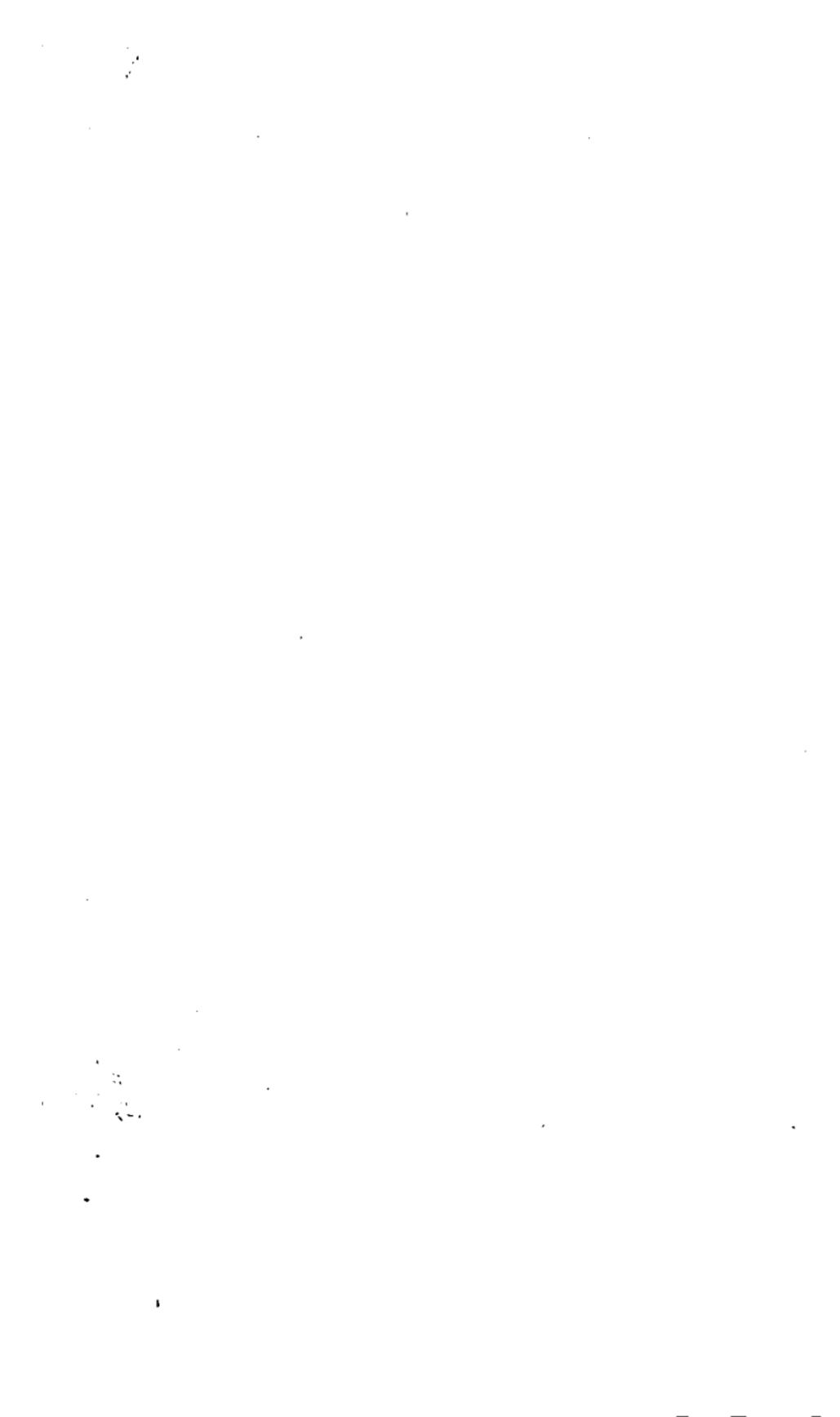


THOUGHTS
ON THE FIRST CHAPTER
OF THE
APOCALYPSE.

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INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS.

AMIDST all the uncertainty that has been cast over the interpretation of this Book, so great, that many have been deterred even from seeking to understand it, the blessing pronounced on "him that readeth" is not withdrawn,—“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep the things written therein: for the time is at hand.” Our sin has caused the darkness, yet God has not recalled His promise; and as in former periods of His people’s history, He has been pleased from time to time to revive the light which unfaithfulness had quenched, so has it recently been with respect to His prophetic word. Thick darkness had settled in upon our minds,—the hour of anti-christianism was supposed to be past,—the judgments on Jerusalem and on Babylon to be finished,—the greater part of the Revelation to be fulfilled,—and a period of advancing light and spiritual prosperity to be before all nations: so that the practical power of the testimony of prophecy was gone. But recently, just at the moment when the energies of evil had begun to work with fresh and unprecedented activity, we have been graciously recalled to the prophetic word,—“a

light shining in a dark place." And they who have given heed thereunto, have found it a guide so certain, as to give to their thoughts, and to the expression of them, a definiteness and decision, which seems like presumption to such of their brethren as have refused to avail themselves of its direction. Our ignorance indeed may still be great, and our mistakes many; but He with whom we have to do, has grace to forgive and overrule our weaknesses, and gently to lead us on into the further knowledge of His will.

The Book of the Revelation is specially addressed to the Churches.—“I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the Churches.” It throws the light of God upon all those vast schemes of human greatness which are spreading over the earth in these latter days, and reveals the nature and manner of the judgment which is to fall upon them from God. It first describes His chastisements, which will be administered by His own hand, and will allow space for repentance (chap. ix. 21), and then His utterly destroying judgments, administered by the Lord Jesus, when manifested in His glory. It teaches also the various characters of the glory which is reserved for them who are now found “in the tribulation, and kingdom, and patience of Jesus Christ.” It is a Book which, although mainly treating of earthly scenes, may be said to be peculiarly heavenly. It was given from the throne in heaven; it is addressed to the partakers of the heavenly calling, whilst militant on the earth;

and, scarcely referring to the *mere* earthly blessings which the Old Testament prophets record, confines itself almost exclusively to the heavenly glories of the redeemed ; some of these glories being for manifestation on the earth ; others to be known only above.

But in this, as in other subjects of divine instruction to the Churches, there is a preparedness of heart needful to their reception. In salvation it is not so ; for we were sinners, blind, wilful, and wicked, to whom Jesus was presented, and we are saved by grace, through faith in Him. But when numbered among the saved, it may be said to us, "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for ye are not able to bear it." We may be "inexperienced in the word of righteousness ;" our spiritual senses may be unexercised in judging practically between evil and good, and this will cause us to be "dull of hearing," and hinder us in receiving the instructions of God.

Yet perhaps nothing is more necessary in reading the Revelation, than that the soul should be established in *grace*. It reveals so much of the holiness and glory of God, and of the terrors of His power,—so much of the ruined condition of the Churches, and of the prosperity of the world's evil—that our souls require to be settled in the peace which the blood of Jesus gives, before we can read calmly and with profit. This is very distinctly taught us in the opening benediction. The very Churches, whose failure was about to be disclosed, are yet instructed to say, "to Him who loveth

(*αγαπῶντι*) us, and who hath washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us a kingdom—priests to His God and Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen.” Words of marvellous and abounding grace, when we consider who, and under what circumstances they were, who were taught to utter them.

It is necessary, however, to have the spirit of *servants*, as well as of children. Jesus was a Son, but He came to be a servant; and so felt the value of having His ear opened morning by morning to receive instruction. Accordingly this Book is addressed to servants. God gave it unto Jesus, to show unto His *servants* things which must shortly come to pass. And, I believe, few things have been more marked in the history of the Church than this. Whenever they have made *themselves* the centre of their interests, and fixed their thoughts exclusively upon their own acceptance, or even their own comfort as saints, this Book has been neglected; but whenever they have had more vigour of faith, or have been forced by circumstances into a place of testimony or service, they have used and valued the Revelation. It was used by the early Christians, whilst in testimony against Pagan Rome,—by the Waldenses and the Reformers against the Papal abominations,—and now, when the Church is being prepared, as I firmly believe, for its closing testimony against the last forms of human evil, its value is again, through the Lord’s great mercy, beginning to be appreciated.

Moreover, it is necessary to have some understanding of the *manner* in which the Scripture teaches us respecting man, and the inveteracy of human evil. We are so accustomed to look at it merely in individual exhibitions—to learn it merely in the narrow circle of our own personal history, or in that of those immediately around us, that we find ourselves little prepared to enter into the wider sphere, in which it has pleased God to teach us through successive dispensations the character of man. Since the flood, for example, God has thrice displayed His goodness in dispensing, first to mankind at large, next to Israel, and lastly to the Church, certain blessings, which were committed to them in responsibility, to use for His glory. This responsibility has been in no case answered. The blessings have been either lost, or so perverted as to accelerate the progress of evil, and add to the accumulation of guilt. When the sons of Noah first descended from the ark, they were acquainted with the true God. They had seen His judgments, and being themselves delivered, were ushered into a new world—supplied with new knowledge and fresh covenanted mercies. “While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease. And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth,” &c. It was not, therefore, in darkness and misery, but with light and blessings consciously received from God, that mankind commenced their new existence.

But a few years only passed, before their confederation at Babel evinced their determination to attain greatness in the earth, apart from God, and in defiance of His will. Heathenism soon succeeded; so that even Abraham's family were serving other gods, when God called Abraham. The call of Abraham and the selection of Israel was a second interference of his gracious power, and Israel's natural blessings were the result. These blessings were manifold—but chiefly, that to them were committed the oracles of God. But they failed (and they will one day themselves confess it) to work any deliverance in the earth. Their light became dim at its centre, and was at last turned into darkness; so that the name of God was blasphemed among the heathen because of them; and now special wrath, or, to use the words of the Lord himself, "days of vengeance" have come upon them, and will rest upon them until the end. The Church dispensation followed. The Church, when it first appeared in the earth, was worthy of Him whose name it bore. It was the pillar and ground of truth,—salt that had not lost its savour,—a light shining in darkness. Whether christianity has continued to be this, or whether it be true, that both Jews and Heathens have scoffed at the abominations committed under the name of Christ, our own consciences must decide. But if we are accustomed to regard European christianity, and its bearing on the earth at large, with complacency and satisfaction, we shall be little prepared for the reading of this Book. It requires a soul in some degree

awakened to a sense of the real aspect of this present hour. There were those of old who could discern the face of the sky, but who were too careless or too blinded to discern the signs of the times; and they could not receive the words of the Lord Jesus.

The Apostle John, who was chosen to receive the Revelation, was one whose soul had been long schooled in the knowledge of prevailing iniquity. I doubt not that whenever he saw the bow in the clouds, it was to him the memorial of mercies abused, and responsibilities unanswered. He knew that darkness was covering the earth. He understood also the glory of Israel's calling, and the depth of their present fall. He had, moreover, assisted in planting and watering the Church of God. He had seen it disappear from Jerusalem; he was now to see it wane among the Gentiles. All these had been lessons of bitter sorrow to him, but they had prepared him to be the depository of this closing testimony of God.

But there were other things also, besides this lesson of sorrow, in which John had been instructed. He held fast the remembrance and the hope of those things which God had promised by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. The return of the Lord, and the times of refreshing and restitution consequent thereon, are truths *assumed* in the Revelation; so that he who believes that the Lord Jesus will never return to re-establish Jerusalem in the earth—and that she will never be the mistress and the light of other nations—and that the saints will never rise in the first resurrection to

inherit their heavenly city, and to reign with Christ,—such a person, in reading the Revelation, must be stumbled at every step—because, on the ground of previous testimony in the word of God, it assumes as true what he altogether disbelieves.

To John, however, these things had long been sure and defined objects of expectation. But the exact character of the closing scene,—the manner and the place in which the combined apostasy of man, of Israel, and of the Church, would be finally developed,—the mode of the interference of God in chastisement,—and then the mission of His Son in judgment. All these things which were needed to complete the picture of the closing hours of our dispensation, were added to the knowledge which John already had, and he was instructed to declare these things to the Churches.

THE REVELATION TREATS MAINLY OF THE PRESENT DISPENSATION.

WHEN the Lord Jesus returned to the Father, after having been rejected on the earth, "Jehovah said unto Him, Sit thou at my right hand until I shall have set thy foes a footstool for thy feet." This is a remarkable verse, quoted more frequently than any other in the New Testament, because so distinctively characteristic of the dispensation to which the New Testament belongs. It describes the Lord Jesus as seated for a season on the throne of Jehovah, waiting—and speaks of the power of that throne as acting on His behalf. Jehovah's throne acting for Christ. There is no characteristic of the present period so essentially distinctive as this;—none which stands so decidedly in contrast with the period when Christ will assume the exercise of the authority of His own kingdom. As soon as this verse ceases to apply, i.e. whenever the Lord Jesus quits His present place on the throne of God, our dispensation ends, and the new age begins.

It is true indeed that Christ (for He is God, and one with the Father) is able to exercise, and does exercise, all the power of the throne on which He is now sitting.

It was His before He was incarnate, for "all things were created by Him," and "all things upheld by the word of His power;" and now He is the Lamb having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth." All power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth. But the power of the throne of God which He thus exercises is carefully to be distinguished from the authority which He will by and by receive from that throne, as the minister thereof, and which He will exercise, sitting upon *His own throne*, and on the throne of His father David. Authority now *delegated* by the throne of God itself will then be resumed, and Christ will be invested with it.

The nature of the power which Christ will soon formally assume when brought before the Antient of Days, is partly the kingly government of nations, which, in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, God *delegated* to that monarch and to the empires which succeeded him, and partly the lordship of creation, originally committed to Adam, and continued, though in altered circumstances, to man after the fall. This last He will inherit as Son of Man—all things, according to the 8th Psalm, being to be set in manifest subjection under Him. The former He will inherit as the true Solomon, heir to the throne of David.

Christ is still waiting for that hour. It has not yet been said unto Him, "Rule thou in the midst of thy enemies." The footstool has not yet been formed, that He might go forth and plant His foot in wrath upon it. But every thing is tending thereunto. The preparation

of the footstool is the end to which all the superintending power of the throne of God is directed. As soon as it is prepared, Christ will quit the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, and will return in glory.

In reading the Revelation, therefore, it becomes an important question—to which dispensation it belongs,—whether to that in which Christ is seated at the right hand of God, secretly exercising the power of God's throne; or whether to that in which He will come forth in the exercise of the power of His own peculiar kingdom. The answer is very obvious. It treats of events which precede the mission of Christ and the “setting of the footstool.” It leads on indeed to the period when Christ is revealed in His glory; but this is not treated of until the 19th chapter. It forms the conclusion, not the subject of the Book. Christ hidden with God—Israel blinded—the Gentiles supreme and glorious—the Church suffering: these are the characteristics of our dispensation, and they are the characteristics of the period of which the Revelation treats. The neglect of this distinction would introduce hopeless perplexity into the interpretation of this Book.

CHRIST IN HIS RELATION TO THE CHURCHES.

THE relation of the throne of God to the nations, and the manner in which God will visit them in wrath, when the maturity of their evil greatness shall have been attained, is the *chief* subject of the Revelation. But it has also another object in relation to the Churches. It reveals the present relation of Christ to *them*, as *their* immediate Governor and Judge.

I say *immediate* Governor; for however truly Christ, in the exercise of the power of the throne of God, superintends and ultimately controls the nations, yet it is a control, remote, secret, and untraceable, even by the saints themselves. The immediate government of the nations, has, by an act of God's throne itself, been delegated to men. Nebuchadnezzar, Cæsar, or their successors, have held and still hold it; and they are allowed to exercise it upon their own principles and laws. It is strictly *delegated* power.

But the Church being a body chosen out of the nations, and separated to God, was placed under the immediate government of Christ: who is able to maintain it in its right relation to Cæsar, and its right relation to

God. He hath made it a kingdom (*βασιλειαν*), even a priestly kingdom—a kingdom of priests, and a kingdom of kings unto His God and Father. This kingdom it is His, and His only, to govern,—to order it by His own peculiar laws (Matt. v. vi.), and having given it life, to qualify it for agency by His own Spirit. It is a kingdom in the midst of kingdoms. Whilst Israel is blinded, and whilst the nations are what they will be to the end, fierce and destroying monsters, devouring the earth (Dan. vii.), it is a kingdom which has Christ for its Priest and King, risen and glorified—set to confess Him thus,—to own union with Him in glory, and seek likeness to Him in suffering obedience here.

We might expect, therefore, that in such a Book as the Revelation, which especially refers to the period during which Christ is hidden with God, this His excellent relation to such a body would be distinctly marked. Accordingly the very first chapter reveals Christ in His relation to the Churches. He is seen not in His present relation to the nations, hidden in the throne; neither as at the commencement of the millennium, coming forth to break them with a rod of iron; but as the Son of Man glorified, walking in the midst of seven candlesticks of gold.

The expression “candlesticks of gold,” leads our thoughts to the candlestick of the tabernacle. That candlestick was set in the holy place, and was made of gold.—Indeed every thing that typified the person or attributes of Christ, as seen in heaven, was of gold. It

represents the appreciated excellency of what He is—heavenly and divine; and therefore was used only in the holy place, and in the holiest of all—they being the courts which represented the heavenly places where alone He is manifested and known as He is. To speak, therefore, of the Churches as candlesticks of gold, is to speak of them as lights of the holy place: belonging to the sanctuary as to their proper sphere, and to the presence of God in heaven; yet set for a season in a world where Satan's seat is,—a place of darkness, corruption, and death.

John had been conversant with the Churches, as to their actual condition in the earth. He had watched over them and laboured among them. But he had never before seen the sanctuary in which they representatively stood, denoted by the seven candlesticks of gold: but now being in the Spirit, he was for a season removed from the sphere of mere human thought and action, and, like Ezekiel, saw visions of God. And observe the nature of the vision.—If the Lord had so pleased, he might have been taken, like Ezekiel, from place to place; have visited, in vision, the seven cities, and seen a candlestick located in each; but this was not the order of the vision. The golden candlesticks were seen *together*; not in their several localities, but, as it were, in a hidden and separated sanctuary—a secret holy place. There they stood as representatives of something that was external and distant—the value and excellency of which they were intended to express. The Lord, the

andlesticks, the stars, and (for a season) John, were out of earthly connection—but that which the candlesticks and stars denoted, was to be found amidst the scenes of earth external to the sanctuary.

It was the part of the Churches to maintain themselves in correspondency with their heavenly pattern, to be heavenly and divine in character and in testimony, in the midst of a world of which Satan is the god. This was indeed a high and difficult calling. But it was not too difficult for Christ to have sustained them in. He could have ministered strength exceeding abundantly, and He would have done it, if obedience and faithfulness had been found in them.

In this vision He is seen walking in the midst (not of the Churches, but) of the candlesticks; as One acquainted with the state in which these Churches practically were, and prepared to pronounce on their condition. It was His title to judge, and He *had* judged whether they were proving themselves worthy of their high calling; and He was there to declare His sentence—willing indeed to admonish and correct, and to supply the needful grace wherever His correction was heeded; but prepared also, if faithfulness to God and to the truth required it, to displace them from the sanctuary, if they proved unfit to be represented there by candlesticks of gold.

And how important is it to remember this relation of our holy Lord and Master to His Churches here. We speak of Him as planting the Churches, and as cherish-

ing and preserving them by His shepherd care, but we often forget that He must also, in faithfulness to God, examine that which is set in the earth, in order to maintain the character of God. He must examine, and He must judge that which bears His name and the name of His Father among men. He can be patient and pitiful, but He cannot own any thing as being what it is not; for then He would Himself cease to be the faithful and the true witness.

It is not, therefore, in the character of King, but of Judge, that He is seen in this chapter. There was no diadem upon His head, but "His head and His hair were white, as white wool, white as snow;" like the head of one who had seen the course of everlasting ages, well suited therefore to be in the place of Judge; "with the ancient is wisdom, and in length of days understanding; with him is wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding."—His eyes were as a flame of fire, able therefore, according to the searching power of God's holiness, to examine all things. His feet were as fine brass purified in the furnace, unsusceptible of corruption, even if obliged to tread amidst that which is defiled or defiling; "His voice was as the voice of many waters," "like the voice of the Almighty," "the voice of the God of Israel." Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, for the word of destroying judgment as well as of grace can issue from his lips. "His countenance was as the sun shining in his strength." The ministry also of the Church, whether to give or to

withhold was entirely subject to his control. He held the stars in His right hand. Nevertheless His vestment was priestly; it was the blue robe of the ephod* girded with a girdle of gold.

It was with these characteristics, all of them distinctively divine (for even the girdle of His priestly vestment was of gold), that He came to pronounce judgment on the condition of the Churches. He could use no moderated standard: He must visit them according to the power of His own holiness and glory. The Churches also were (as He had set them) fit to be symbolized by candlesticks of gold. There was, therefore, no necessary discrepancy betwixt them and His holy requirements; and even if there had been, He had all power to remedy, and His visitation was priestly as well as judicial. He could have trimmed the lamps and supplied the oil: for grace can, in such things, follow, or, as it were, walk by the side of judgment. Only there must be submission

* That is, if the word *ποδηρη* refer, as is generally supposed to the septuagint rendering of Exod. xxvii. 4, and xxix. 5.

If the Lord had been here presented to us in the work of atonement, He would have been clothed in the white linen garments of the sixteenth of Leviticus.—Those garments represented the unsullied purity which He, as man, has been able to present to God. If, on the other hand, He had been here described, according to that character of priesthood, in which He maintains our standing before God,—“appearing in His presence for us,” we should have seen the garments of glory and beauty. But since He is not here presented in any aspect God-ward, but in a peculiar relation to the Churches, viz. of judgment, He is merely clothed with a garment denoting His heavenly character, and girded with a girdle representing the power and dignity of His divine nature.

to His hand. He could give space to repent. He could supply gold tried in the fire ; but He required obedience and attention to His word. "He that hath an ear let him hear."

Such is the relation of the Lord Jesus to the Churches as revealed in the opening chapter of this Book.

“SEVEN CANDLESTICKS OF GOLD.”

I AM unwilling to leave these words without considering the instruction they convey respecting the order of the Gentile Churches. If we have inconsiderately assumed that the Scriptures teach nothing on the subject, and have imagined that the question of Church order is one left open, to be decided according to our own judgment on the ever-varying principles of expediency; these words, so few and simple, may be sufficient to convince us of our mistake. It is a subject, too, so nearly affecting all who desire to honour God by an obedient recognition of His arrangements, and one to which attention has of late been so remarkably aroused (in some cases for good, but generally for most disastrous evil), that it claims at the present moment our most serious consideration.

When the Lord Jesus was personally on earth, the Church was not yet ordered, according to the form which He intended it to assume among men. He was engaged in collecting, rather than in arranging the materials for His spiritual house; in preparing the living stones, not in building them together. Accordingly all who were gathered by His word were quickened

with divine and heavenly life, and were brought into living and everlasting union with Him who was "the new thing" in the earth; but they were not, until Pentecost, "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

But on the day of Pentecost, the Church was constituted as a visible body on the earth. It was constituted at Jerusalem, and was like the Gentile Churches afterwards, heavenly in its standing, its hopes, and its laws.* In such things there was an essential resemblance between all the Churches of God. But since the Church at Jerusalem was intended for a season to be the centre of light and control to other Churches, its order was peculiar, being one of singular dignity pertaining to the Church at Jerusalem alone.

This order was what has since been called metropolitan. The Church at Jerusalem, like a sun in the centre of its system, had other Churches, like so many planets, revolving round it. It was strictly a mother Church, and therefore when the Church at Antioch was in difficulty, it sends to Jerusalem for direction, and receives an

* Its hopes were heavenly; for the Lord had said to them, "In my Father's house are many mansions, I go to prepare a place for you." Its standing was heavenly; for they had been "quicken'd together with Christ, and raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Their laws were heavenly; for they were those of the sermon on the Mount. Their practice was heavenly; indeed far more heavenly than that of the Gentile Churches afterwards; for even the Levite sold his land; neither said any that ought that he possessed was his own.

authoritative reply; "It seemeth good to the Holy Ghost and to us." This then was a relation that could not be fitly symbolized by two candlesticks unconnected, equal and alike. One candlestick with many branches and many lamps, would have been a more appropriate emblem; and this *is* the character of the symbol employed to represent Jerusalem when she shall nationally assume her metropolitan position in the millennial earth. To her alone it belongs, and for her it is reserved by God.*

But when Jerusalem had rejected the testimony of the Church, St. Paul was raised up to carry the truth among the Gentiles. He preached the *same* Gospel; but he established a new order among the Churches which he gathered. This order was not metropolitan. Seven Gentile Churches are represented by *seven* candlesticks of gold, separate one from another—all equal—all alike; connected by no *visible* bond, neither revolving round any common centre. They were independent one of another; but not independent of Him who invisibly walked amongst them and who was able to preserve the likeness to Himself and to one another which His grace had given them; to keep them what He had made them, alike in faith, manners, and testimony. This was indeed an invisible bond of unity; but the unity that resulted

* "I looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps which are upon the top of it" (Zech. iv. 2).

from it was *not* invisible. If a saint journeyed from Ephesus to Thyatira, he found at Thyatira what he had left at Ephesus: and moreover, the world knew that it was so. They knew that in these several Gentile cities, there were those gathered together who, in faith, and doctrine, and manners, were emphatically *one*. The whole of the Gentile Churches, though locally separate, together constituted the one Church of the living God, and as such were known and recognized among men.

But if we turn to the present condition of Christendom, how different the picture! It may be divided (except where it has lapsed into positive infidelity) into two great classes. The first are strenuously insisting that the Church is one; that its unity should be visible; and that its order is prescribed of God. The others scorn the notion of visible unity, as if it were a figment of man; vindicate the present divisions of Christianity, as not inconsistent with the mind of God; and say that they are rather intended by Him to afford an opportunity for the exercise of charity and forbearance. Rome, and they who follow Rome, in the established Protestant Churches, constitute the first of these classes; whereas all others, all who maintain that Church order is a mere question of

I am aware that some will say that we are not concerned with Christendom, but only with the elect children of God.—And in *one* sense this is true, though not in the sense that would be contended for. But even then, I ask, what are the elect children of God doing? They are either included in one of these classes, or else are careless and unconcerned about the subject altogether.

expediency undetermined by the word of God, are included in the last; and whether professedly so or not, may justly be denominated dissenters.

That the true and honoured servants of God have for ages been found almost exclusively amongst low Churchmen and dissenters, is a fact which no spiritual person will deny. But in their anxiety to recover the Gospel, and to testify against the doctrines and pretensions of those who, after they "had crept in unawares," exalted themselves, first into the place of Apostles, and afterwards into that of Christ and of God, they seem not sufficiently to have remembered, how difficult it is to reject the evil without also rejecting the good, which the craft of Satan has mingled with it. The Church of Rome, for example, has insisted on the necessity of visible unity, and claimed it for herself. Her claim is, indeed, a claim of falsehood; but it was not necessary to scorn the visible unity of which the Scriptures speak, because the wickedness of Rome has falsely ascribed that unity to herself. On the contrary, we are bound by every principle of reason and of truth, either to maintain that we have it, or else to account for its being absent. That we have it not, is too plain to need a proof; the accounting for its absence, may involve an humbling confession of past sin and present weakness, which we would gladly be spared the necessity of making—but such confession is the place of truth, and the only place in which God can fully bless us. The present re-action against the truths of Protestantism may doubtless be

regarded as a judgment from His hand: but it may in no slight degree be accounted for by our having so neglected what the Scripture has said respecting the unity of the Church of God, and thus abandoned a weapon from His armoury to the exclusive use of the enemies of truth.

And let me ask any spiritual Christian, who has been trained in the principles of low Churchism or dissent, whether the notion of one candlestick connected with each city, does not, as regards these subjects, introduce into his mind an element of thought entirely new. He has either been careless about the subject, and so has no judgment at all, or else his views require that there should have been many candlesticks for each city; for he thinks that Christians may be rightly gathered around their respective points of difference,—that they may worship separately, teach separately, act separately—and yet be all rightly acknowledged as Churches of God. But is this what we find in the Revelation? We find *one* candlestick representing the gathered saints of *one* city. This is the only pattern for the Gentile Churches. That they have long since ceased to answer to it, is plain: but it makes no little difference in the sight of God, whether we assign as the reason for the want of correspondence, that no pattern has been given, or whether we are willing to confess that sin has been the cause of the variation. To neglect the pattern God has given, is in itself a sin; but it is a sin which is sure to multiply—for when the human will begins to act, uncontrolled by

the directions of the word of God, manifold results are speedily produced,—results which cannot but be evil. And unless, through God's mercy, we are quickly called back to the standard of His word, we shall mistake these results for good; vindicate them—rejoice in them; and so when God would call to weeping and mourning, behold joy and gladness, eating flesh and drinking wine; but no penitence—no confession of sin. Is this an over-drawn picture of the present hour?

As regards the Church of Rome, and every other body which has sought to occupy either a national or a patriarchal position, they have not even desired to imitate the lowly order of the Gentile Churches. They have all coveted and assumed the dignity of metropolitan influence. Whether it be a pontiff surrounded by his cardinals, or a king by his convocation, or a patriarch in his see, in either case a place of centralized power has been assumed. They have sought to govern other Churches, just as Jerusalem governed Antioch, and the order which God assigned to the Gentile Churches has been trampled under foot. Now if this had been done by those who, both in doctrine and in practice, had been pure and blameless, God would never have sanctioned the presumptuous sin. But when we remember what the Church of Rome, and national Churches also, have for the most part been, we may well tremble: for they have walked, as it were, hand in hand with the world, sanctioning its plans and stimulating its energies, during the darkest and most ungodly periods of its course,

as the history of the European nations abundantly testifies.

We, indeed, at the present hour, are not so much concerned with the primary occupancy of this position, as with its recognition now that it has been occupied. Others have placed themselves there; we may, or we may not, recognize their claim. But by tacit acquiescence, we may easily connect ourselves with all the evil. The true Church position is a high and holy place: and if it behoves us to beware of false Christs, and false Prophets, surely it equally concerns us to repudiate the pretensions of any body which claims the reverence and regard due to a Church of God, without any of its credentials.

And if any enquire where the test of true Churchship is to be found, I would entreat them solemnly to read the message of the Lord to the Church at Ephesus. That Church was faultless in all its developed ways. It was chargeable with no worldliness nor any corruption. Its labours were abundant, and they were praised; "For my name's sake thou hast laboured and hast not fainted:" yet it had declined as to the energy of its first love, and for this, and for this only, it was to lose the standing of a Church of God unless it should quickly repent.* Such

* "I am coming (*ερχομαι*) to thee—and I will remove (*κινησω*) thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent." These words have been imagined by some to refer to the removal of Christianity out of Ephesus. But the Lord is not threatening the city of Ephesus. He is not saying to Pagan

is the strict and holy test which alone satisfies God. We may, if we please, refuse to acquiesce in the sentence which Christ pronounces. He may remove the candlestick, and we may say that we will raise up another, and speak loftily about ordination and successional order, and the like; but "the Lord will laugh at it, for He seeth that its day is coming."

Not that the claim to Church standing and authority is confined to Romanists, and their abettors. It is found as truly, although in a form more subdued, in Protestantism, throughout all its manifold divisions. This has been made sorrowfully evident in almost every thing that has recently been said or written against the present Popish re-action in this country. It would seem as if Protestants imagined that Luther was another St. Paul, specially commissioned to re-establish the Churches in all the perfectness of their original standing, and that His work had succeeded to the full.

That Luther and the Reformers were instruments

Ephesus, "I will remove thy candlestick;" neither does He say to the Church in Ephesus, "I will remove thee out of Ephesus," but he says to the Church in Ephesus, "I will remove thy candlestick from its place among the seven, where it is now standing in my secret sanctuary." Consequently, as to numbers and individual names, the Church in Ephesus might have continued just what it was, and yet its candlestick have been removed. And this was the fact—for true Christianity did continue in Ephesus for a long period, but in a state of such declension that unless we say that Christ was untrue to the words of His message, we must admit that the cessation of Christianity in a city, and the loss of Church standing by Christians residing in that city, are totally different things.

specially employed by God to establish the paramount authority of the Holy Scripture, and to let in its light upon the consciences of God's elect, I freely and thankfully own. But they neither did nor could restore the candlesticks of gold. They did not even restore *local*, much less *catholic* unity.* The Reformation confessedly commenced a period in which division has multiplied upon division. In many cases the false ecclesiastical headship of Rome was exchanged for the equally false headship of the secular power: nor has there appeared any body that could bear the holy scrutiny of Him, who once "walked among the candlesticks," or answer to the test, which He applied to the Church at Ephesus. Indeed truth constrains us to confess, that the history of Protestantism, has manifested features of deadly evil as dark and as determined as that of Popery itself.†

* *Local* unity, and *catholic* unity also, once characterized Gentile Christianity. The first was symbolized by one candlestick, the second by seven. At Ephesus, for example, all the saints were gathered into open and visible communion with each other; all the light was with them,—every thing else in Ephesus was darkness, and therefore *one* candlestick fitly represented their position. There was one point of concentrated light. But what each Church was to its own locality, that all the Churches unitedly were to the world around them. They were together separated, had a common calling and service, were alike one to another, were nourished and ordered by the same hand. This was catholic unity, symbolized by the seven candlesticks, seen standing together with the Son of Man in the midst. Unity is gone if either of these things be wanting.

† The Socinianism and Infidelity in Switzerland, and the Neology of Germany, the condition of the United States also, are proofs.

I scarcely need repeat that it is idle, and indeed sinful, to pretend to a Church standing, when unity has ceased to exist; and unity has ceased to exist, for it is neither found locally or generally. Individual saints, and companies of saints, remain and will remain until the Lord Jesus returns. But as to unity—the proper and once realized unity of the Gentile Churches—it is gone, and gone for ever. The candlesticks have, therefore, ceased to be. Gentile Christianity no longer answers to its pattern: and consequently the Lord's addresses to the Churches can by us be only *indirectly* applied. He that hath an ear may still hear what the Spirit said unto the Churches: but we cannot hear it *as Churches*, for Churches have ceased to be.

Let me not be misunderstood. I do not mean that because the proper unity of our dispensation is gone, we are therefore driven into isolated individuality. The New Testament knows nothing of isolation.—Love, service, the not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, the continuance, through the gift of God, of pastors and teachers, involve consequences which must necessarily secure the union, and that the visible union, of all those who are obedient to Christ. But union such as this, however precious in the sight of God and of Christ, is something very different from that union which once flowed from the unity of the unfallen Churches. And it is well to be aware of the difference. The remnant who followed Moses when the rest of Israel was gathered around the calf, or the remnant who, with Elijah, had

not bowed the knee to the image of Baal, or even the more happy remnant around Haggai or Nehemiah, would have sinned, if they had thought or spoken of themselves as Israel once did, when triumphing at the Red sea, or rejoicing under Solomon. A time of apostasy is generally a time of pride; and it is no little blessing to be preserved from the high words and exaggerated pretensions of the present hour. And although the indirect application of the addresses to the Churches is, as I have said, all that now remains to us, yet that application will be found to involve most precious instruction to all who remember, that no change of circumstances can ever deprive us of our right to obey God; and His commandment is, that we should never cease "from separating the precious from the vile," and from seeking "to gather together in one the children of God, that are scattered abroad:" but this is something very different from pretending to the place of the seven candlesticks of gold. A knowledge of this difference is essential to the right understanding of the Revelation; for its testimony is in great part founded upon the lapse of Christianity, and we can have little notice of what its fall really is, if we imagine that any thing yet remains that answers to the symbol of the candlesticks of gold.

NOTES ON THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ.—These words cannot refer, as some have supposed, to the personal manifestation of the Lord in glory; for that is not the special subject of the Apocalypse; neither would it have been said, "*which God gave unto Him.*" They may mean either the Revelation possessed by the Lord Jesus, or the Revelation communicated by Him.

Which God gave unto Him.—These words show how peculiarly this Book is to be regarded as coming from God *as God*. It is not the instruction of the Father to children in the bosom of the family; but it is God on the throne of His government, instructing the servants of Jesus. Although John had been so peculiarly conversant with the truths respecting the Father and the Son, which his gospel and epistles unfold; yet in this vision he evidently felt himself brought into strange and, hitherto, unknown circumstances. He felt as a creature before God.

It is important to observe how continually the name "Jesus" is used throughout this Book. No Jewish confession of Messiah, as about to come; nothing in short but the Spirit, giving communion with the Father and His Son, would entitle any to be regarded as *servants of Jesus*. The place and character of John marks that of those who are considered witnesses to Jesus throughout this Book.

Things which must shortly come to pass.—The events described in the sixth chapter and onwards, are here referred to: for there the prophetic part of the Revelation properly begins. These words teach us that the time for the fulfilment of this prophecy is always to be regarded by the Church as close at hand.

And He signified it, having sent by His angel, unto His servant John.—It may seem strange that one to whom the Holy Spirit had been given, as the Comforter, should be instructed through an angel. If the truth communicated had pertained to the family as such, it would not so have been. St. Paul and St. John were

not instructed through angels in feeding and ordering the Churches. But since the subject of the Revelation is GOD on the throne of His government in His relation to the nations, John and the Church, as represented by Him, are placed in a comparative distance. He stands as a man and as a creature before God. At present the Holy Spirit does not give the power of fellowship with God in the glory of His government. The Church has not yet the seven spirits of God, although Jesus has. As to this we have still to say, "His way is in the sea, and His path in the deep waters, and His footsteps are not known."

Who hath testified the word of God, and testimony to Jesus Christ, touching the things which he saw.—This may be considered John's superscription of the Book. He states that what he has written in this Book is to be regarded as the word of God and testimony to Jesus; i.e. it has the character and authority of other prophetic and apostolic writings.

Blessed is he that readeth.—The word "readeth," is here to be understood as denoting instruction, i.e. reading to others. Thus it is said in Timothy, "Till I come give attendance to reading, exhortation," &c. This shows that this Book should be made a direct subject of ministerial instruction in the Churches.

And they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things written therein.—This strongly marks the practical use of the prophetic part of this Book. The use of that part which is not directly prophetic would of course be never doubted. The word translated "keep" or "observe" is frequently used in this meaning. "Teaching, then, to *observe* all things whatsoever I have commanded you." "If a man love me he will *keep* my words." The command given to the Churches to observe the things written herein shows that we are interested in the events predicted in this Book in a sense different from that in which we are interested in future prophecies; such, for example, as many parts of Isaiah which will be fulfilled after we, the Church of the firstborn, have passed into another condition of being.

John to the seven Churches.—Seven is a perfect number. These Churches were doubtless selected by the Lord in order to afford a perfect representation of the practical condition of Gentile Christianity.

Grace to you, and peace from Him that is, and that was, and that is to come, and from the seven spirits which are before His

throne.—These verses, from the 4th to the 6th inclusive, are a benediction. It appears specially adapted to the circumstances of those to whom it is addressed. The Churches were about to enter on a period that was to end in Atheistic blasphemy, when every thing seen by the outward eye would seem to corroborate the word of those who say, "There is no God," "Who is Lord over us?" In the midst of all this, and whilst the foundations of all things are becoming more and more out of course, we have to remember the unchangeableness of the everlasting God whose benediction is here pronounced upon us.

The seven spirits of God, represent a peculiar agency of the Spirit of God which He exercises in subordination to the throne; and therefore they are said to be *before* the throne, not *in* it. The seven spirits do not represent what the Holy Spirit is, as one with the Father and the Son; neither what He is as the Comforter, abiding with and in the saints. As God, one with the Father and the Son, He quickens: as the Comforter, He instructs and leads into all truth; but as represented by the seven spirits, He watches over and minutely controls all things. In this character He presides over the movements of the universe; angels, devils, men, both wicked and good, and the whole course of nature also being under His superintending power. If, whilst seeing the mighty fabric of man's evil greatness arising around us, we should be tempted to feel as if all things were being allowed to take their own course, or should shrink from the thought of impending conflict, we may remember the seven spirits of God,—that their power has not ceased to be supreme, and that benediction, as from them, has been pronounced over us.

Moreover, the Apocalypse reveals the failure of the Churches in their service and testimony. If the saints should be aroused to a consciousness of this, and should be discouraged, they may remember One who has not failed,—One who bears in heaven the name which He well earned upon the earth—"the faithful witness." As the first-begotten from the dead, He is the pledge of the Church's final glory. The visions of glory in the Revelation are founded on the truth of His being this. "Prince of the kings of the earth" is what He now is in title, and what He shall soon be manifested to be, when He shall come forth with the many diadems. This affords to the Church their test of the present condition of kings and nations,—is the object of their own hopes, and one great subject of their testimony. From Him also in these characters the benediction comes.

It should be observed, that He who is on the throne, and the seven spirits before the throne, stand, as it were, apart from humanity, in the full character of God. Jesus, on the contrary,

takes a human place as well as divine, and therefore is mentioned last, as one who *has been* proved faithful, *is* risen, and *will be* manifestly glorified among men. His co-equality with God is shown, from His being mentioned as the source of benediction.

The progress of human infidelity appears to be in the reverse order to that in which the Divine Persons are here presented. It begins by rejecting that which is proximate to itself, i. e. Jesus in the condition and characters here revealed: then follows the rejection of the superintending government of God; and lastly, God is asserted not to be. When God has been thus fully rejected, the end will come.

Behold He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the land shall wail against Him. Even so, Amen.—The three preceding verses have pronounced the Church's blessing. In this verse we find the subject of their testimony to others. Having ourselves been loved, and washed from our sins in His blood, we ought throughout the dispensation to have said, "Behold He cometh, and at His coming all will wail." But, instead of this, we have testified falsely, and spoken of the gradual spread of light and blessing. "Every eye" refers, I suppose, to mankind generally, and includes the heathen: but "they which pierced Him" is more limited, and refers to the proud civilized Gentile nations, and the wicked Jews—the successors of Pilate and Caiaphas. It is the history of these nations at their close which forms the special subject of this Book.

It is the manner of Scripture to regard those who pierced Jesus, as if alive at the hour of His return. The generation that rejected Him is considered as not having passed away. This generation shall not pass away till all these things be done: for the present generation being made up of the same *kind* of persons, is in God's estimate the same as that which stood around the cross of Jesus. The Church is, in like manner, spoken of as living on to the end. "We which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord," &c. "I am with *you* alway, even unto the end of the age," The identity of persons is, in the estimate of God, determined by their likeness in spiritual and moral characteristics.

And all the tribes of the land shall wail against Him.—Here, as well as in Matt. xxiv., and wheresoever else "tribes and land" are connected, I should consider the reference to be to Israel. One object of the Revelation is to show that, during the whole period previous to the appearing of the Lord, Israel remains unconverted; and therefore the tribes, being unprepared to receive Him, wail. The wailing here mentioned must not

be confounded with the penitential sorrow of the spared remnant spoken of in Zech. xii.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day.—That is, not in any ordinary state even of Apostolic inspiration, but in a trance, or like St. Paul when taken into the third heavens—his visual and hearing powers being supernatural whilst in this condition. The first day of the week—the day of the Lord's resurrection—seems chosen as the period of communication, because the Church being one with Christ, is regarded as belonging to the resurrection day: the day on which, bye and bye, it is to know God fully, and all the secrets of His power. I may add (though not in immediate connection with the subject before us) that the Lord's day is one not of *rest* merely (for that the sabbath was), but of *life*; together with rest from such toil as has been entailed on man by the fall. During the other days we are subjected to the sweat of the brow,—on the Lord's day we are free, and may live only to God.

It has been a strange mistake of some to suppose that John was carried forward by the Spirit into the day of the Lord, meaning thereby the millennium; for in the first place the Revelation mainly refers to a period that precedes the day of the Lord and every thing millennial, and secondly *κυριακη ημερα*, is a different expression from, and is never confounded with *η ημερα του κυριου*.

Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.—This is a threefold division of the subjects of this Book. The first chapter alone contains the things which "thou hast seen," and therefore is constituted by itself one division of the Revelation. The condition of the Churches as golden candlesticks, and the character in which Christ *tries* them, is the subject of this chapter; and is of such moment, as to entitle it to be considered one of the great divisions of the Book.

The second and third chapters, which should be read as one, are concerned with "the things that are"—i.e. present to John, but to us past. The sixth chapter and all that follows, constitute the third division, and are altogether future, even at the present hour.

The fourth and fifth chapters, which should be read as one, belong, strictly speaking, to the second division—for they reveal the throne from which John received the Book. Our dispensation is still, as it then was, under the throne, *as* it was then seen by John. The symbols of glory which surround it, and other circumstances revealed in these two chapters, may lead us

on to the knowledge of future glories which the Church is to have, when actually invested with the glories which these symbols represent (and in this sense the fourth and fifth chapters may be said to be prophetic) : but their primary subject is the revelation of the throne of God, as it was when seen by John, is still, and will continue to be, till our dispensation terminates.