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to the  
**Seven Churches.**

BY

*D. M. PANTON.*

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# THE LETTERS

TO THE

# SEVEN CHURCHES.

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IT is of a practical importance impossible to exaggerate that we should understand exactly how our Lord presents Himself to the Churches; and the Apocalypse opens (Rev. i. 13) with this overmastering revelation. Jesus moves amongst the Churches, not as the Sacrifice, but as the Priest; He presents Himself to the Church militant, not as the Saviour, but as the Investigator; He stands amongst us all in the assembly, not so much the human Jesus as the Divine Judge. Mr. William Kelly has put it excellently thus:—"Christ was in their midst as a judge; and as such He is about to execute judgment on the Seven Churches, as well as upon the world. Responsibility on earth is the question: not the privileges of the Church, or the saints in Christ, but the obligation of the churches to represent Him, and His estimate of their state. The lightbearers are under His scrutiny and judgment." "So that the Seven Letters are not so much messages from an absent Lord, as sentences of a present Judge, telling us what Christ's judgment of each of us is, *and what we each may expect in the great day of His coming*" (Dr. J. A. Seiss).

So, closeted though He is with the Churches alone, wholly apart from the world and world-judgment, all the attributes our Lord presents to us are challenging, awesome, minatory. John saw Him thus:—"His head and His hair are white, as white wool, white as snow"—eternity, omniscience, wisdom; judgment as the Ancient of Days

(Dan. vii. 9): "and His eyes were as a flame of fire"—piercing all secrets, and penetrating all souls; supernaturally conscious, Christ *brings* (as a flame does) the light with which He sees: "and His feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace"—copper, the hardest of metals, actually aglow; feet already trampling all that the eyes condemn: "and His voice"—which John had heard with startling suddenness, even as we shall so hear it at the Advent—"as the voice of many waters"—no still, small voice to woo, but the falling thud of a Niagara, to which all *must* listen: "and out of His mouth proceedeth a sharp two-edged sword"—amputating sin and cutting off fruitless boughs: "and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength"—creating day; so that while all is night around, calling for stars and lamps, for those who see Christ *within* the Church, it is broad day.

Seven lamps illumine the night. "I saw seven golden lampstands"—candles (self-consuming) were neither used in the Temple, nor were they known to the ancients: "and the lampstands [fed with oil from without, the oil of the Spirit] are seven churches": golden churches! golden men! The Holy of holies—heaven—had no light but God's, the shekinah glory; the outer court—earth—has no light but the seven-branched lampstand, the people of God: it is the Church still on the earthly side of the Veil, the only light of the world, shining for an invisible Christ; she receives, embodies, dispenses the sole Divine light in the night of earth. But seven separate lamps have replaced the seven-branched lampstand; for now each church assembly is responsible for itself alone; and the central stem is no longer a visible, centralised organisation at Jerusalem, but the High Priest standing, trunk-like, in the centre of all. And the Churches are seven—even as the rainbow has seven colours that give to earthly eyes heaven's perfect light: for it is the Church of all ages, in all nations; seven flames that are always watched, and fed, and if need be extinguished, by Christ. The whole Church lies buried in the seven, and springs afresh out of the Seven Letters all down the ages; and each of us is an Ephesian, or a

Smyrnaote, or a Pergamite, or a Thyatiran, or a Sardian, or a Philadelphian, or a Laodicean. As the Seven Churches formed, geographically, a complete circle in space, so the Letters are, spiritually, a complete epitome of church truth; and the Seven Churches themselves are, ecclesiastically, the Church Universal.<sup>1</sup>

Between the Lamps and the Sun are the Stars. "And He had in His right hand seven stars": "the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." That these Angels are charged with sin, and that one of them is in danger of death (Rev. ii. 10), establishes that they are not angelic beings; neither is it conceivable, nor does it ever occur in Scripture, that our Lord should send messages to angels through a man. John was to write a letter to each Angel and send it to him: how could he do so to an *angel*? The Angels of God are described in the Apocalypse as "stars of heaven" (Rev. xii. 4): the Angels of Christ, the chief stewards of the Churches, are stars *of the earth*; stars of Bethlehem to lead wise men to Christ. How wonderful! the God-created minister moves in a Divine orbit; his authorization is not from the church that calls him, but from the Christ who appoints him; no power can wrench him from the grasp of his Lord; his light is *from heaven*; and if unfaithful, who shall deliver him from that infinite grasp? How solemn is the attitude of our Lord to the Churches, both now, and still more at the Bema, is proved by its effect on John. Christ's selected amanuensis though he is, and, as the last survivor of the Twelve, ranking above all other stars, nevertheless, he who had reclined in the bosom of the Saviour, falls "as one dead" at the feet of the Judge. It is most remarkable that on the only two occasions on which our Lord has appeared visibly on the earth since His Ascension—and that to two supreme apostles, Paul and John—all who saw Him fell prostrate on their faces. All Laodicean angels must hear the judgment word:—"Though Coniah were the signet upon my

<sup>1</sup> "To have given a distinct *chronological* history, so marked as to be apparent from the first, would have falsified the true posture of the Church in habitually waiting for the Lord from heaven" (W. Kelly).

right hand"—the Laodicean angel is actually a star on the palm of Christ—"yet would I pluck thee thence" (Jer. xxii. 24). But the saint with the sanctity of John has nothing to fear: "FEAR NOT."

So we realize the momentous import of the Letters. "What thou seest write in a book, and send it to the seven churches": so that the Letters to the Seven are as much meant for all Churches as the Apocalypse itself, for they are part of the catholic book, to be universally circulated: exactly as Paul's seven letters to the Churches (to Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica) are seven only, because they are for the Church universal of all ages. In these Letters our Lord weighs, estimates, judges the works, the grace, the creed, the discipline, the love of each church, and commands a hearing for what the Holy Ghost, through His lips, is saying to all assemblies. "Hear," He says, "what the Spirit saith TO THE CHURCHES." "Such language, seven times underlined, as if printed in the largest capitals, has in it an intensity of universality and urgency beyond anything in all the volume of Scripture" (Dr. J. A. Seiss). The Seven Letters are probably the only unabridged utterances of our Lord that have reached us, verbally complete; they are enforced with an entreaty and command to hear them seven times repeated; they stand on the threshold of the last judgments, revealing where our Lord's heart is—*with His Church*—on the eve of the apocalypse of wrath; and every Letter is stamped with a section of His portrait—an *imprimatur* than which none could be conceived more momentously august. No letters—not even those of Paul—are more charged with the heart of God: they are the *ipsissima verba* of Deity.

### I. THE PRIEST.

Each Letter opens with a section of the portrait of our Lord as He was seen by John; nor are these sections of the Priest's portrait, as He walks amid the Lampstands with ceaseless vigilance and holy inquisition, drawn at random. Each dominant virtue or vice in a church draws forth, as by an irresistible magnetism, the corresponding response of

grace from the person of Christ. To Ephesus, the fading church, He presents the shining stars and the burning lamps; to Smyrna, the martyr church—the risen, immortal Christ; to Pergamos, the erroneous Church—the pruning sword; to Thyatira, the immoral church—the eyes of fire and the feet of judgment; to Sardis, the dead church—the sevenfold fulness of the Spirit of life; to Philadelphia, the blameless church, the wide-flung door of ample service; and to Laodicea, the worldly church—an exiled Christ. It is the Priest, not only investigating present holiness with a view to future glory, but the personal Christ presenting Himself in such exact conjunction with the mystical Christ, that each church's peculiar need is confronted, here and now, with the corresponding fulness of Divine grace.<sup>1</sup>

### II. THE ANGEL.

In each Letter the Angel alone is directly addressed. The Angel hears for the church, receives for the church, is responsible for the church, and transmits the word of Christ to the church; held in the grasp of Christ—in solemn words that have haunted my own memory for years—"so that, if faithful, none can pluck him thence, but, if unfaithful, none can deliver" (Govett). It is obvious that the Angel is not a spirit, for the Angel in Smyrna is exhorted to be faithful *unto death* (Rev. ii. 10), and spirits do not suffer

<sup>1</sup> Our Lord's description of the synagogue as "the synagogue of Satan," and of the Jews as among the keenest antagonists of His disciples during the period covered by the Letters (Rev. iii. 9), at once disposes of the view that the Letters are in any sense or degree Jewish, and establishes the fact, also abundantly internally proved, that the highly technical word "ecclesia" is used by our Lord—as invariably in the New Testament, with but a solitary exception (Acts vii. 38)—of Jew and Gentile gathered out between the two Advents, and compacted together into the mystical Body of Christ. Such Ecclesiae at Ephesus and Laodicea are addressed by Paul as already existent long prior to our Lord's Letters. That the Lord's Day (Rev. i.) is not the Day of the Lord, see *Rapture*, p. 41. "To interpret 'on the Lord's Day' as='in the Parousia' is contrary to usage, besides introducing a thought foreign to the context; it is not Christ at His coming who is revealed, but Christ present with the Church on earth" (Dr. Swete).

death ; nor an elder, for we know from Acts (xx. 17, 28) that there was a plurality of elders at Ephesus ; nor a diocesan, for a single city assembly is his sole charge : probably he was a resident apostle—what Paul calls elsewhere “ apostles of churches ” (2 Cor. viii. 23) or “ your apostle ” (Phil. ii. 25). It is deeply significant that, whereas our Lord appears in the vestments and functions of a priest, the angel, His delegated officer, is totally devoid of all sacerdotal character and function. Angels of earth, as spirits are angels of heaven, the church angels are “ stars ” that turn many to righteousness, as distinct from false teachers, who are “ wandering stars ” (Jude 13) : for each angel is a “ star ”—a single point of burning light, while each church is a “ lampstand ”—a gathered blaze ; shining together through the Night, until the Sun of righteousness, rising, shall put out all lamps and veil all stars.

### III. THE WORKS.

Seven isolated lampstands, in the place of Israel's seven-branched unity upon one stem (Ex. xxv. 32)—for in Israel all turned on the central Temple—reveal the Church as here regarded, not in its corporate standing, as the Body or the Bride of Christ, but as seen from the view-point of isolating judgment. In standing, the Church is a vessel filled with a liquid interpenetrating and one ; in responsibility, it is a vessel in separate water-tight compartments, a leakage in Laodicea being no leakage in Philadelphia. Each Lamp reposes upon its own lampstand. For in the Apocalypse, the revelation of judgment, the Church is nowhere addressed as a unity, until all judgment is over (Rev. xxii. 17) ; we are in the region of the judicial ; and, in the sphere of justice, no man stands responsible for any merits or demerits but his own. Thus isolated lampstands indicate separate responsibility : each angel, isolated from his church, discloses personal investigation : works isolated from faith reveal a disciple's judgment as based on character and conduct since regeneration. Each angel, as clothed in the righteousness of his Lord, is perfect : as a servant, at best he is unprofitable. To each angel therefore—except

in Smyrna and Pergamos, where suffering replaces action ; and our Lord ever graciously accepts suffering as a substitute for action—Jesus begins with the words,—“ I know *thy works* ” ; and the whole of the adjudication is built, with excessive care, on the character and conduct thus revealed under the microscope of Christ. The startling nature of the Letters lies in this,—that they do not merely contain general principles for us to apply in church life, but are a record of actual churches visibly judged : it is not what Christ is *likely* to think, but what He *has thought* : it is concrete church judgment unfolded before our eyes, and already pronounced by the lips of the Lord.

### IV. THE INVESTIGATION.

Our Lord next splits the works into good and bad. He first fastens—as Paul also habitually does—on what He can praise : virtues—such as “ patience,” thrice repeated, as so sorely needed in an angel ; service—such as “ labour *unto weariness* ” (Rev. ii. 2), a tender sympathy with a tired angel ; attitude—such as antipathy to evil men (Rev. ii. 2), the recoil of holiness ; and suffering—such as imprisonment, “ where Satan's throne is ”—due allowance made for acuteness of circumstantial difficulty. Every angel, however—except two—is flawed with a “ but ”—“ *but* I have this *against* thee ” : in Ephesus, dwindled love ; in Pergamos and Thyatira, neglected discipline ; in Sardis, deadness ; and in Laodicea, worldliness. It is deeply humbling to us all that in these pristine, sample, apostolic churches two alone pass (and somewhat feebly) the solemn inquisition ; five reveal grave sin ; and one is totally condemned : and even of the angels, four out of seven are summoned to repent—not the repentance of the lost, but the repentance of a Star, still undeposed and unquenched.

### V. THE ADJUDICATION.

Our Lord's adjudication now stands forth as critically decisive of church truth. As for the individual there is no second conversion, so for the Church there is no second Pentecost : all the Lord Jesus can say is,—“ Strengthen the

things that remain" (Rev. iii. 2). A return to pristine purity on the part of an individual assembly is the utmost that is possible in a fallen dispensation. Churches being judged now—as distinct from individual disciples, to be judged at the Bema—unfaithfulness imperils a lampstand, and threatens a church with total spiritual extinction. The line of adjudication taken by our Lord sheds a flood of light. If spiritually dying, no sacerdotal succession can redeem a church, no State recognition rescue it, no erudition restore it, and no splendour of outward activity resuscitate it; it fails, if it fails at all, inherently, and dies for want of its own virtue: a dead church—dead in the sight of God—loses its lampstand from the Holy of holies. On the other hand, it is a truth of exquisite significance that no assembly is beyond recovery. Sardis and Laodicea, for example, are laid on God's operating table; they are cauterized to the bone; but they *can* recover. Ephesus can recapture its first love; Smyrna can win the martyr's crown; Pergamos can restore sound doctrine; Thyatira can excommunicate Jezebel; Sardis can learn afresh the Second Advent; Philadelphia can enter to the full its open door; Laodicea can get from Christ according to her awful need. No individual church is beyond the magnificent resuscitation of the Son of God.

#### VI. THE INCENTIVES.

Our Lord draws to a close in each Letter with a distinction of supreme significance. With unerring finger He has located each collective peril; now, within each assembly, He severs the overcomer from the overcome: and He discloses stupendous glories, and incalculable perils, both made wholly contingent on fidelity, or infidelity, up to the moment of His return. "In the seven Epistles there are seven promises to the individual overcomer, which are all to be fulfilled during the thousand years of Christ's reign on the earth" (J. Sladen). To the rekindled Ephesian—the Tree of Life; to the martyred Sardian—the crown of life; to the sound Pergamite—the white stone; to the pure Thyatiran—authority over the nations; to the revived Sardian—the white garment; to the blameless

Philadelphian—the pillars in the Temple; and to the separated Laodicean—the Messianic throne. Correspondingly grave are the consequences of unfaithfulness. Had our Lord returned at that moment—as He might have done—for the Angels of Sardis and Laodicea no award would have been possible except sharp censure at the Judgment Seat, framed in strictures, here actually before our eyes, of appalling severity. Even blameless Philadelphia is invoked to "hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown." The lost crown (Rev. iii. 11)—the lost rapture<sup>1</sup> (iii. 3)—the lost authority (ii. 26)—the lost throne (iii. 21)—no ingenuity of exposition, no sophistry of tradition, can blunt the plain solemnity of the words of the Son of God. That both the promises—twelve in number—and, the warnings are Millennial is proved, instantly and finally, by the smiting of recalcitrant nations with an iron rod (Rev. ii. 27)—for no such nations inhabit the Eternal State, where all are holy: they are promises so ineffable, so intimately personal, as to provoke, when once realised, to uttermost fidelity,—even to the faggot or the block; and warnings so dreadful as to counterweigh the worst fears of man with the still more awful fear of God: and they are promises and warnings all set to strike at the Advent. "BEHOLD, I COME QUICKLY," rings through the hearing of the Seven Churches.

#### VII. THE APPLICATION.

Our Lord finally embeds, in every Letter, an individual call which, cast like a net over the assemblies, catches, for present holiness and consequent glory, every hearing ear. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit"—for Christ and the Spirit are essential Deity: what Christ utters, the Spirit utters: there is fusion in the Godhead, but no confusion—"saith to the Churches." By this phrase the Letters are instantly made catholic. It is not—"what the Spirit saith to *this* Church"; or, "what the

<sup>1</sup>"If therefore thou shalt not watch"—is the warning to the Sardian Angel—"I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will ARRIVE OVER [ἄξει ἐπι] thee" (Rev. iii. 3): the Parousia will have begun, to the total ignorance of the unrap't Angel.

Spirit saith to the *Seven Churches*"; but, "what the Spirit saith to *the churches*"—all churches, everywhere. The seven churches are seven strata always present in the geology of the Church Universal.<sup>1</sup> As the whole Apocalypse was sent through an angel "*for the churches*" (Rev. xxii. 16); as also our Lord makes Thyatira an example by which "*all the churches shall know*" (Rev. ii. 23); and as the very selection of *seven* churches, no more and no less, indicates catholicity: so, in this urgent and insistent application, every ear that *can* hear is laid under Divine command to accept these as universal epistles of the Holy Ghost. "He that hath an ear"—for the final summons is individual; "let him hear"—for individual purity can be flawless in the midst of institutional corruption (Rev. iii. 4); "what the Spirit"—the Person resident with the Church to apply to it these Letters throughout the Age; "saith to the churches"—the Church, consecutive and catholic. Our Lord's last and priceless utterances are the holy heritage of all disciples, in all ages, for primitive purity and heavenly life.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> With the graded history of the Church supposed to be found in the seven consecutive Letters, I do not deal: it is a truth, if proved a truth, which one would be happy to accept; and certainly a condition equivalent to Laodicea seems disclosed in other Scriptures, as the final stage of the Church. The fact also that the references to Old Testament narrative—that is, the typology of the Letters—seem historically graded affords at least an impressive inference. But two things need to be said. Firstly, no proof—proof sufficient, for example, to turn the edge of Archbishop Trench's refutation—seems yet forthcoming; and secondly, the scheme is beset by an acute peril—lest, while vast ingenuity is being expended on the exact adjustment of the prophecy to its alleged fulfilment, the pregnant practical issues of the Letters, immediate and urgent, are overlooked. This would be a disaster of the first magnitude, and, I venture to add, solemnly athwart the holy purposes of Christ. "By the seven churches is signified the perfection of the universal Church, and by writing to *seven* the Lord shows the fulness of the *one*" (Augustine).

<sup>2</sup> "These variations occur in individual Christian experience; in the life of individual churches; and in the history of the Universal Church. And not only so, but they all find their illustrations in different portions of the Catholic Church of any one period. Though in each period the Church as a whole may predominantly present one of the seven types, yet illustrations of all the others may be found in different sections" (Dr. E. C. Craven).

In conclusion let us summarize the drift of the Letters, as expressed in a single utterance of our Lord. "I will kill her children with death; and ALL THE CHURCHES shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give unto each one of you ACCORDING TO YOUR WORKS" (Rev. ii. 23). Concerning the solemn warnings to believers contained in the Letters, and in the Gospels and Epistles, Isaac Taylor says:—"We of this age may expound, as we think fit, these appalling words; or may extenuate these phrases; or, if we please, let us cast away the whole doctrine as intolerable and incredible. But it is a matter of history that the Apostolic Church and the Church of later times took them, word for word, in the whole of their apparent value. It is certain that the language of Christ in regard to the future life was constantly on the lips of the martyrs throughout the suffering centuries. Often was it heard from out of the midst of the fire, and was lisped by the quivering lips of women and children while writhing on the rack."

"All the churches shall *know*": for only by a closer knowledge of Christ can the Church shape its life as it should; and Jezebel judged is Christ revealed. From this sharp discipline in Thyatira the churches shall know—what? "THAT I AM HE WHICH SEARCHETH THE REINS AND HEARTS; AND I WILL GIVE UNTO EACH ONE OF YOU ACCORDING TO YOUR WORKS." The truth stated is obvious. All the churches shall know—either now, or at the Judgment Seat of Christ—that we are dealing, primarily and ultimately, not with church officers, or church assemblies, or even the Church catholic, but with Him "before Whom all hearts are open, and from Whom no secrets are hid." All the churches shall know that the Eyes of Fire search, not outward conduct only and external works, but also the reins and hearts where the motives lie. All the churches shall know that the recoil of a disciple's life upon his future destiny is exact, proportionate, and sure. All the churches shall know that although church discipline may fail, the Priest's discipline never fails; and that sins, not bound by the Church on earth through guilty complicity or slothful negligence, will yet stand forth as bound in heaven.

All the churches shall know that the Lord is jealous with a godly jealousy for the purity of His Assembly; and that He holds nothing dearer on earth than the love, the witness, and the sanctity of His people. All the churches shall know that the severest discipline, and the utmost sweep of the Sword of His Mouth, only prove that as many as He *loves*, He rebukes and chastens; that Laodicea itself is still being invited to the Throne; and that neither things present nor things to come can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Finally, all the churches shall know that the latent possibilities in every discipleship, springing out of our marvellous standing, are golden beyond the highest dreams man ever dreamed. "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when He cometh shall find so DOING. Of a truth I say unto you, that He will set *him* over ALL THAT HE HATH" (Luke xii. 43).

Each sees one colour of Thy rainbow-light,  
Each looks upon one tint and calls it heaven;  
Thou art the fulness of our partial sight;  
We are not perfect till we find the seven.

Thine is the mystic life great India craves,  
Thine is the Parsee's sin-destroying beam,  
Thine is the Buddhist's rest from tossing waves,  
Thine is the empire of vast China's dream.

Thine is the Roman's strength without his pride;  
Thine is the Greek's glad word without its graves;  
Thine is Judæa's law with love beside;  
The truth that censures and the grace that saves.

Some seek a Father in the heavens above,  
Some ask a human image to adore,  
Some crave a spirit vast as life and love:  
*Within Thy mansions we have all and more.*

GEORGE MATHESON.

## Note on Our Attitude to Laodicea.

As a huge Laodicea rises around us, composed of Churches which still preach a Divine Christ, but which grow more full of worldliness every year, what is to be our attitude towards it? This is a question of extraordinary practical importance; and it is a question to which we have an answer of the most exquisite decisiveness. We have the actual example, in heart and word, of our Lord Himself, in a letter addressed to Laodicea, and therefore to all Laodiceans of all time. Here we can set our feet on rock. What Jesus felt, we ought to feel: what He said, we ought to say; what He wrote, we ought to write; His whole attitude should be our whole attitude. It is a priceless discovery. The Lord presents Himself as the Faithful and True Witness, the Amen to all that God has said: what a joy if we too, by grace, can succeed in being "faithful and true witnesses," lisping the very accents of Christ, and "amens" confirming all that God would have us be and say to the Laodicea of the End.

Our Lord first addresses it as a real church:—"to the angel of the *church* in Laodicea" (Rev. iii. 14). Laodicea was an actually existing assembly, for Paul had already addressed a letter "*to the Laodiceans*" (Col. iv. 16); and John is commanded by our Lord (Rev. i. 11) to transmit this letter also. As a sevenfold completion of the whole Church, all seven are vital, all are alive; and so of all seven we are bidden to "hear what the Spirit saith *to the churches*." The Laodicean assembly was, therefore, a body of believers: in all seven the Lord recognises their "works," so assuming a foundation of saving faith: the Gospel, therefore, He never presents to any of the seven: *John sees Laodicea's lampstand in the Holy of holies* (Rev. i. 11, 12). Nor is the Angel himself less recognized by the Lord. It was still the Apostolic age when "*the Holy Ghost* hath made you *overseers*" (Acts xx. 28): the appointment of a



wolf in sheep's clothing was thus impossible; nor, if an unconverted man, would our Lord have confirmed him in office, leaving him not only undismitted, but (so far as the possession of the angelship is concerned) unrebuked. *The Laodicean Angel is one of the seven stars held in the grasp of Christ and shining in the spiritual darkness.* The easy and superficial solution of an acute church problem—namely, that sin in a soul disproves its second birth, and that Laodicea is no church at all—is not Christ's solution: this is the most wonderful letter to a backslider ever written.

Now our Lord at once makes a rapid and exceedingly grave diagnosis. So far from dilating on the Church's magnificent standing in election and grace; or emphasizing our position of privilege as Body or Bride; or comforting them with the imminence of their coming glory at the Advent:—He says,—“Thou art *neither cold nor hot*; thou art *lukewarm*.” A corpse is cold; a healthy living man is warm: this Angel is alive, but abnormal, because he is chilled. “Judged by his works he was neither frigid nor at boiling heat: it is the believer who is without enthusiasm” (Dr. Swete). What makes it the more remarkable is that some regard Paul's lost Epistle to Laodicea as the Epistle to the Ephesians; and both Colossians (in which the lost Letter is named, and which Paul directs shall be read at Laodicea) and Ephesians deal with the splendid position of the Church in Christ. Thirty years before, when Paul wrote, it was safe to write thus to Laodicea: on the contrary, to a church on the sharp down-grade a far more solemn word is necessary—a word so sharp, so weighted with judgment, that it is rarely ever commented upon:—“Toward thee [the Gentile Church], God's goodness, *if thou continue in His goodness*: otherwise THOU ALSO SHALT BE CUT OFF” (Romans xi. 22). So to a Church in which not one gross sensual sin is named; a Church highly esteemed by the State; and a Church wholly ignorant of her rapidly approaching doom, the LORD says,—“Because thou art lukewarm, I will”—I am “about to,” a word reserved to the Millennial Age—“SPEW THEE OUT OF MY MOUTH.”

There is now revealed to us the counsel needed by such a church, such counsel as that given by the Faithful and True Witness:—“I COUNSEL thee.” First, our counsel must be based on an unswerving analysis of the facts. The facts are these:—great wealth, in endowments, sustentation funds, vast popular contributions; a self-complacency which wholly denies deep departure from Christ, and which imagines that it has His approval; unkeenness, springing from an attempt to make the best of both worlds; poverty of faith; blindness to the signs of the times; nakedness of good works—a shame which must some day be exposed; and, worst of all, CHRIST OUTSIDE. An almost cruel analysis is essential, because the root of the trouble is self-complacency; and no ignorance is so dangerous as ignorance of our ignorance. “Thou KNOWEST NOT that thou art *blind*.” Nothing short of a revelation of the facts can shock a Laodicean out of his deadly slumber. As an overcomer's sanctity is saved by the unpopularity of the truths he has to proclaim, so Laodicea's cure is the knife; and our LORD's words are not the exposure of a detective, but the surgery of a physician; though, if unheeded, they may pass into the summary of the judge, and the writ of the executioner.

Now what exactly is the counsel based by our Lord upon this absolutely faithful and true diagnosis? “I counsel thee to BUY OF ME.” An *outside* Christ cannot heal an *inside* disease. It is not dragooning, or scolding, or excommunicating, but *counsel*; and the counsel is an appeal again to receive Christ, when all the worldliness and carnality and compromise will melt away. Barter, O fallen Church, the world for the graces:—*gold*, rich in faith; *white linen*, the righteousnesses of saints; and *eyesalve*—the illuminations of the Holy Ghost. “As many as I *love*, I reprove and chasten: be zealous *therefore*”—that is, because I love you enough to rebuke you—“and repent.” As a French writer says:—“The essence of true love is not its *tenderness*, but its strength, its power of endurance, its purity, its self-renunciation.” We learn a good deal about Laodicea in this letter; but we learn a great deal more about Jesus Christ.

For we now arrive at what must ever be the supremely difficult thing to do. Our Lord, by the revelation of His heart, reveals what our heart-attitude is to be. "As many as I LOVE"—the Greek is 'love dearly': this utterance puts beyond all doubt that Laodicea is regenerate—"I reprove and chasten"; for "if we are *without* chastening, ye are BASTARDS and *not sons*" (Heb. xii. 8): the rebuke and chastisement prove the sonship. *Since Christ's love has not yet left Laodicea, neither must ours.* Now this is our extreme difficulty, as it was to Christ, and our fearful test. For the recoil from Laodicea's worldliness was so intense in the Lord Himself that it produced nausea; and exactly in proportion as we have the mind of Christ, so shall we also feel the deep loathing which made Him say,—"*Because thou art lukewarm, I will spew thee out of My mouth.*" The nausea created by gross worldliness in believers can be overpowering. Nevertheless, the diagnosis, the counsel, the rebuke, the warning—beneath it all runs an undertone of the deepest tenderness: Christ is grieved, and dishonoured, and nauseated, and expelled, *but He still loves*; AND THE APPEAL OF LOVE REACHES WHERE NOTHING ELSE WILL REACH. It is most remarkable that only to the best Church and the worst does Christ name His love: to Philadelphia, that she may not slacken; and to Laodicea, that she may not despair. For myself I would utterly despair of the standard set by our Lord were it not for the promise self-*in*-folding heights of unimaginable grace:—"ASK, AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN YOU" (Matt. vii. 7).

Our Lord closes most remarkably. He presents Himself, standing on the very threshold of the Second Advent, as to a Bride who is between sleeping and waking, and who is unwilling to open to her returning Bridegroom. "Behold, I stand at the door, *and knock*"; for His command sixty years before had been,—"*that when He cometh and knocketh, they may open unto Him IMMEDIATELY*" (Luke xii. 36). We are never to acquiesce in any church's worldliness or sloth, but are to stand knocking, even though, like Christ, we may have to stand *outside* the organized churches, in deep concern and undying patience. But it

is still more wonderful than that. "He that overcometh, I will give to Him to sit down with Me in My THRONE"—that is, not God's throne, which no man is ever invited to share, but our Lord's Messianic, Millennial throne: "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Our Lord's last word to an organized church on earth is a vision of Messiah's Throne, and the possibility of a backslider yet sharing it: wonderful thought! *The offer of the Throne, with its condition, an overcoming sanctity, is to be pressed increasingly on Laodicea as the end approaches.* It is most startling. Follow your Lord's counsel, O Laodicean Angel, and you will yet step into the front ranks of glory! We are to shew perfect grace up to the very end; we are to despair of none; we are to offer the highest thrones (on their conditions) to the most worldly believers; we are to have mercy upon what, after all, may be in many an unconscious ignorance; we are constantly to cry out for the sake of 'him that hath ears,' buried deep in slumberous Laodicea. Ours is to be an attitude of perpetual hopefulness concerning exceptional disciples and exceptional assemblies; for grace is like forked lightning—we never know where it will strike. Two centuries after this (A.D. 303-313), in Eumenia, a neighbouring city to Laodicea, which shared her reputation for lukewarmness, *the whole body of believers, herded by soldiers into the church, and refusing apostasy, were burned to a man, "calling upon the God over all."* "Many shall be last that are first; AND FIRST THAT ARE LAST" (Matt. xix. 30).