulpit*, ix. 284.

<sup>3</sup> E. C. Selwyn, *The Christian Prophets*, 189.



or as when a man puts his initials on the back of his oxen, or as the old practice of branding the master's mark upon the slave did. It means absolute ownership.

We think of the brand of slavery, the inscription of the owner's name upon the body of the slave. We recall how the most spiritual and imaginative of the Old Testament prophets had already idealized this immemorial usage to set forth the willing subjection of the surrounding nations to the God of Israel, in the words: 'One shall say, "I am Jehovah's," and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob, and another shall write on his hand, "Jehovah's"' (Is 44<sup>5</sup> margin). And now at last the seer of Patmos, beholding in prospect the final regeneration and renewal of mankind, embraces in a single apocalyptic glance the whole evolution of human society, from the rudest beginnings of barbaric slavery to the joyful services of the new heavens and the new earth, where the servants are still slaves and yet 'kings and priests unto God.'

(2) *Likeness*. But it means more than ownership. The name is the manifested personality, the revealed God, or, as we say in an abstract way, the character of God. That name is to be on the foreheads of His perfected people. How does it come to be there? Read the clause before. 'His servants shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads.' That is to say, the perfected condition is not reached by surrender only, but by assimilation; and that assimilation comes by contemplation. The faces that are turned to Him, and behold Him, are smitten with the light and shine, and those that look upon them see 'as it had been the face of an angel,' as the Sanhedrin saw that of Stephen, when he beheld the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

'There are lots o' men in this world, Jemima, and still more women, who grow old before their time working for other people: and I take it that when folks talk o' their wrinkles, the Lord says, "My name shall be on their foreheads"; and when folks talk o' their grey hairs, He says, "They shall walk with Me in white for they are worthy."' <sup>1</sup>

FitzGerald one day went with Tennyson to an art gallery. In it they found a long line of marble busts. Side by side were busts of Dante and Goethe. The poet and his friend studied with interest, and in silence, the two faces. At last FitzGerald broke the silence with a question. He asked Tennyson, 'What is it which is present in Dante's face and absent in Goethe's face?' The poet answered, 'The divine.'

(3) *Holiness or Sanctification*. In a band of gold that encircled the forehead of the high priest of the Jewish temple, there was engraven 'Holiness unto the Lord.' This marked the man who alone might ever enter that holiest room of all, which represented heaven. That real character distinguishes the Son of God, who is the High Priest of the Church over which Christ presides. The like name denotes the like character of His people in heaven. This challenge, as if it said 'Who goes there?' is heard in respect of each and every one who approaches the gates of the New Jerusalem. 'There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth.' Defilement is inability to see God. It is as the cataract in the eye. Purity of heart is the lens through which alone God is seen. But 'holiness to the Lord' shall then be a fact for each one of the redeemed. The promise is thus seen fulfilled, at the end of this Book of the Revelation, which is given to God's children in the beginning of it. 'Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God; and I will write upon him my New Name' (Rev 3<sup>12</sup>).

A man once said to me, 'You carry a certificate of health in your face.' He was speaking of physical health. But it struck me at the time, and it strikes me still, that, all unconsciously to himself, he was illustrating by a happy metaphor the meaning of this passage. St. John says that in the New Jerusalem the spiritual health of men will be so good that they will carry a certificate of it in their face, or, as he puts it, on their forehead. The idea, of course, is that their Christian character will show itself in the very front of their lives, that it will be patent to the observation of every man. Now, in the old Jerusalem this cannot always be said of either physical or spiritual health. Many people look delicate who are inwardly strong; they have health, but they do not carry it on their foreheads. In like manner many people look frivolous who are very serious. In a recent book a minister tells us how he had received a letter breathing the intensity of religious emotion from a lady of his congregation whom, to meet in society, he would deem the gayest of the gay, and whom he would believe to be not at all interested in spiritual things. I would say this woman had the name of Christ in her heart, but not on her forehead. In the New Jerusalem, however, St. John declares that there will be no difference between appearance and reality; men and women will look what they are, and be what they look.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler in *The Farringtons*.

<sup>2</sup> G. Matheson, *Messages of Hope*, 245.

A little girl, reading this phrase, asked her father, 'Who will write it?' The father replied, 'It will write itself, Mabel. Look at your dear grandfather and see how contented and smooth his face is. The name of the Lord is already written on his forehead. When you are angry next time, run and look at yourself in the glass. You will see that your forehead is wrinkled and cross. If you want the name of God on your forehead, you must live a contented and holy life, like your grandfather, in all things doing God's will.'

(a) The secret of true holiness is *unconsciousness of itself*. Unconsciousness of the radiance on the face is part of the splendour; being aware of it would dim the brightness. We know that when any one is conscious of the beauty or the refinement stamped on his face, a great part of the beauty or the refinement is gone. So self-consciousness mars spiritual loveliness. When a man knows that he is humble, he is no longer humble. The name will be visible to all who look upon them, but will be unseen by themselves. That they are Christ's is evident to all, but of this they themselves are unconscious.<sup>1</sup>

There is a beautiful legend which tells of a saintly man who was greatly beloved of the angels, who had seen much of his godly life on the earth. The angels asked God to give their favourite some new power, some fresh mark of the Divine favour, some new gift or ability, which would make him still more useful. They were told to see the man and ask him what special power he would like to have bestowed upon him. The angels visited him and asked him what gift he would choose. He said he was content and wanted nothing more. They pressed him to name something which God might do for him or give to him. Would he not like power to work miracles? He said No—that was Christ's work. Would he not like power to lead many souls to Christ? He answered No—it was the Holy Spirit's work to lead men to the Saviour. The angels in their eagerness still begged him to name something which they might ask God to grant to him. At last he answered that if he must choose any new power he would like the ability to do a great deal of good among men without even knowing it. So it was granted that from that day his shadow, when it fell behind him where he could not see it, had wondrous healing power, but when it fell before his face where he could see it, it had no such power.<sup>1</sup>

(b) The interest of true holiness is its *unending variety*. The multitude no man can number. But it is no mere mass, no mere aggregated unit. It is a host of faces. Look, the very foreheads are to be seen; each forehead there, as it is here, the seat and the expression of personal character, of individual thought, and will, and affection; no two precisely alike there, any more than here, while all are suffused with the inner oneness of

<sup>1</sup> J. R. Miller, *Our New Edens*, 116.

the family of God. Each happy personality, while one with Him, and in Him one with all, is *itself* for all eternity, sustained by Him unwearied in its blissful identity, and so contributing *itself* that individual radiating point of life and love, to the joy of all.

In this enduring individuality of the glorified may we not trace a deep assurance that they shall always enjoy a deep felicity in *each other*? This indeed shall never be their supreme felicity, but it shall always be a real one. Never shall they find in each other the *spring* of life and love; but consciously, and with *mutual* delight, they shall rejoice together in Him who is the spring. 'His name on their foreheads' shall renew in them for ever a youth of holy companionship; they shall be never weary of each other, because they shall all be for ever those who 'see the face' of their Friend and Lord.

I saw a Saint.—How canst thou tell that he  
Thou sawest was a Saint?—

I saw one like to Christ so luminously  
By patient deeds of love, his mortal taint  
Seemed made his groundwork for humility.

And when he marked me downcast utterly  
Where foul I sat and faint,  
Then more than ever Christ-like kindled he;  
And welcomed me as I had been a saint,  
Tenderly stooping low to comfort me.

Christ bade him, 'Do thou likewise.' Wherefore he  
Waxed zealous to acquaint  
His soul with sin and sorrow, if so be  
He might retrieve some latent saint:—  
'Lo, I, with the child God hath given to me!'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> C. G. Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 169.