

in the History ; if we can find in the teaching of the Letters the necessary sequence and out-growth of the life which is sketched for us in the Gospels and the Acts ; and if, further, we can discern the same mind and character (modified only by circumstances of whose operation we are not left without evidence) in the Second Epistle as in the First, we may, from our inquiry, be better able to picture to ourselves something of the after-life of this chief of the Apostles, who so soon disappears from our view in the historical books ; and may also bind into somewhat closer unity all that in the New Testament is connected with the name of St. Peter.

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*THE EPISTLES TO  
THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA.*

VI.—PHILADELPHIA. (*Rev.* iii. 7-13.)

THE city of Philadelphia, situated at the foot of Mount Tmolus, about twenty-eight miles south-east of Sardis, named after Attalus Philadelphus, King of Pergamos, and the centre of the wine trade of the region lying on the frontiers of Lydia and Phrygia, presented, so far as we know, the same phenomena of religious and social life as its nearest neighbours. There, too, there was a population mainly, of course, Heathen, but including at least three other elements distinct from it and from each other,—Jews, Jewish Christians, and converts from Heathenism. What its spiritual condition was we gather from the Message, and from that only. Three facts connected with it may, however, be briefly

noticed, as having some historical interest. 1. That, like Sardis, it had suffered severely from the great Asiatic earthquake in the reign of Tiberius. 2. That of all the Seven Churches it had the longest duration of prosperity as a Christian city, and is still a spacious town, with the remains of not less than twenty-four churches. 3. That of all the seven its name alone appears in the catalogue of modern cities. The meaning of the word, "brotherly love," or "love of the brethren," perhaps also the special character of the promises connected with it in the Apocalyptic Message, commended it to the mind of William Penn as the fittest he could find for the city which he founded on the banks of the Delaware; and so it has won for the name of the old Asiatic city a higher niche of fame than it would otherwise ever have filled in the world's history.

The name by which the Sender of the Message here describes himself is that of "*the holy, the true, he that hath the key of David, he who openeth, and none shall shut, he who shutteth, and none shall open.*" Each of these epithets has a special significance, and calls for a few words in explanation of it. 1. "*The holy.*" The word here used is, it must be remembered, *ἅγιος*, not *ἁγιος*, and represents the holiness of consecration rather than that which is ethical and indwelling. As such, in by far the great majority of instances, it is used either of the "saints" as consecrated, in spite of manifold individual weaknesses, to a life of devotion; or of the Temple and its sanctuaries, literal or spiritual, as dedicated to God's service (1 Cor. iii. 17; Ephes. ii. 21; Heb. viii. 2 and *passim*); more prominently still of the Holy Spirit,

as partaking that otherwise incommunicable sanctity which belongs to the Divine Essence. Of the person of the Lord Jesus it is used but rarely. It would seem, however, to have been one of the names, more or less accepted as equivalent to that of the Messiah, which were current during his ministry. It came from the lips of the Gadarene demoniac when he uttered the cry, "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Luke iv. 34). But it was not only from those lips that that word had come before in the hearing of the Apostle. If we take the reading of all the great MSS., including the Sinaitic, we find it was the form of the confession borne by St. Peter and recorded in John vi. 69: "Thou art the Christ," not as in our Version, "the Son of the living God," but, "the Holy One of God." That name is now recalled to the Disciple's mind in special connection, we may believe, with the memories of that day, but also, and more prominently, with the promises with which this Message ends, every one of which especially brings out the idea of consecration, the pillar in the temple of God, the name and the city of God.

If textual criticism has helped us to trace the first of these great adjectives to its source, so, indirectly, it suggests the subtle links of association by which "the holy" and "the true" were connected. For it was on the self-same day that the beloved Disciple had heard from his Master's lips, for the first time, that word thus applied, when He spoke of Himself as "the *true* bread that came down from heaven." Whatever may have been its equivalent in the Aramaic which our Lord spoke, it is a familiar fact

that the Greek word which St. John uses (*ἀληθινός*) was with him a favourite and characteristic one. It expressed, more than the simpler *ἀληθής*, "true with all the fulness of truth," true not only as opposed to false, but as distinguished from all shadows of, and approximations to, the truth. So we have, for example, the "*true* light" (John i. 9), the "*true* worshippers" (John iv. 23), the "*only true* God" (John xvii. 3). The last application had raised it almost to the level, not only of a divine attribute, but of a divine Name, and it is as such that it is used here. The Lord who speaks to the Churches claims to be holy as the Father is holy, true as He is true.

In the words that follow we have a manifest reproduction of a passage in that strange episode in the prophecy of Isaiah (xxii. 15-25) which contrasts the character and the fortunes of Shebna the scribe and Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, that was "over the household" of Hezekiah. While the doom of shame and exile was predicted for the former, for the latter there was honour and advancement. "The key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder: so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open." His influence in the great crisis that was coming on the kingdom of Judah was to be mighty for good. He was to be "a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of David." Here, of course, the historical bearing of the words falls entirely into the background. And the words are chosen simply because they described, in terms which the prophecy had made familiar, that aspect of the highest sovereignty which was now most needed. They are not identical, it will be

noticed, with those which described the Lord of the Churches as having the keys of Hades and of Death (Chap. i. 19). There He was manifested as extending his sway into the world that lies behind the veil, the region of the unseen and spiritual, contemplated on its darker side. Here, in closer analogy with the promise of the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter (Matt. xvi. 19), what He claims is sovereignty over "the house of David," over the kingly palace of the Son of David, over the Church, as being the house of God. The right of admitting into that palace of the great King is his, and his alone. Others in vain admit when He excludes, or exclude when He admits.

The next clause gives the more immediate application of the claim: "*I know thy works: behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.*" As before, I take the words as spoken primarily of the Angel or Bishop of the Church in his personal character; and, secondly, of the Church so far as it was represented by him. So taken, we cannot doubt that the "*works*" which the Lord "*knew*" were such as He recognized as being worthy of all praise. And the context at once determines the nature of those works and adds another link to the chain of evidence which shews that the teaching of the writer of the Apocalypse was, in all essential points, one with the teaching of St. Paul. If there was any phrase which more than another was characteristic of the language of the Apostle of the Gentiles, it was that of the "open door" which we are now considering. At Ephesus, a "great and effectual door" was opened unto him (1 Cor xvi. 19).

At Troas a "door was opened unto him of the Lord" (2 Cor. ii. 12). He entreats those to whom he writes, to pray "that God would open to him a door of utterance to speak the mystery of Christ" (Col. iv. 3). So, in like manner, his friend and fellow-worker, St. Luke, records how that the Lord had "opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts xiv. 27). In all these cases the open door refers to the admission of the Gentile converts into the great house of God, the "opportunities for the mission work of the Church" (Alford) which the providence of God placed in the preacher's way. That phrase must, in the nature of things, have become current in the Churches which owed their very existence to the labours of St. Paul; and when it came to the ear and was recorded by the pen of St. John, it could not fail to recall the same thought and to signify the same thing. The words which came to the Angel of the Church of Philadelphia were accordingly of the nature of an assurance and a promise. He was encouraged to persevere in the work in which he had already laboured so well by the declaration that in this he was a fellow-worker with his Lord, that no narrowing exclusiveness, no bitter antagonism should hinder its completion, that the door had been opened wide by Him who had the key of the house of David.

And this promise comes as the reward of faithfulness in the use of the opportunities that had already been granted: "*Because thou hast little power,<sup>1</sup> and yet didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name.*"

<sup>1</sup> Not "a little strength," as in our English Version, which lays an undue stress on the substantive rather than the adjective.

The words point to something in the past history of the Church of Philadelphia and its ruler, the nature of which we can only infer from them and from their context. Some storm of persecution had burst upon him, probably, as at Smyrna, instigated by the Jews or the Judaizing section of the Church. They sought to shut the door which he had found open, and would have kept so. They were strong, and he was weak; numbers were against him, and one whose faith was less real and living might have yielded to the pressure. But he, though not winning, like Antipas, the martyr's crown, had yet displayed the courage of the confessor, had kept the word, the doctrine, the creed, of his Lord, the mystery of the faith, the brotherhood of mankind in Christ, which was, in St. Paul's language, the substance of "the word of God," and had not been tempted to deny his name, the name of that Jesus to whom the Jews in their frenzy said, Anathema (1 Cor. xii. 3), through any fear of man. Like the faithful servant in the parable, he had thus been faithful in a very little (Matt. xxv. 23); and therefore, as the promise that follows shews, he was to be made "ruler over many things."

The reappearance of the same description as that which met us in the Epistle to the Church of Smyrna, points, as I have said, to the quarter from which the attack came. Here also we have those who "*are of the synagogue of Satan, that say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie.*" So far they seem to have gained the mastery. Though resisted, they are yet the stronger party. But the day of retribution is not far off. "*I will make them to come and*

worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." Before long, in that "hour of trial which was about to come upon the whole world," in the storm of persecution which, coming from Heathen panic and suspicion, would involve both Christian and Jew alike, the man who had been faithful in his work would be courted as a protector even by those who had been his bitterest enemies. They would then bow down and do him homage, and would recognize, it may be, in the outward events of life, it may be, in the very fact that his power to protect them would flow from his influence with those Gentiles against whose admission they had so vehemently protested, that his Lord had "loved him," and would love him even to the end. He who had "kept the word of the endurance of Christ," the message which bade him endure, even as Christ also had endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, the word which had passed, we may well believe, into a proverb, "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved," should, in his turn, be "kept" from that hour of trial or temptation, the "fiery trial" of 1 Pet. iv. 12, which was about to spread over the "whole world" of the Roman Empire, to "try those that dwelt upon the earth."

And now, as before, in reference not only, or chiefly, to the far-off event that shall close the world's history, but to a nearer and more individual advent, we have the promise, "*I come quickly.*" The trial should not be long. The issue was not far off. Therefore "*hold fast that which thou hast,*" thy zeal, thy faith, thy endurance, thy open door, "*that no man take thy crown*"—that



crown of life (Rev. ii. 10) and righteousness (2 Tim. iv. 8) which is reserved for the faithful combatant. The promise to him that overcometh is, however, in this instance, more definite, and, if one may so speak, more appropriate, than the simple crown of the conqueror: "*I will make him 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, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and my new name.*" The circle of imagery into which we are here brought anticipates the more wonderful and glorious visions with which the Apocalypse closes. There also we hear of "the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God" (Rev. xxi. 10). But there are differences of detail in the terms of the promise here which call for notice, and are, each of them, singularly suggestive. (1) In the vision of the holy city the Seer beheld no temple in it, for "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb were the temple thereof" (Chap. xxi. 22). That which constitutes a sanctuary in the highest sense of the word temple (*ναός*) is the presence felt and, it may be, seen, of the god to whom it is dedicated. So our bodies are temples (*ναοί*) of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. vi. 19). So the Lord Jesus spake of the temple of his body (John ii. 21). But in that heavenly city (itself, when we analyze it, but the symbol of a reality which as yet we know only in part and through types and shadows) that Divine Presence is everywhere manifesting itself to the whole company of the blessed according to the capacity of each; and just as the material universe,

in its relation to the creative power and the permanent and immanent energy of the Creator as sustaining it, is the Temple of the Lord God Almighty, so, where there is the presence of the Lamb, one with the *Logos*, revealing the Fatherhood and redeeming love of God, there also is the Temple which is wherever that Presence is. Here, however, in the earlier stage of the symbolic apocalypse, the mind of the Seer was not as yet ripe for that thought. It is to come to him when he *sees* the city. So long as he hears of it only by the hearing of the ear, he is to picture it to himself as having a temple analogous to that of the earthly Jerusalem, with which he was familiar. And in that Temple he that overcame was to be made "*a pillar.*" It will be remembered that that was a title which, in its relation to the Church of God, had been borne by the Apostle himself. He, with Cephas and James, had been among those who seemed to be "*pillars*" of the Ecclesia at Jerusalem (Gal. ii. 9), sustaining the fabric of its polity. And now he hears the gracious promise that, as he had been in the earthly Ecclesia, which was the Temple of the living God, so should every one that overcometh be in that heavenly Temple. And that position once gained, should never afterwards be forfeited. "*He shall go no more out.*" Here on earth there is to the last the possibility of failure. The surest guide may wander from the right path. The pillar may give way, and need removal, that the fabric may remain unshaken.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is just possible that there may here be a local reference to the earthquakes from which Philadelphia had suffered, and which may have so shaken the fabric of many of its temples that some, at least, of their pillars had to be removed and new ones erected in their place.

But there the victors shall abide for ever, each, under this aspect of the symbol, a column in the Infinite Temple, as each, under another aspect, had been as a "living stone" in the structure of the temple upon earth. He that had the keys of the house of David would close the gates upon those who were received into the Holy City, so that there should be no departure.

*"I will write upon him the name of my God."*<sup>1</sup> So, in Chap. xxii. 4, we read of the servants of God in the heavenly city that "his name shall be on their foreheads," and in Chap. ix. 4, of those "who have the seal of God upon their foreheads." We can scarcely fail to see in this promise a reference to the thin plate of gold which was borne upon the forehead of Aaron and his successors in the office of the High Priest, and upon which was to be graven, "like the engraving of a signet, HOLINESS TO THE LORD" (Exod. xxviii. 36). And so the promise takes its place side by side with those which speak of the elect of God as being, like their Lord, sharers in a kingly priesthood. Their life of consecration, their fulfilment of the priestly ideal on earth, will hereafter be recognized by the consummation of that life in the heavenly Temple in which they have been made as pillars, not mute and motionless, like the columns in human form of an earthly temple, but living, moving, worshipping.

*"And the name of the city of my God, which is*

<sup>1</sup> It has been a question whether the "writing upon *him*, or *it*" (the Greek admits, of course, of either rendering), refers to the pillar as such, or to the man as represented by it. Probably the frequent use of human figures in the Caryatides of Greek temples suggested the identification of the two.

*New Jerusalem.*" Were the thoughts of the Seer directed here, also, to the prophetic symbolism of the past, or does the mystery of the new name belong entirely to the far future, unrevealed to him and therefore hidden from us? An interpreter may well shrink from speaking over-boldly in answer to that question; but, on the whole, the analogy of the symbolic imagery of the Apocalypse generally suggests the conclusion that the key of the mystery is to be found in that volume of the Prophets which was to St. John so inexhaustible a storehouse. The new name might be that which meets us at the close of the prophecy of Ezekiel, as the name of the renewed and glorified city which he saw in vision, "*Jehovah-shammah*"—"the Lord is there" (Ezek. xlvi. 35). More probably, as it seems to me, both because the name itself is of deeper and richer significance and because the Messianic prophecies of Jeremiah, connected as they were with the proclamation of the New Covenant (Jer. xxxi. 31), were more prominent in the thoughts of men than those of Ezekiel, we may think of "*Jehovah-tsidkenu*"—"the Lord our Righteousness"—which was, we read in Jer. xxxiii. 16, to be the name of the city in its glorified and transfigured state, no less than of the Anointed King, as in the more familiar words of Jer. xxiii. 6. Every inhabitant of that celestial city would count it his glory to have that name written upon his forehead, the sign of that completed citizenship in heaven (the *πολιτεῦμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς* of Phil. iii. 20) which had been his joy and comfort upon earth.

Last and greatest in the list of names which the Conqueror is to bear as the insignia of his victory

is the "new name" of the Lord Himself. Here we are reminded of the analogous promise to the Church of Pergamos,—the "new name," though not in that instance of the Lord who speaks, but of the disciple who has been faithful to the end. There we saw that the new name was the symbol of a new and transfigured character, and this may guide us to a right apprehension of the meaning of the promise here. The name is not one that is merely "new" now, but one that shall be new in the day of the final victory. It is, therefore, more even than those two great names, "the Word of God" and "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Chap. xix. 13-16), which the Apostle heard and beheld in one of his later visions. For these his own writings made familiar to the minds of men even during the time of struggle and incompleteness, and there was, besides these—written, it would seem, not, like the latter of those two names, on "the vesture and the thigh," but on the diadems that crowned his brow—another more mysterious name, seen but not understood even by the Seer, a name "which no one knoweth but himself." Full and rich as are the names of Jesus now, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Word, the Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, revealing what we can in some measure even now comprehend and realize, there will be in the completed glory of the kingdom a yet fuller revelation of all that He is in Himself, of all that He has been to us. Now "we know in part, but then we shall know even as also we are known; now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face" (1 Cor. xiii. 12). We know not what we shall

be, but we know that we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is; and that knowledge will find its adequate expression, as before, in a Name. And that Name written on him that overcometh will mark him not only as a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem, but as the subject, nay, rather, as the heir of the Eternal King.

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*GIDEON'S FLEECE.*

THE story of Gideon's Fleece is one which will be read by different people in different ways. Some will probably regard it as one of those improbable stories of which so many are to be found in the Old Testament, which they despair of reducing to any sort of harmony with the facts of common life, and consequently reject as mere stories to be classed with the narrative of Balaam's ass and Joshua's bidding the sun to stand still; the absence of which from the pages of the Old Testament would make it, they suppose, much more trustworthy as an historical record, or, at all events, less open to reasonable objection: others, probably, will endeavour to account for it as the expression of Gideon's own fancy, and imagine that the story relates not what actually took place, but what he thought took place: while others, representing a number gradually becoming less and less, will accept the narrative as a miraculous one, and derive so much spiritual meaning from it as they may be able to extract.

The tendency to allegorize Holy Writ is indicative of an unhealthy condition of mind, and has often been productive of pernicious results. It is derogatory to