

*THE EPISTLES TO
THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA.*

VII.—LAODICEA. (*Rev.* iii. 14-22.)

THE position of Laodicea, on the banks of the Lycus, within a short distance of Hierapolis and Colossæ, brought the Church of that city within the range, if not of the direct influence, of St. Paul's personal teaching, at least under that of those who had been taught by him, and of an Epistle specially addressed to it. If we accept the words of Col. ii. 1 in their natural meaning, the members of that Church were as dear to his heart and filled him with as profound emotion as any could do who had not "seen his face in the flesh." To them, from his Roman prison, he had sent a letter, probably by the same messenger that carried the Epistle to the Colossians. (Col. iv. 16.) The question whether it was a letter exclusively for them, or that which we know as the Epistle to the Ephesians, considered as an encyclical letter to the Asiatic Churches, and reaching them in due course, is one which we need not now discuss. It will be enough to remember that a letter written at the same time as those to the Churches of Ephesus and Colossæ would, probably, in the nature of things, treat of the same subjects and be written in the same tone. Those to whom it was addressed would learn to think of Christ as of One in whom dwelt "the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. ii. 9); in whom, "in the fulness of time, all things were to be gathered together, both which are in heaven and which are on earth"

(Ephes. i. 10), as the head of all principality and power (Col. ii. 10).

The names by which the Message to the Angel of the Church of Laodicea was ushered in were accordingly such as reminded him of the truths that had been thus proclaimed by the great Apostle of the Gentiles: "*These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.*" It need hardly be said that this is the solitary passage in which the word, so familiar as a formula of emphasis even in the Greek version of our Lord's teaching, so familiar also in the worship of both Jews and Christians, appears as a personal name claimed by the Lord Jesus as his own. It is obvious that as it came to the inner ear of the Disciple it must have thrown back his mind, full as it was to overflowing of the words of the prophets in their old Hebrew speech, upon the passage in which Isaiah had spoken of the new name of Jehovah as the God of Truth (*Elohim, Amen*; Isa. lxxv. 16). But with this there may also have come the recollection of the very syllables in which his beloved Lord had declared Himself to be the Truth, lingering in his memory as that of "Ephphatha" and "Talitha cumi" did in the memory of those from whose reports St. Mark compiled his Gospel, and leading him to see new meanings in the old familiar words. To him it had now come to be equivalent (as in the LXX. Version of the passage in Isaiah) to the name which he elsewhere uses in Gospel and Epistle as the True (*ὁ ἀληθινός*), as standing; not only in conjunction with words such as the True

Light, the True Bread, or, as here, the True Witness, but absolutely as in 1 John v. 20. It is not without interest to remember that the language of the Pauline Epistles had already presented an approximation to a like use, and that in Christ the promises of God were Yea, and in Him Amen (2 Cor. i. 20).

To some, at least, however, among his readers that new name was likely to be an obscure and hard saying, and for them, therefore, after his manner elsewhere,¹ he adds the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name: "*the faithful and true witness*," and thus they were led to the first proclamation of that Name, with all that it involved, in the opening words of the Apocalypse (Chap. i. 5). Both the words are thus brought together, we may believe, because the Message that was to follow was one of sharp reproof and condemnation. Men were to remember that Truth had its severer as well as its more gracious aspect, and that He who was the "faithful and true witness" of the everlasting love of the Father would cease to be faithful unless He also testified against the sins of men, against the lukewarmness and indifference which were shutting out that love. And to this there is added the higher and more mysterious title, "*the beginning of the Creation of God*." Here we find another striking instance of that to which I have endeavoured throughout these papers to give its due prominence,—the identity, in its great broad outlines,

¹ As in the case of Siloam (John ix. 7); Gabbatha (xix. 13); Golgotha (xix. 17); the Devil and Satan (Rev. xx. 2).

of the teaching of St. John and of St. Paul. For not only does the name express the self-same truth as the "firstborn of every creature" in Col. i. 18, but the very name, the Beginning (*ἡ ἀρχὴ*), appears as thus applied in Col. i. 18 in connection with "the first-born from the dead;" and we can hardly doubt, from its use here, that it had passed into the liturgical and devotional phraseology of the Asiatic Churches of the valley of the Lycus. The stress laid in the Epistle to the Colossians on the inferiority of those to whom the self-same name of *ἀρχαὶ* was given in the other sense, of all "principalities and powers" (Col. i. 16, ii. 15), to the One who was the true Beginning, or, if we might venture on an unfamiliar use of a familiar word, the true *Principality* of God's creation, may account for the prominence which the name had gained, and, therefore, for its use here in a Message addressed to a Church exposed, like that of Colossæ, to the risks of angelolatry, of the substitution of lower principalities and created mediators for Him who was the Head over all things to his Church.

In the absence of other information we can only gather the state, outward or inward, of the Church of Laodicea from the words that follow. It is probable from what we know of the city in which the Church was found, that it was exposed, more than most other Churches, to the temptations that come from wealth. The trade of the town, mainly that of dyeing, which it shared with Thyatira and with Sardis, was prosperous; and almost alone of the Asiatic cities it was able, without any subvention

from the Imperial Treasury, to recover from the effects of an earthquake which, in A.D. 60 (according to the view I have taken, but a few years before the date of the Message sent to it), had laid many of its buildings low. We can well believe that not a few of the converts to the faith of Christ belonged to the wealthier class, even as we find at Ephesus that there were those who were "rich in this world" (1 Tim. vi. 17). And the temptation which then, as ever, riches brought with them was to take things easily, to enjoy life and the pleasures which wealth can buy; to act practically on the rule, "*Surtout, point de zèle,*" when that zeal brought with it the necessity for self-denial or exertion. The love that had once been warm or glowing was waxing cold, though it had not as yet passed into open apostacy and antagonism. The Angel, or representative leader of the Church, had shared in this general declension, and to him, therefore, the rebuke is primarily addressed: "*I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot.*" The meaning of the latter word (the Greek of which occurs here only in the New Testament) lies, of course, on the surface. It denotes the temper of *fervent* love, a love that warms and animates the whole life, the temper, we must remember, specially characteristic of the Apostle who records the Message. In him there had been, at first, the fiery zeal that marked him out as one of the Sons of Thunder, and made him seek to call down fire from heaven to consume the village of the Samaritans; and this, though it had been purified, had not lost its old intensity, and

equally in the actual language of the Epistles (2 John 10 11; 3 John 9, 10), and in the tradition of his fleeing from the presence of Cerinthus, we trace the ardent spirit that alike loves strongly and strongly hates. The precise spiritual state described as "cold," is, we may well believe, the exact opposite of this. It is not an equal fervour on the side of falsehood and of evil, not an open hostility to the truth, the fanaticism of the heathen and the heretic. The temper of St. Paul was not "cold" when he led the persecution against Stephen. It is simply the entire absence of any love to Christ and his cause, of even the least enthusiasm for any person and any cause, an absence which, in the former case, may be the result of simple ignorance, or, as in Matt. xxiv. 12, of the presence of an abounding iniquity. The condemnation of that state is expressed in terms which startle us by the naked boldness of the imagery employed: "*I would thou wert cold or hot: so, because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am about to spue thee out of my mouth.*"

That "*tepid*" state of soul (not of cold passing into heat, but of heat passing into cold) was that which had, as its physical effect, in the case *e.g.* of water, to cause nausea, and which, in its moral aspect, was the object of a loathing that was not roused by the state described as "cold." That feeling has, in not a few cases, found its analogues in human utterances. Men prefer an entire stranger to the "candid friend." The profession of a dispassionate attachment to institutions, ecclesiastical or political, is often felt to be but the prelude to desertion or betrayal. The language of the great

poet of mediæval Christendom singles out for sharpest reprobation, those who were,—

"A Dio spiacenti ed a nemici suoi." †

And the reason lies, it is clear, in the tendencies of such a state to self-satisfaction, and, therefore, self-deceit. The man who has no religious feeling at all may be roused to penitence—conscience may be awakened, and the work of conversion may begin. But the "lukewarm" state is for the most part that which is blind to its own shortcoming. It is unreal, and yet thinks that it is in a true and healthy state. As Mr. Carlyle has somewhere put it, in one of those epigrams that haunt one's memory, "it is the hypocrisy which does not know itself to be hypocritical."

† It may be worth while to give the whole passage. I quote from an unpublished translation:—

"Speech, many-tongued, and words of dire lament,
 Language of sorrow, accents of despair,
 Deep voices hoarse, and hands in anguish bent,
 These made a discord through the dusky air
 Which ever floats eternally the same,
 As whirls the sandstorm driven here or there.
 And I, upon whose brain strange wanderings came,
 Said, 'Master, what is this that now I hear,
 And who that race whom torment so doth tame?'
 Then he to me : ' This wretched doom they bear,
 The sorrow-smitten souls of those whose life
 Nor foul reproach nor glorious praise did share,
 Mingled they are with those who in the strife
 Of angels were nor rebels found nor true,—
 Apart withdrawn when wars in Heaven were rife.
 Heaven, fearing loss of beauty, spurned that crew,
 Nor were they ordered to the depths of Hell,
 Lest to the damned some glory should accrue.'

At once I understood and saw full clear,
 These were the souls of all the caitiff host
 Whom neither God nor yet his foes could bear."

DANTE, "*Inferno*."

And it needs therefore words of sharp warning and rebuke from Him who searcheth the hearts and reins, or from any who, having the mind of Christ, can speak as He would have spoken of this inner baseness. It may be noted, as tending to confirm the assumption that the Gospel of St. John and the Apocalypse were the work of the same writer, that this is the fault which the former, again and again, notes for special condemnation. Those who could not believe are less the object of his censure than those who, believing, feared to confess the Christ "lest they should be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John xii. 42, 43). Something of the same feeling is seen in the language of the Epistle to the Hebrews, as to those who "forsake the assembling of themselves together," who need therefore to be "provoked to love and to good works," lest there should remain for them only "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation" (Heb. x. 24, 27).

The underlying grounds of the condemnation, the secret working of this tepidity of the soul, is brought before us in the words that follow: "*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have become wealthy, and I have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou*" (the pronoun is emphatic in the Greek, as is also the article) "*art the wretched and the pitiable one, and poor, and blind, and naked.*" It is clear that the imagined wealth here is that of spiritual, not temporal riches. In regard to the latter, the boast would probably have been true, and would have called for no such stern contrast. And yet it is not

the less true that it was the possession of the riches of this world that made the Laodicean Angel and his Church so satisfied that they had the riches of the other. They took the "unrighteous mammon," not only as a substitute for the "true riches," but almost as a proof that they possessed them. Outward ease and comfort took the place of inward peace; prosperity was thought a sure sign of Divine approval. We cannot read the history of the Church of Christ, or look around us, or retrace our own experience without feeling that it has often been so both with Churches and individual men. Lethargy creeps over them; love is no longer active, material success, multiplied endowments, the power of giving money as the one embodiment of love to God or man: these have been the precursors of decline and of decay. On the larger scale it has been found hard to rouse to energetic spiritual action a Church that was threatened with no dangers, resting on an arm of flesh, secure in the State's support. On the smaller, it is equally hard to convince a respectable and well-to-do Christian that he can be wanting in the true wealth of love when he is ready, on occasion, to draw a cheque for a charitable institution.

The state described was bad, but it was not hopeless. The Great Healer has a word of advice even here, and the advice, though not without a touch of irony, would not have been given in the mere scorn of indignation: "*I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white garments, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and anoint*

thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see." The tone of irony, of which I have just spoken, will be felt, I think, in that advice to "buy," given to one who has just been pronounced a beggar where he fancied himself rich. Where can he find the price for these inestimable treasures? The answer to that question is to be found in the words of Isaiah, which this counsel at once calls to our remembrance, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa. lv. 1). And yet the irony contains in both instances the truest and most gracious tenderness. The wine and the milk, the gold and the white garments, are beyond all price, as measured by earthly standards, and therefore they are *given* freely. And yet, on the other hand, they have, in some sense, their price. The man forsakes his earthly treasure that he may have treasure in heaven. St. Paul counts the things that had been as his "gain," his fancied spiritual riches, as "loss" for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord (Phil. iii. 7, 8). Lastly, besides this renunciation of unreal wealth in both its aspects, there is a price which even the beggar can pay, when he has found that it will be accepted by the Lord who is so ready to sell. He can give *himself*—can yield his body, soul, and spirit, to be dealt with as his Lord shall see fit, if only he may receive the priceless treasure which he needs. To accept that discipline is the counsel now given, and it is implied that it will not be without a sharp severity. The "gold" which Christ will thus "sell" to him who seeks it, the treasure of

holiness and peace and joy, is that which has been "*tried in the fire;*" and this, as in all like cases, implies chastisement and suffering. The "white garments" that hide the shame of nakedness, the true holiness of life which alone prevents the exposure of that "inner vileness" of which even the saints of God are ever painfully conscious, are those which have been made white in that blood of Christ which symbolizes suffering. The eye-salve, which gives clearness of vision, does so (one may refer, if such a reference be needed, to the history of Tobit's recovery from his blindness, Tob. x. 8-12) not without the pricking smart that clears away the blinding or beclouding humours.

Of the three forms of discipline thus indicated, the first scarcely needs any discussion here. The second has been dealt with in speaking of the Message to the Church of Sardis. The third is new, and stands almost, if not altogether, alone in the imagery of Scripture, and calls therefore for a few brief notes. I know not whether the suggestion which I am about to make has been made by any other interpreter, but most readers will, I think, answer in the affirmative if asked whether they remember anything in St. John's Gospel of which these words remind them. They will recollect how, in one instance at least, our Lord gave sight to the blind, not by word or touch only, but by the use of an eye-salve, or *collyrium*, how "he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and *anointed* the eyes of the blind man with the clay" (John ix. 6), and they will not think it strange to assume that these words must have recalled to the mind

of the Seer what he had thus himself witnessed in one, if not in many instances (Mark viii. 23). The very state of the Laodicean Church had indeed been described in words recorded in connection with that very narrative: "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John ix. 41). As in those cases, sight came through that which derived its power to heal from the lips of Christ, so here that which would remove the spiritual blindness was the power of that Divine Word which would make the man's inward eye see himself as God sees him, and with the smart of that knowledge draw forth tears of penitence which, as they flowed, would cleanse.

The end of the Message stands out in striking contrast with the beginning. No other opens with such sharp unsparing severity; no other closes with such yearning tenderness and a promise so exceeding glorious. Something there was, we know, in the character of the beloved Disciple, as seen in his Epistles and the traditions connected with his name, which corresponded to that combination of qualities that seemed at first hardly compatible. But that something was but the reflection of the union of the two in the Lord and Master, into whose likeness he had grown. Where the highest love is, there must also be severity, and the severity is a proof of love, yearning, pitying, and seeking to restore. And so, after piercing as with the sharp two-edged sword to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, of the joints and marrow, He, the Lord of the Churches, in the gracious words that follow, pours in the oil and the wine that are to cleanse and heal: "*As many as I*

love I rebuke" (i.e., rebuke so as to convict),¹ "and chasten. Be zealous, therefore, and repent." There is in the Original a force which it is not easy to reproduce in a translation. The 'I' stands first, and has the special emphasis which always attaches to the presence of the Greek pronoun. It is as though he suggested a contrast between himself and others. "Human friends may seek simply to please and soothe, to speak smooth things and prophesy deceits; but not so with Me. I give a far other proof of love, and so deal with those who are dear to Me as to make them conscious of the evil that mars their peace and keeps them from their true blessedness; and when that consciousness has been roused, I bring them under the loving, though it may be sharp, discipline of chastisement." The command, "Be zealous, therefore, and repent," may seem at first to invert the natural order of the soul's recovery. Must not "repentance," the turning from evil, precede the righteous zeal which is to animate the true life? In some cases, perhaps in most, that is, doubtless, the natural order. But the inward life of the soul, in all its subtle workings, cannot always be brought under these sharply-defined formulæ; and here we can, I think, recognize a special adaptation to the exigences of the case with which the great Healer was dealing. The root-evil of the Laodicean Church and its representative was their lukewarm indifference, the absence of any zeal, of any earnestness. And the first step, therefore, to higher things was to pass into a state in which those elements of

¹ The word is the same as that which describes the office of the Comforter (John xvi. 8).

life should no longer be conspicuous by their absence. "Be zealous;" let that be (so the tense of the Greek verb indicates) the "true and abiding state;" and then (the tense changing to that which indicates a thing done once for all), let the first act of that new state be to throw itself with all its force on the side of God, to repent of the evil of the past, and to enter on a new course of action for the future."

And then we come to that which Christian art and poetry have alike made familiar to us,—the promise that speaks of the love which rebukes and chastens, the love of the Divine Friend in all its infinite tenderness: "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me.*"

The words of the promise that thus come as the sequel to the rebuke are referred by most Commentators to the imagery of the Song of Solomon, and are claimed accordingly as sanctioning the mystical interpretation of that Book. There the bride tells her tale of expectancy and joy, "I sleep, but my heart waketh; it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled" (Song Sol. v. 2); and the frequent recurrence of that image in the visions of the Apocalypse,—the "marriage supper of the Lamb;" the "New Jerusalem coming down as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. xxi. 2), the "bride, the Lamb's wife" (xxi. 9),—seems at first to give a high degree of plausibility to the view that it is to be found here. I am constrained, however, by what seems to me a true method of interpretation,

to reject that view and to seek for another meaning. It cannot be too strongly impressed on our minds that wherever that image of the Bride and the Bridegroom occurs, either in the Old or the New Testament, it shadows forth the relation of Jehovah to his people as a collective unity, of Christ to his Church. The wider the induction the more convincing will be the proof that, however largely the other idea may have prevailed in the writings of Christian or other Mystics, this, and not the relation of the individual soul to its Maker or Redeemer, is throughout Scripture the truth shadowed forth in all bridal and nuptial parables. But here the promise is distinctly personal, and describes, under whatever figure, what belongs to that living individual experience of a joy with which a stranger doth not intermeddle. There is no picture here of the bride tarrying for her spouse. That which is brought so vividly before us is the arrival of a guest at night, of a guest who comes to cheer and guide and comfort. And if so, is it altogether an idle dream to imagine that St. John may have had other sources of imagery open to him than those which he found in books, however sacred; that the memory of his own early years may have been brought back to him by the words that he now heard, as supplying the fullest expression of his Lord's communion with the loving and trusting soul? Remember how his discipleship had begun by his tarrying where the Divine Friend was for the time dwelling, invited by the words, "Come and see," and there listening during the long hours, till day passed on into evening, and evening into night (John i. 39). Remember

how, in all likelihood, he was sharing in the same high blessedness in the lodging at Jerusalem, when Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, and so was able to record that marvellous teaching as to the new birth which he alone reports, and reports with such a vivid fulness as to make it hardly possible to doubt that he himself had heard it (John iii. 2-13). Think of the three years of companionship growing into ever closer and closer friendship, so that he became known to all men as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," of the long-continued intimacy implied in the words which led that disciple to take to his own house the sorrowing mother of his Lord, and then ask whether such a scene as that which this verse brings before us may not often have presented itself in his own actual experience? Think of the day's work over, the sick healed and the poor taught, and then the Master, after his manner, leaves the shouts of the crowd and the stir of the town, and withdraws into some solitary place to hold communion with his Father; and the scholar remains in his lonely chamber in the cottage at Bethsaida, or the lodging at Capernaum, watching, not sleeping, waiting for the return of Him in whose presence he found life, postponing till then the simple meal with which the day habitually closed. And then, as he watches, there is the distant sound of footfall, and then He, the expected Friend, stands at the door and knocks, and then the voice, so familiar in its gentle sweetness, though capable also of the tones of stern rebuke, tells him who it is, and then he rises, and the door is opened, and the Friend enters—the Son of Man, who had not where to lay his head,

finds shelter under his disciple's roof: He comes, first, as a guest, and sits down to sup with the scholar, who thus, as a host, receives Him; but soon the places are changed, and He takes, as it were, the place that of right belongs to Him. He blesses and breaks the bread and gives thanks over the cup of wine. He is now guest no longer, but the host. The disciple "supps with him."

That I take to be the outward framework of the parable of this verse, at once probable in itself and a more adequate representation of the spiritual truths shadowed forth than any bridal imagery. What men want is the consciousness of the presence of a friend that "sticketh closer than a brother." It is better (the very devotional utterances which express the opposite feeling being themselves the strongest proof of it) even for women, in their individual personality, to think of Christ as the friend and the brother, rather than as the bridegroom of their souls. And now the promise that this blessedness shall belong to any one who will but claim it—even to one who had been "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked"—is given in all its fulness. There is something, we cannot doubt, in the inner life of every one who is zealous and repents which answers to the several stages of that experience which was thus brought home to St. John's memory—Christ "stands at the door and knocks." Warnings come that either rouse us from our slumbers, or fall on the expectant ear and make us feel that the Judge who rebukes and chastens is not far off. Suffering in one or other of its many forms, unexpected judgments, or unlooked-

for mercies, these tell us that He is asking for admission. If we listen in the attitude of reverence and faith we "hear the voice," become more distinctly conscious of that Presence, not as the Judge only, but as the Friend who comes to plead with us and for us, and so to be our Advocate and Comforter. Well for us if then we open the door of our hearts to Him, even though it may have been long barred against Him, and the weeds that creep over it may shew Him how little we have been prepared to give Him entrance. For then it shall be true of us also, that while we receive Him, He, on his side, is receiving us. If we invite Him to share what we have to offer Him of that which has been indeed his own gift to us, He, in his turn, will call us to his own heavenly feast, and so even the poor chamber of our hearts will become thus honoured and glorified by his presence, as one of the "many mansions" in "the house of his Father."

These thoughts serve at least to prepare the way for the glorious words with which the Message to Laodicea closes: "*He that overcometh, to him will I give to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and sat down with my Father in his throne.*" It is, as I have said, the highest and most glorious of all the promises with which the Seven Messages end. It speaks of nothing less, if we may use a familiar word in a new sense, than the *apotheosis* of the conqueror. So, when on earth, the prayer of Jesus for his disciples had been for nothing less than this, "As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us;" and He had said of them, "The glory which thou gavest me I have

given them," and therefore He could pray, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am" (John xvii. 21-24). The conquerors in the strife with evil share "the throne of God and of the Lamb," the throne which is the great centre of all the visions of the wider future that from this point begin to unfold themselves to the prophet's gaze (Rev. iv. 2 ; xxii. 1, and *passim*). They are, in some sense which we cannot as yet fathom, made "partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet. i. 4), sharers in the holiness, the wisdom, and the love, and therefore in the glory and the majesty which have been from everlasting.

And so the Messages to the Seven Churches close. I have not attempted in dealing with them to dwell at any length on the history of these Asiatic cities in the past, or on their present state, in some instances of decay and desolation, in others of an outward prosperity, under the yoke of their Mahometan conquerors. Whatever interest may attach to such descriptions they contribute little or nothing, I believe, to a true interpretation. Still more entirely have I thought it right to exclude altogether what has been called the "prophetic" interpretation, which sees in the Seven Churches, as in the seven trumpets and the seven seals, the symbolism of an historical sequence, and connects each with some one period, more or less clearly marked, in the history of the Universal Church, beginning with the Apostolic age and ending with that which followed on the Reformation. I entirely agree with Archbishop Trench in looking on such a method of interpretation as grasping at the shadow and losing the

substance, as leading to fantastic and arbitrary applications of Divine words, and robbing them, in so doing, of all their interest and life. But it remains true, as I trust these notes have not failed to shew, that however directly historical and personal in the first instance, they have, for that very reason, a wider range. Any Church, at any time, may look into these pictures of spiritual excellence or decay, as into a mirror, and see in one or other of them its own likeness. The soul of each individual disciple may learn to behold in them his own besetting temptations, the rebuke or the encouragement which he himself most needs, the rewards to which even he may rightly and reverently aspire.

E. H. PLUMPTRE.

THE VINDICTIVE PSALMS VINDICATED.

PART IV.

IN two preceding papers upon this subject¹ I have addressed myself, almost exclusively, to the proof of this one proposition, that prayers for the temporal and even capital punishment of the wicked, while unlawful and unjustifiable on the lips of Christian men, were nevertheless, under certain conditions, perfectly lawful and perfectly natural on the part of those to whom life and immortality and a judgment *to come* had not been brought to light. I have endeavoured to prove such prayers to be a necessary and commendable result of the partial revelation vouchsafed to the Jewish people; of the purely temporal eco-

¹ See *THE EXPOSITOR* vol. iii. pp. 101-118, 185-203.