

E. J. THOMAS

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PHILADELPHIA AND THE PROSPECT TO-DAY

Among the seven churches, Philadelphia is almost singular, for no fault is laid against it: of only one other can this be said, namely, Smyrna. Smyrna was suffering persecution and martyrdom, and if there were faults, the Lord does not mention Philadelphia had not the honour martyrdom; there is nothing heroic in her record yet she ranks in the same class; there were works. and the Lord says He knows them, but if He had not said this, we might not have been aware that she had any, so private, so modest, so undemonstrative her demeanour. The works are not set out and catalogued like those of Ephesus, but the Lord gives His assurance that to Him they are known, and that suffices her. This shows that God has His own principles of estimating. The faithfulness that would face the stake at another time may be called for and found in a quieter, humbler path between Sardis and Laodicea; morally between them, as well as chronologically. In Philadelphia there was not power for much, "Thou hast a little power"; but there was that which was precious to Him who had given them His word: they valued that word assiduously: "Thou hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." And what is Philadelphia's reward—her present-time reward?

An opened door: a door suited to her measure of power and character of work. There is a subtle linking between these five things:- I know thy works: Behold I have set before thee an opened door which no one can shut: Because thou hast a little power: And hast kept my word: hast not denied my name. Now it is Philadelphia's wisdom to know her place and her calling. To make a name and a display in the world is not her mission. If she attempt it, it will be a failure. The Lord is not going to set up the Church again. Outwardly the testimony is a failure, a failure full of disgrace, and never more so than to-day. Hers is the place to own with meekness the failure, but to keep His word with fidelity; and in doing so, her power is found; it is only a little power, but it is enough for her task. Her works may be small and despised; let it satisfy her heart that He says; "I know" them: for His eye they are done, not for the applause of the world, and certainly not of the Church-world.

> "Feeblest works, yet dear to Jesus, Weary hearts that wait for Him, Eyes that look upon the glory, Till all else is dark and dim: Midst the wreck, the desolation. Where the glorious city stood, Called to raise the lonely altar, One last witness for their God."

Works, then, are not the characteristic of Philadelphia, but—oh! blessed encouragement to diligence—her works are known, and known in the highest quarter.

"As He pronounces lastly on each deed
Of so much fame, in Heaven expect thy meed."

Another point about Philadelphia is her outside position. She is not of Thyatira, not of Sardis, not of Laodicea. In these circumstances she may be completely ignored—not recognised as having any place in the Christian economy. There is a formula here which we find also in Smyrna:—"Them of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews, and are not; but lie." Smyrna was comforted against their persecution; Philadelphia has more: there comes a time when the great professing body will be forced to acknowledge the Philadelphians she had despised. "Behold I will cause that they shall come and shall do homage before thy feet, and shall know that I have loved thee."

This might seem a triumph for Philadelphia, and so in truth it is, but it may also prove a more hazardous trial than any before, for flattery may succeed where persecution fails. Can Philadelphia stand in this new experience? It is very sweet—that even the Church-world is forced to acknowledge those that she had despised.

But the construction of this epistle seems to intimate that when this phase is reached, it may not be long before. Philadelphia's path upon earth is concluded. The NEXT THING THAT FOLLOWS IS THE COMING OF THE LORD: "Because thou

hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee out of the hour of temptation that is about to come upon the whole world to try them that dwell upon the earth. I come quickly: hold fast what thou hast that no one take thy crown."

Note here that an hour of temptation or trial is appointed to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. The Lord declares that He will keep Philadelphia out of that hour; not from the trial, or through it, but out of the time of it: when this comes, Philadelphia will not be there. How will this be? Obviously the coming of the Lord will have translated the saints Surely it is not irrelevant that to heaven. immediately following upon this comes the declaration (the first time in Scripture) "I COME QUICKLY; hold fast what thou hast, that no one take thy crown." Is not this a word for us to-day? Some will be alive on earth when the Lord's coming occurs: suppose that it is we ourselves!

Three things spoken of in the Revelation, are, in people's minds, often confused, viz: The hour of temptation in Rev. iii. 10; Great tribulation for Thyatira, Rev. ii. 22; THE Great Tribulation, Rev. vii. 14; xiii. 13-17. Each of these is distinct. The third is last in point of time, and quite peculiar; that which will never have been in the world before, and never will be again (Matt. xxiv. 21; Jer. xxx. 7; Dan. xii. 1). It is, emphatically, "The Great Tribulation." Pre-eminently it falls upon

the Jews, and is "the time of Jacob's trouble" ([er. xxx.) The centre of it will probably be in Jerusalem where the abomination of desolation will be (Matt. xxiv. 14; Rev. xiii. 14-17), but that the Great Tribulation will be confined to that land or that people, is, if we go by Scripture, a mistake. The Lord Himself states that a certain tribulation is so great that there never will have been such before, and never can be such again. If after this, Scripture tells us (Rev. vii. 9-14) that a certain company out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues came out of The Great Tribulation, or, as it is more emphatically expressed in the original,-"THE TRIBULATION, THE GREAT"surely we must bow to Scripture, and own that they did come out of the Great Tribulation, and let fall the theory for which no Scripture has been shown, that the Great Tribulation is confined to the land of the Jews. As, however, these Gentiles came out of it, they must have been in it. Moreover, the whole tenor of prophecy coincides with these saved ones having part in the Great Tribulation; for that awful persecution is consequent upon men being required to acknowledge the Beast and worship his image. Now the sphere of the Beast's authority is not merely Israel and Palestine, but every tribe and people and tongue and nation (Rev. xiii. 7); and all who will not worship the image will be killed, and no one will be allowed either to buy or sell, save he that has the mark of the Beast or the number of

his name (Rev. xiii. 17). The gospel of the kingdom, too, is to be preached in the whole world (Matt. xxiv. 14), and the fruit of that preaching is, we may suppose, this blessed, this countless multitude of saved souls. We see then this awful persecution marked off and standing by itself alone: it is the work of Satan, through his agent the Beast.

Now we come-tracing our way backwards-to-Thyatira and the judgment threatened towards her. This is 'great tribulation:' but it is without the emphatic, distinguishing, double article-indeed without an article at all: still, minus the article, the words are the same, and we must remember that in the Revelation, there is not the change of a word without significance. The phrase bears with it an association of its awful employment which we have just been viewing. The explanation is that the judgment of Thyatira for her sins comes from the same Satanic source as the persecution of the faithful under the Beast. Thyatira of the Seven churches, becomes Babylon of the latter part of the Revelation. The ten horns and the Beast hate the whore; make her desolate and naked, and eat her flesh and burn her with fire. God uses them as His instruments of judgment. "God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will" &c. (Rev. xvii. 16-18).* Her tribulation is indeed great—it is ruthless, relentless destruction, and from the same

^{*}For the word "upon" in verse 16 read "and." See Rev. Version, and J.N.D.

hand as, but is not identical with, THE Great Tribulation. The woman who rides upon the Beast must be destroyed, before the Beast's supremacy can be asserted. The Great Tribulation will then follow for all who will not own and worship the Beast.

The third topic, the "Hour of Temptation,' is the most interesting to us, as being the nearest to us in point of time,-for, as already explained, we shall be removed from this scene before the "hour of temptation"; but immediately that the Church is gone, this Satanic breath will spread its blasting influence over the world. There is an hour approaching most baneful to the world. But let us be clear as to what it is. It is temptation $(\pi ειρασμός)$ not suffering $(\theta \lambda i \psi \iota \varsigma)$. In the Great Tribulation there will be keen and appalling suffering; extensive killing; a father will see a son haled to the guillotine (Rev. xx. 4), or a wife her husband, a mother her children, or children their mother,—taken away to die for their faith. Worse still, there will be a shaking of all human confidence; many will betray one another and hate one another; human affection will wither under the awful dominating sentiment of Satan-worship (Matt. xxiv. 10; Rev. xiii. 4). Whoever will not worship the image of the Beast will be killed. This may apply more especially to the land where the image is. But ALL, wherever they may be, will be required to receive a mark, the name of the Beast, or the 164/41

number of his name; and no one will be allowed to buy or sell who has not this mark. But this is more than temptation: it is tribulation—well may it be named "The tribulation, the great." What a privilege for the Church to be caught away into glory prior to this! And blessed to know that there will be a multitude too numerous to number, who will pass as conquerors through that trial, awful as it is, and stand before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white, and with palms in their hands, ascribing salvation to God and to the Lamb (Rev. vii. 9-12).

But before this time of force and terror, there comes one milder in character, but yet Satanic-the "Hour of Temptation"—which is our subject. It is temptation or trial; but if called trial, it is so in the sense of temptation or testing, not affliction. It must not, however, be under-estimated on this account: for it is a vast prophetic event; the whole world will be subject to it, and that must be a serious thing which affects the whole world. It is most interesting to us, from its being closely connected with the Lord's coming. One naturally asks, Does Scripture give any clue to the nature of world-wide temptation? Obviously the temptation must be in the line of the great prophetic events which are to follow, indeed leading towards them—probably the first definite and overt movement after the rapture of the Church. Now Scripture is clear as to what the end and goal of those events is: it is the direct and definite worship of Satan. "They worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the Beast" (Rev. xiii. 2). "And power was given him over all kindreds and tongues and nations, and all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him" (vers. 7, 8).

This was Satan's object in the temptation of the Lord Jesus, "If thou wilt do homage before me, all shall be thine" (Luke iv. 6-8). He had succeeded with the first man; and now tempted the Second Man, but was foiled. He has not yet, however, given up his purpose, which for a brief moment is to be accomplished in a day that is approaching. There are two indications to guide us as to the nature of the coming temptation; one, the ultimate result as just shown; and the other, the character of the testimony given by God during that awful period, viz: "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation and kindred and tongue and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come; and WORSHIP HIM THAT MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH AND THE SEA AND THE FOUNTAINS OF WATERS" (Rev. xiv. 7, 8).

May we not gather from these two data that the temptation is to apostatize from God; not merely from the revelation of Himself which He has given in Christianity, but to abandon the very notion of a

Creator-god, as hitherto held—at least within the area of Christendom. Hence the gospel of that time is a loud call from heaven to the whole world to worship God in His Creator-character.*

To this it may perhaps be answered: 'You have just said that Satan will be worshipped, how then can the notion of God be given up?' This may at first seem contradictory, but the two ideas are not necessarily incompatible. The whole Earth wonders after the Beast, and they worship the dragon because he gives power to the Beast, and they worship the Beast. Satan is recognised as the power behind the throne, and is worshipped as such. Further, Satan's imitation Trinity is completed by the man of sin, sitting down in the temple of God and showing himself that he is God (2 Thess. ii. 4); but the true idea of God, the Almighty Creator, has been abandoned, and is lost, before this could be possible; and the Temptation to come, is to do this, to relinquish both Christianity and the idea of a Creator-god. last is indeed already the case with many leaders of thought and of science to-day. Matter is regarded as eternal; there is no creation, and therefore no Creator; and worse still, no God to whom men owe a moral responsibility; God in that sense is abolished from men's minds. The Hour of Temptation is preliminary to the Great Tribu-

^{*}This is a little more fully explained in the author's previous work "The Time of the End, But the End not Yet," pp. 74 et seq.

lation. It is an education, a preparation of men's minds, and when this has proceeded far enough, Satan will burst upon the scene, with his great master-piece, the Roman Beast, after which the whole earth wonders; the man of sin, the antichrist; and, completing Satan's trinity, himself the dragon behind all, each and all of which the world worships.

It has been said, and often truly, that "Coming events cast their shadows before." An hour is coming upon the whole world to try them that dwell upon the earth. This cannot be until the Church has been caught away (Rev. iii. 10); but are not its shadows already upon us? Is not what is called "Evolution" a denial of creation? Man, according to that theory, is evolved from an ape; an ape from something lower, and so on until we come to atoms. A leading Review* speaks of "the discoveries of modern science, which, in demolishing the legends of the creation of the world and man, have also uprooted in the educated mind the faith in the Divine inspiration of the books and traditions which taught these legends, and which were the basis of all the accepted religious beliefs." So like is this to what is coming, that one might almost enquire whether we are not now entered upon that time; we might indeed suppose that wewere, but that Rev. iii. 10 tells us that the Church

^{*}The International, March, 1908

is to be kept out of that hour. If, however, we are in the shadow of that "Hour of temptation," the thing itself cannot be far off. But there is something which is to precede even that; to intervene between the shadow which we are now in, and the substance which seems to be so near: IT IS THE COMING OF THE LORD: the sudden descent of the Lord into the air, and our blissful rising to meet Him, passing into heaven without death. "changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye" (I Cor. xv. 51, 52). Reader, it may be your privilege and mine to be a partaker in that scene, to pass into glory without dying. However this may be, the Lord follows verse 10 with the striking words, "I come quickly; hold fast what thou hast, that no one take thy crown " (Rev. iii. 11).

The titles which the Lord takes in addressing Philadelphia must be noticed. "These things saith the holy, the true; he that has the key of David, he who opens and no one shall shut, and shuts and no one shall open" (chap. iii. 7). On this nothing better, nothing so good, can be offered to the reader as the following by Mr. Darby: "Christ is known as the Holy One. Then outward ecclesiastical associations or pretensions will not do. There must be what suits His nature, and faithful consistency with that word which He will certainly make good. With this He has the

administration; and opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens. See what His path was on earth; only then graciously dependent, as we should be. He was holy and true, to man's view had a little strength, kept the word, lived by every word that proceeded out of God's lips, waited patiently for the Lord, and to Him the porter opened. lived in the last days of a dispensation, the holy and true One, rejected, and, to human eye, failing in success with those who said they were Jews, but were the synagogue of Satan. So the saints here; they walk in a place like His; they keep His word, have a little strength, are not marked by a Pauline energy of the Spirit, but do not deny His name. This is the character and motive of all their conduct. It is openly confessed, the word kept, the Name not denied. It seems little; but in universal decline, much pretension and ecclesiastical claim, and many falling away to man's reasonings, keeping the word of Him that is holy and true, and not denying His name is everything." *

And what is to be the end of the path of the Philadelphian? He has been nobody here; he will be a pillar up there. "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God." Of course this is figurative; but a pillar of a temple gives the idea of permanence, strength, and perfect beauty. He was not such on earth; among Thyatira, Sardis, Laodicea—scarcely recognised. Their architecture,

^{*} Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Vol. 5, p. 512.

their numbers, their affluence attest their position, and might offer a career of wealth and distinction. Of these things he had none, nor desired them; to keep Christ's word was his sole ambition and his holy aim; now he has an eminent position in the glory, one of honour and permanence, "He shall go no more out at all."

The special character of this epistle is shown even in the Promises to the Overcomer. There is a tenderness in the expressions; almost a familiarity in the repetitions of the word "my"; the temple in which the overcomer is to be a pillar is not merely the temple of God, but "of my God." The Lord here takes His place with us as man: "He that overcometh, him will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out no more at all; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down of heaven from my God, and my new name" (chap. iii. 12). It is like a prospective bridegroom impressing on the loved one that she is to share everything that is his.

"Yet it must be; thy love had not its rest
Were Thy redeemed not with Thee fully blest;
The love that gives not as the world but shares
All it possesses with its loved co-heirs."

A survey of the epistle would not be complete without some notice of the name. "Philadelphia" is a Greek word meaning brotherly love—the

words "brotherly kindness" or "brotherly love" in Scripture are represented in the original by the one word "philadelphia." It can scarcely be without special significance that the name occurs in the title of this epistle. To force a typical meaning from every name in Scripture would be a serious mistake-but Scripture itself recognises the spiritual significance of some names, and here it would seem to indicate that there was, along with the general keeping of Christ's word, a recognition of the brotherhood of true believers. In Apostolic times, "brethren" was the name by which Christians were generally known amongst themselves, thus :---

"the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and made their minds evil-affected against the brethren " - - - Acts xiv. 2. "certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said" - - - Acts xv. 1. "we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren and abode with them one day " - -Acts xxi. 7. "Erastus, the chamberlain of the city, saluteth you and Quartus, the brother " -Rom. xvi. 23. "All the brethren greet you" - I Cor. xvi. 20. "Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea" - - Col. iv. 16.

- "put the brethren in remembrance of these things" - 1 Tim. 4-6.
- "know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty" - Heb. xiii. 23.

This brotherhood is not like the conventional agreement of a human society to regard and call one another brethren, as is the case with—say— Freemasons. All true believers are brethren as being born of the Spirit (and "except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God"). Being born of God, they have become partakers of a new nature, and the brotherhood of such is a reality, not mere name. "The brethren" now, alas, instead of being together, are to be found in every sect of Christendom. Everyone united to Christ is a brother in Christ, however little he may acknowledge it. With all true believers there is some recognition of this, however faint, for everyone "that loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him" (1 John v. 1). Indeed this love in the heart is an evidence of the new birth in the soul, for "we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (I John iii. 14). This is evidence to ourselves; but it is also a testimony to the world: "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John xiii. 35). However, in the closing period of the dispensation, amid all the confusion of Christendom, here is-brotherly love!

Precious to the heart of Christ, beautiful in the eye of heaven! Let us cherish it wherever we find it, and cultivate it all we can.

- "Blessed are their eyes that see Him,
 Him the holy and the true;
 Gathered round Him, He amongst them,
 His despised rejected few;
 He who hath the key of David,
 God of resurrection power;
 He hath opened heaven before them,
 Shut them in for evermore.
- "Feeblest works, yet dear to Jesus,
 Weary hearts that wait for Him,
 Eyes that look upon the glory,
 Till all else is dark and dim;
 Midst the wreck, the desolation,
 Where the glorious city stood,
 Called to raise the lonely altar,
 One last witness for their God.
- "He the golden door has opened
 Of His temple's holiest place,
 Midst these latter days of darkness
 Called them in to see His face;
 None can shut where He has opened,
 None that 'little strength' withstand,
 Which He gave amidst their weakness,
 By the touch of His right hand.
- "Precious to the heart of Jesus,

 Love that keeps the word He spake,

 Knowing somewhat of the sweetness

 Of rejection for His sake;

Yet so little of the glory,
Of His scorn, and cross, and shame,
That His love can witness only
'Thou hast not denied my name.'

"He their Lord is coming quickly—
Brethren, yet awhile hold fast;
In His God's eternal temple
They as pillars stand at last.
Here to be cast out, rejected,
Here to bear the brand of shame;
There go out no more for ever,
Bear in light His God's own name.

"He will write that name upon them,
His God evermore their own,
And the name of His bright city,
Of the bride who shares His throne;
And His own new name of triumph
Then shall shine upon their brow—
Shall they not rejoice in bearing
His reproach, rejection now?"

(Extract)

E.J.T.