

APOCALYPTIC SKETCHES.

XI.

THE CITY OF GOD.

REV. XXI.

THE two chapters which remain are very simple compared with those through which we have been struggling, yet even these are not quite so simple as they seem. To the ordinary reader they stand unmistakably for a description of the heavenly state; but though this interpretation seems to fit the greater part, it cannot be maintained throughout. "They shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it" (v. 26). What nations? Have we not seen the great white throne and witnessed the final judgment? How then can there still be nations outside the city of God? And since there is no more death or pain or curse, how comes it that these nations need healing? For we read (xxii. 2), "The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." Will there be nations in heaven that have need of healing?

So seriously has this difficulty been felt that many have given up altogether the reference to the heavenly state, and apply the passage exclusively to the present, understanding it simply as another way of putting the ideal of the Church on earth. The Church now and always should be the Bride of God, the holy city, into which nothing enters that defileth, so glorious and beautiful that all will recognise her excellence, with the result that the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and the glory and honour of all nations shall be attracted to it; and, on the other hand, healing influences should go forth from her to all nations, so that there should be no more curse.

If, however, we drop the reference to the heavenly state, we find ourselves in difficulty with other parts of the

description, which seem so clearly and unmistakably to carry us forward to an entirely new state of things. It is not like the description of the saints risen in spirit and reigning with Christ in the preceding chapter, for there the language was no stronger than is found in other parts of the book, and in other books of the Bible, as descriptive of the ideal state of the Church on earth. But it is different here, as, *e.g.*, where we read: "Death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more; the first things are passed away." And again, "There shall be no night there." And again, perhaps most decisive of all, "I saw no temple therein," for surely it can scarcely be said that before the Church can reach her ideal on earth she must destroy all her sacred edifices. If we must accept some reference to the Church in its present state, we may not regard the meaning as exhausted by it; we must leave room for the time-honoured interpretation which has commended itself to the Christian conscience in all ages.

There seems, indeed, to be no great difficulty in combining the two applications, for the one passes into the other by a natural and almost inevitable process of thought. The ideal of the present is to be the reality of the future. "The Holy to the Holiest leads." The Church on earth has the foretaste here, the full banquet there. There is a sense in which even here all things are new to the Christian: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are made new." There clearly, however, the great change is in the man, so that he sees the things around him in a new light. But in the passage before us the change is not in the people only, but in the surroundings. There is a sense in which the believer in Christ even here is already victor over pain and death, as well as over sin; but it does not fill up the measure of the language used in

this passage. Here we see these things dwindling; there we see them gone. Yet the two conditions are so closely related that they can be seen in the same line of vision; the near horizon of the Ideal, and beyond it the far horizon of the coming Real. As "the law had a shadow of good things to come, not the very image of the things," so that in the shadow of the law could be seen a picture of the good things of the gospel, so is it in the gospel as related to the great consummation of the heavenly glory. It seems, therefore, not at all unnatural to suppose that the apostle had both the present and the future in his mind, both the ideal and the real, and that this sufficiently accounts for the fact that parts of the description are applicable to the present, while for the most part it is a vision of the great future, when

All we have willed, or hoped, or dreamed of good, shall exist,
Not its semblance, but itself . . .
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.

Let us bear in mind, then, as we read this passage, that we should use it in both ways. Let us not relegate it to the future in such wise that we miss its value as setting forth a high ideal for the present towards which we must ever aim. The cities in which we live will never, in these days of ours, attain to the perfection of the New Jerusalem as here described; but that is no reason at all why we should not work towards it, no reason why the citizens of our great cities should set before them any lower aim than that of making them as like as possible to the city of God. And it will encourage us all the more to work for this, if we remember that it will not always be an ideal to which we are painfully and often well-nigh hopelessly reaching up, but a state of things which will certainly be realized in the fulness of the times.

Now let us look at the passage itself.

First, we must bear in mind the connection with that which immediately precedes and in particular with the new book which has just been opened, called "The Lamb's Book of Life." At the close of St. John's Gospel we read, "These are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye may have life in His name." And the Apocalypse, like the Gospel, converges on the comprehensive blessing of Life, life in its large, liberal sense, set free from all that hinders and annoys, and with capacities and powers perfected for noblest use. Now the new life must have a new environment. The new wine cannot be put into the old bottles. No one can say that this is the best of all possible worlds in the abstract. It is quite conceivable, however, that it may be the best of all possible worlds for the life that is in it now, with which its mingled darkness and light, sunshine and shade, rose and thorn, calm and tempest, are in obvious harmony. But when life shall have been emancipated and glorified, then the old environment will serve no longer; there must be a new one.

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more." We must be careful not to import our modern astronomy into the text. When we speak of the heavens now, we generally mean the starry vault with its infinity of space, and its galaxies of suns and systems. But here surely the word is used in the familiar Hebrew sense, signifying the upper air as distinguished from the under earth; as when in the first chapter of Genesis we read of the fowl that "fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven." The change in view, therefore, does not necessarily involve the solar system, far less the great universe, but only the earth itself with its surrounding atmosphere.

Moreover, we must remember that the word in the

original translated "new" does not necessarily imply a new creation; rather does it suggest the thought of renovation. The essential constituents of the atmosphere may be the same, so that the students of Argon, and Krypton, and Neon, and Metargon, may not have to destroy their old note books, but may build on the old foundation other newer and more marvellous discoveries; only we may be sure that it will not be laden with soot, or infested with death-dealing microbes, or so darkened with fog as to dull the golden streets.

"And the sea is no more." Again, we must remember that this is no geography lesson. In the first place, we must not allow ourselves to forget that we are dealing with a vision, the landscape of which is necessarily limited by the range of the eye. The seer was a prisoner on a lonely island, too small for any river scenery. His daily outlook had been upon the "salt, unplumbed, estranging sea." Now that he is "in the spirit" the scene is completely changed. All is new; and instead of the weary sea there is a beautiful river, flowing through loveliest scenery, to make glad the city of God. Where are the wild waves, and what has become of their monotonous dirge? Gone. "The sea is no more." But the fact that the scene on which the eye of the seer rests has not even an arm of the sea in any part of it surely does not settle for all space and time the entire physiography of the better land. Moreover, we are dealing, not with plain prose, but with high poetry. Therefore we must understand the absence from the vision of the sea, not as suggesting the annihilation of the mighty ocean, to the majesty of which no one who admires the works of God would wish to bid eternal farewell, but the absence of all that the sea stood for to the Patmos prisoner—loneliness, restless tossing to and fro, estrangement, exile, melancholy, and mysterious dread.

A new heaven and a new earth, with no moaning of the

homeless sea, such is the place the Bridegroom has prepared. And now the Bride enters. The last we saw of her was when the heavens were opened to disclose the preparations for the marriage feast (xix. 8). Now the marriage has taken place, for she is in this chapter (v. 9) spoken of as "the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And as the marriage ceremony was in heaven, we now see her coming down from heaven to take possession of her home: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."

So the bride is a city, a community. This is the familiar scriptural idea. "Thy Maker is thine Husband" was said, not to an individual, but to a nation. And so it will be found even in those passages which seem most to suggest a more personal application, as *e.g.* that saying of St. Paul's, "I espoused you to one husband that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ," the application being to the Church to which he is writing. It was indeed a woman whom John saw in the former vision arrayed in fine linen white and pure, but the woman was the symbol of the Church, of the redeemed and sanctified community of saints, here presented to view as the city of God.

From this, again, it follows that we are not to think of the city as the place in which the redeemed shall dwell, but as the symbol of the people themselves. It is not the house; but the bride who dwells in the house. The house we have had already: the new heavens and new earth, made fit to be the abode of the pure and holy community.

But may we not at all events consider this much settled as to place—that heaven is to be, not in some far-off world, but on this very earth on which we live made new? This may be, and it is in many ways an interesting and a pleasant thought; but this chapter does not settle it, for the reason already insisted on, that this is not a geography or

astronomy lesson, but a vision; and the new heavens and the new earth which John saw were not the reality but only the picture, a picture in lines and colours within the range of his understanding; and of course the reality may be as much greater than that which John saw as a country-side is greater than the painted canvas which represents it to the eye.

With the vision comes a voice, a great voice out of the Throne, with the assurance that Bride and Bridegroom are united for ever in the new home. Attention has till now been fixed on the Bride entering her place; but the voice calls attention to the abiding presence of the Divine Bridegroom, with the result that all sadness and sighing have fled away for evermore. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God: and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more: the first things are passed away." Thus is realized at last the full significance of the old revelation of God in the Tabernacle. What an interesting study, were there time, to follow its development first into the temple of Solomon, then into the second temple, and later still the magnificent erection of Herod; then its elevation into the Temple of the New Testament, the incarnate Christ, who spoke of "the Temple of His body," the Word made flesh, and coming to tabernacle among men, as St. John puts it in his Gospel, as "Emmanuel, God with us," when only the few beheld His glory, when the light shone in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not; and then on and up to this final realization of the Divine thought and promise, when the light no longer shines in darkness, for darkness is no more; when He comes to His own, not to be despised and rejected, but to be welcomed and delighted in, not to have His gift

of life refused, but to see it all around in fulness of strength and joy for evermore.

The words which follow (*vv.* 5-8) may be taken, not as part of the description, but as a solemn word from the Throne, of encouragement, and promise, and warning. This is one of those parts which is clearly addressed to men upon the earth as it is now. The verses need no exposition, but it may be well to note in passing that evidently the new creation is to be as easily accomplished as the old. Then, "He spake and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast." So now: "Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, It is done." How different from the long agony of redemption! How easy to make a world! How terribly hard to redeem a soul from sin and death! Ages of agony to make man new! only a word to make all things new! The new *life* comes as the gift of God through the humiliation of the manger, the agony of the garden, the shame of the Cross, the gloom of the grave, the struggle of the ages; the new *environment* comes with a wave of the hand.

From the ninth verse onwards we have another vision of the Holy City as from a high mountain to which the seer has been conducted in spirit by one of the angels of the vials. It is full of detail on which we cannot enter without departing from the plan of these Apocalyptic Sketches, and perhaps it is as well for the reader that the plan on which we are working forbids the attempt to expound in detail; for it is hazardous to do more than touch such a passage as this, where exposition is so apt to take the form of translating out of splendid poetry into very poor prose. Far better leave the glorious imagery to make its own impression on the reverent mind. I shall content myself, therefore, with a few general remarks on the whole description.

It is evidently founded on Ezekiel's vision of the city of God in his closing chapters; but it differs from it in some

most significant respects, which it is well worth while to notice. In the first place, while Ezekiel's is a plan of the actual city, capable of being followed like an architect's plan and specifications, St. John's is purely ideal. Look at the dimensions: 12,000 furlongs. By measurement that is as near as may be our 1,500 miles; and I fancy that even those who are most eager to make 1,000 years mean exactly a millennium of time will scarcely insist on the 12,000 furlongs as the precise measurement of the city of God, the more especially as it applies not only to the length and the breadth, but to the height. The city is 12,000 furlongs high. Fifteen hundred miles straight up in the air—what kind of a city is that? The answer is plain. It is the idea of the cube of the Holy of Holies in the old Tabernacle enlarged and glorified. The 12 is the mystic number of the patriarchs of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New, and it is made 12,000 to give a general idea of vastness, while the cubical form, the length and breadth and height all equal, gives the idea of perfection. It is clear then that the city is purely ideal. The figures do not mean dimensions; they mean ideas.

Another significant difference from the city of Ezekiel is found in the striking declaration: "I saw no temple therein." The temple was the great feature of Ezekiel's vision. There are whole chapters about it with the most elaborate details; and the division between sacred and secular is most carefully observed. Here the division between secular and sacred is obliterated quite, not however by levelling down, but by levelling up, not, as so often happens in this sinful world, by making all secular, but by making all sacred. "I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb are the Temple thereof," and there is no spot or corner of the city where He is not. The city has no temple, because it is all Temple. It is the perfect cube filled with the Shekinah. It is the Holy of Holies expanded

into a world. And just as the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle had no window to let in the sun, and no candlestick like that which was needed to illuminate the Holy Place which led to it, but was lighted by the Shekinah alone, so the "city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine upon it; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb.

The next great difference follows upon the absence of the Temple. It is in the river of the vision. Ezekiel's came forth from the temple; here there is no temple from which the river might proceed, so it flows direct from the Throne of God and of the Lamb, which, by the way, reminds us of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as set forth in St. John's Gospel as proceeding from the Father and the Son. Lastly, while the vision as a whole is expressed, as far as circumstances will allow, in terms of Ezekiel's prophecy, at the close it runs back to a much older record and takes for its imagery the old-world picture of the Garden of Eden; but as that takes us into the last chapter, it must be separately considered.

XII.

THE PARADISE OF GOD.

REV. XXII.

In the above article attention has been called to the relation of this vision of the city of God to that of Ezekiel in the closing chapters of his prophecy. Here, as there, the last feature is the River of Life, in the older prophecy proceeding out of the temple, in the later prophecy, where there is no temple, "proceeding out of the Throne of God and of the Lamb." The symbol of the river gains fresh significance here by contrast with the sea, which is no more.

The sea is solitary; the river is eminently social, its

banks the scene where men especially do gather, and build their busy cities. "The troubled sea which cannot rest" is an emblem of the wicked, but restful progress is suggested by the onward flowing stream. While the sañ sea waves speak of melancholy and mystery, the river has a tone of gladness, from the babbling brook of merry childhood to the calm, peaceful flow of serene old age. You can drink of the fresh river but not of the salt sea; you can wash in the soft water of the stream as you cannot in the hard brine of the ocean; and while the margin of the one is barren sand, where nothing lives, the bank of the other is living green, where everything grows in luxuriance watered by the crystal stream. Even to a Western mind the symbol is most expressive; but how much more so to one familiar from his infancy with the scorching heat of a Syrian summer, and now condemned to exile and a barren shore! To him a stream of clear crystal water meant not only the chief necessity, but the highest luxury of life, while at the same time it recalled the old home to which his thoughts were ever fondly turning.

Up to this point in the vision the seer, rapt in contemplation of the new city, has been using as the materials for its construction the vision of Ezekiel; but the mention of the river sends him back to Eden, and suggests to his mind that while the joy of the new Jerusalem is in the main the joy of city life, it is not on that account deprived of the rapture which the pure soul finds in the beauty and calm of nature. The New Jerusalem is also to be a new Paradise, and none the less a Paradise that it is a populous city. As a rule, in these days of ours, people who go into cities leave Paradise behind them. They may try to keep the name, as in Marylebone's Lisson Grove, which can boast of its Paradise Street; but what a mockery! and what a reproach to the nineteenth century! Such a grove, such a paradise is that which man, apart from God, makes

for himself in this age of progress and high civilization. It was indeed a distinct advance when men gave up the nomadic life and built them cities; but, alas, that they should so often sink into slums! Is it necessary?

Certainly not, if this vision be a true one. The city of God will have none of them. Not that city life is bad and must be abandoned for a general return to Arcadian simplicity. We are to retain all the advantages—the convenience, the culture, the stimulus, the fellowship, the enjoyment—which the city at its best stands for; but all the amenities of the country are to be conjoined with it. The New Jerusalem is also to be a new Paradise: “On this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month.” The imagery is the simplest; but it is most suggestive both in what we miss and in what we find. There is no tree of the knowledge of evil, no forbidden fruit, no serpent to beguile. Sin has been conquered, and temptation has gone for ever. There are no danger signals, no trespass notices. Every one can do just as he pleases, for the simple reason that nothing now will please him that can displease his Father or do harm to his neighbour or himself. Every tree now is a tree of life. There is no restriction, and there is the richest variety. The old Eden has its one tree of life with one kind of fruit; now there are trees of life all along the river banks with fruit in liberal profusion, as indicated by the mystic number twelve, and, further, by the monthly crops. For there is no winter in this year, yet no monotony of an unchanging season, for there are twelve seasons now in every year, each bearing fruit, and each its own fruit. So richly and happily suggestive is the simple imagery of the new Paradise.

“And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations,” which reminds us that we must not relegate this vision of hope wholly to the future. We have seen reason

in previous references to believe that the seer thought not only of the ultimate reality but of the present ideal; that, as the ideal of the present and the real of the future lay in the same line of vision, he could think now of the one and now of the other without altering his position. Be it remembered then that even here on earth there is for the Christian a "Paradise Regained." Even here the tree of life is growing. The time of fruit is not yet; it is the time of leaves, but even the leaves have their value, "the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

Let us not think of the present time as the winter. It is not summer yet; but it is springtime; therefore let us expect to see life springing up around us. Let us look for healing to the nations from the tree of life, not to individuals only, saved out of the general wreck of humanity, but to communities, to the nations, to our cities and towns. Let us have our rivers pure, our streets clean, our spaces wide, our avenues bordered with trees. And, what is far more important, let us put away all that defileth, all that worketh abomination or that maketh a lie. But how many hindrances, how much discouragement in the work of reform! There, in that Apocalyptic vision, is the high ideal, but how can we ever hope to reach it, or even to come within sight of it? Certainly not till men look up for it; not till they seek and find the inspiration of heavenly love which will unite men in a true brotherhood; not till men learn to love one another even as Christ loved us all and gave Himself for us all, that He might unite us to one another as brethren, and all to Himself as a holy Bride. The path of this Apocalypse is the only path to the Paradise city of God. The New Jerusalem cannot be built up from below. It must come down out of heaven from God.

Before we allow ourselves to swing back, as naturally we shall immediately, from the ideal of the present to the great prospect of the future, let us notice that what follows has

also its application to the present as well as to the future, for surely to the Christian, even here on earth, there is no curse any more. There is pain, there are tears, so that the strong language of the earlier part of the vision (xxi. 4) could not be so applied; but this certainly can. And surely it is as true now as it will be then that His servants serve Him, not yet indeed with perfect service, but with such as they have grace to render; and by faith they see His face; and by some subtle chemistry of grace His name does get written on their foreheads. Let us not lose this beautiful passage in its application to the present life. Let us have it as our constant ideal.

But for the great reality we must look forward to the future, when there shall be nothing *banned*, for that is the full force of the Greek (see R.V. margin), nothing forbidden, nothing profane, nothing that may not live in the full light of the Throne of God and of the Lamb; and when in the fullest sense His servants shall do Him service and see His face, and His name be on their foreheads.

Let us pause here for a moment to observe how satisfying to the thoughtful mind is this view of the heavenly life and work. There are many who imagine that, however reticent and reserved may be the suggestions as to the future life in other parts of Scripture, notably in the utterances of our Lord, the Book of Revelation can lay no claim to any such merit. Its heaven seems to be a perpetual singing and shouting and playing of golden harps. Those who make this objection only show with how little care they have read this great book. The references to harps and hallelujahs have certainly been frequent, as we have seen; but why? Because the glimpses which have been given of the future have been always after some grand crisis in the conflict of the ages. The jubilations have been pœans of victory. But the suggestion has never been made, and there is no authority whatever for making it, that these are the

normal occupations of the inhabitants. Now that we have come "to where beyond these voices there is peace," and are allowed to look into the city of God, in what we may by comparison call the even tenor of its life, here is the quiet, dignified, and eminently rational and sober account we have of it: "The servants of God shall do Him service; and they shall see His face; and His name shall be on their foreheads." Full activity in high and useful work, beatific vision, perfection of character. How reticent, yet how suggestive! inspiring, yet restful! nothing to satisfy an idle curiosity, everything to minister to a radiant hope.

This high service of the city of God shall not suffer through weariness, or through blundering; for this we take to be the main suggestion in the assurance given in this connection that "night shall be no more." There was, it will be remembered, a reference to the absence of night before (xxi. 25), but in such a connection as to suggest the absence of all that makes it necessary to guard the city from the terrors of the night and from the pestilence that walketh in darkness. Here the connection is quite different, so that, though the symbol is the same, the thought is new. Again we must remind ourselves that this is no physiographic lesson. Just as the declaration that there shall be no more sea does not necessarily mean the abolition of the ocean, so neither does this necessarily mean the abolition of that natural darkness which is so splendid a revealer of the glory of the sky. It means the abolition of that which night stands for to the ardent servant, who, however eager, is obliged to cease his task when his powers are spent, and, what is far more trying and baffling, to carry it on when he knows not what is to come out of it, or how his work would stand the revealing of the light of God. There all our work will be done in the light of God, so there will be no blundering, no need of unravelling tangled skeins, no need of painful doing to be followed by

still more painful undoing; no need of checks and counter-checks to prove that we have not gone astray; no need of any light but that which is always with us in the presence of God, of whom it is written, "The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee," "They need no light of lamp neither light of sun; for the Lord God giveth light."

"And they shall reign for ever and ever" gives the assurance of perfect mastery, a mighty comfort surely to those of us who continually feel that work is set us which overtaxes, work beyond our power, work which we can only struggle to do as best we can, and when it is done, are constrained to confess that it needs so much apology. No more of that: "They shall reign"; they shall have the mastery. There is, first, perfect mastery of self, the regnant position reached by Dante, when in his ascent of the Mount of Purification he gained the victory over the last and most refractory lust, and was told by his spiritual instructor that he now needed no further guidance or restraint:

Look not for me to signal or to speak;
Free, upright, healthy, is thine own will now,
And not to do as it commands were weak;
So, crowned and mitred, o'er thyself reign thou.

But there is more than self-mastery, there is mastery over circumstance: no more failing or shortcoming, no more abandoned enterprises, no more of that harassing sense of limitation which makes the best men feel as if they could not accomplish one-hundredth part of the service they are called to render, no more "letting I dare not wait upon I would," the power never lacking when holy ardour leads the way. All this too is involved in the final words, "they shall reign for ever and ever."

The rest is epilogue and need not detain us long; especially as it returns, after the manner of John, to the general position and leading thoughts of the prologue.

The repetition of the assurance that the things he has

spoken of are shortly to come to pass may come upon us strangely after reading of an interval of a thousand years, and dwelling thereafter on a prospect which, though having in it elements which serve as an ideal for the present, cannot be realized until a very long time shall have elapsed; but let us not forget that these are only specimens of the far-off glimpses of hope which are given to reinforce failing faith and patience, amid calamities present and impending. The cloud rack which constitutes the main body of the vision was then impending, and was very soon to gather to a head and burst upon the Christians then living in Ephesus and Smyrna and all the Churches in Asia, and in Europe too. The days were close at hand when all the comfort of this Apocalypse would be very sorely needed. Remember that the Coming of the prologue and of the epilogue too is the cloud advent, "Behold He cometh with clouds." We have had glimpses of a final Coming when the clouds shall have rolled away, but the Coming with clouds was very close at hand.

And that John was on the alert for it, is evident from his readiness to fall down and worship before the feet of the angel who showed him these things. He had made that mistake before; he makes it here again. What other explanation can there be of this than that the apostle, who was looking for the Coming of the Lord, should once and again, in presence of the radiant form before him, say to himself, "He has come: He is here," and fall down to worship at His feet. Clearly he meant what he said, when he spoke of the time as at hand.

When the time should come, it would be too late to change sides. That is the import of the solemn warning of the next paragraph (*vv.* 10-15).

As at the beginning, so at the end, the Lord Himself speaks in person, acknowledging the vision as from Him, and claiming His place as the Mediator between God and man,

the root and offspring of David, and yet the bright and morning star. His feet are on the earth; His head is in the highest heaven. And how cheering to have at the end of all this night of tempest the clear shining of the star of morning! He is the evening star amid the cloud rack of the coming night; He will be the morning star which ushers in the cloudless day. The star of evening and the star of morning are the same, both in nature and in grace:

Sweet Hesper-Phosphor, double name
 For what is one, the first, the last,
 Thou, like my present and my past,
 Thy place is changed, thou art the same.

Then follows the last, perhaps the most gracious, of all the invitations of the gospel: "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come; and he that is athirst, let him come; he that will, let him take the water of life freely."

This is the last word of the prophetic scroll, for what follows is simply the seal, to ensure the preservation of its integrity (*vv.* 18, 19); and the last words of all are the three closing voices of the heavenly revelation, three voices like angels coming and going between earth and heaven now made one through the finished gospel of God: a voice from above of glorious promise, "Surely I come quickly"; a voice from beneath of eager expectation, "Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus"; and a final benediction from above, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints. Amen."

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