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here, certainly as much as we have deserved; but we may all get a blessedness far larger than we have deserved hereafter, and shall get it, if only we follow those who, through faith and patience, now inherit the promises. S. COX.

THE EPISTLES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA.

II.—SMYRNA. (*Revelation* ii. 8-11.)

THE messages that follow that to the Church of Ephesus stand in one respect in very striking contrast to it. There we are able, through the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of St. Paul, to follow the history of the Christian community from its very birth; to trace the influences that had acted on it; to see in what way the picture brought before us in the Apocalypse was the result of those influences. Here we know nothing of the previous history. But for this mention of the Churches we should not have known that any Christian congregations had been planted there. Knowing that they were so planted, we can at best conjecture that they owed their origin to the evangelizing activity of St. Paul or his associates in the mission-work of the Church during his residence at Ephesus, and that they had become personally known to St. John when he succeeded to the care of the Asiatic Churches.

Nor does it help us here, any more than in the case of Ephesus, to fall back upon the pre-Christian history of Smyrna as a city. That it had been wealthy, populous, commercial, from the remote

period that had preceded the Persian conquest; that it claimed, with other cities (six or seven), to have been the birthplace of Homer; that, after suffering great injury from an earthquake in the early part of the reign of Tiberius, it had risen from its ruins into fresh magnificence; that it courted and gained the favour of that Emperor and his successors,—all this is, for our present purpose, of little moment. It is, perhaps, something more to the point to remember that it was as famous for the worship of Dionysos as Ephesus was for that of Artemis, and that the mysteries and games which were held yearly in his honour were a prominent feature in its life. It followed, almost as a matter of course, from its wealth and trade, that it would attract a considerable Jewish population, and that these would occupy there much the same position as at Ephesus,[1] worshipping in their synagogues, zealous for their faith, some of them welcoming the new doctrine of the preachers of the Cross as the completion of that faith, some of them hating and reviling it even more than they hated the Heathenism by which they were surrounded. In such a city it was natural that the believers in the name of Christ should suffer persecution. It is clear that they had not escaped the storm which swept over the Asiatic Churches at the time of St. Paul's last visit, and which had apparently burst out with fresh violence at the time when the beloved Disciple was suffering for the faith in his

[1] The prominence of the Jews in the history of the martyrdom of Polycarp at a later date shews how numerous they then were (Mart Polyc. c. 12, 13, 17).

exile in Patmos. Possibly its comparative remoteness from the great centre of apostolic activity at Ephesus exposed it more to the excitement of fear and agitation which persecution inevitably brings with it.

To the Angel of that Church accordingly the Lord, who speaks the word in season to them that are weary, reveals Himself by a name that speaks of permanence and calm, of victory over all disturbing forces, victory all the more complete and wonderful because it came after apparent defeat, "These things saith the First and the Last, which was dead and is alive." Those who were struggling, suffering, dying for the faith, were the servants of no party-leader, no founder of a sect, no prophet with a temporary mission, but of One to whom all the æons of the world's history, all wars and revolutions and the rise and fall of kingdoms were but as moments in the eternal silence. They might be tempted to think their cause desperate; they might seem to be fighting against overwhelming odds; death in all the myriad forms which the subtle cruelty of persecution could devise might appear imminent, but He who "was dead and is alive" could give them there also a victory like his own.[1]

Nor were the words that followed less distinctive

[1] I can hardly bring myself to accept Dean Blakesley's suggestion ("Dict. of the Bible," art. "Smyrna"), that the words imply a reference to the mythical legend of the death and reviviscence of Dionysos which, at Smyrna as elsewhere, was prominent in the mysteries that bore his name. That legend must surely have been altogether foreign to the thoughts of the Evangelist and the believers to whom he wrote.

in their consoling power: He knew their "works," their "tribulation," and their "poverty." The last word is specially suggestive as pointing to that which weighed most oppressively on the minds of the suffering community of Smyrna. Persecution has its heroic and exciting side, and under its stimulus men do and dare much; but when, in addition to this, there is the daily pressure of ignoble cares, the living as from hand to mouth, the insufficient food and the scanty squalid clothing of the beggar, the trial becomes more wearing, and calls for greater fortitude and faith. We do not sufficiently estimate, I believe, this element in the sufferings of the first believers. Taken, for the most part, from the humbler class of artizans, often thrown out of employment by the very fact of their conversion, with new claims upon them from the afflicted members of the great family of Christ close at hand, or afar off, and a new energy of sacrifice prompting them to admit those claims, subjected not unfrequently to the "spoiling of their goods," we cannot wonder that they should have had little earthly store, and that their reserve of capital should have been rapidly exhausted. Traces of this meet us, though they are not put forward ostentatiously, in many scattered passages of the New Testament writings. Collections for the poor saints at Jerusalem were made in all the churches of the Gentiles. Those who gave most liberally to that work did so out of the "deep poverty" in which they were themselves plunged, "to the utmost of their power, yea, and beyond their power." (2 Cor. viii. 2, 3.) Even the stress laid in some

of St. Paul's Epistles on the duties of the rich points to their position as altogether exceptional. And poverty brought with it, as the Epistle of St. James shews us, some trials to which those who had been devout Israelites before their conversion, and who had not ceased to claim their position as such, would be peculiarly sensitive. In the synagogue which they had been in the habit of attending, and which there was no reason for their at once forsaking, perhaps even in the assemblies of Jewish disciples which still retained the old name and many of the old usages, they would find themselves scorned and scoffed at, thrust into the background, below the footstool of the opulent traders in which a city like Smyrna was certain to abound. The hatred which the unbelieving Jews felt for the name of Christ would connect itself with their purse-proud scorn of the poor and needy, and "those beggars of Christians" would become a by-word of reproach.

It was a message of comfort to those who were smarting under that taunt to hear, as from their Lord's lips, "I know thy poverty, but thou art rich." He measured poverty and riches by another standard than the world's, and so the words recorded by St. John are, as it were, the echo of those which the brother of the Lord had addressed to men who were in a like condition: "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" (James ii. 5.) And He, looking upon their works and their tribulation, knew that they had their treasure in heaven, that they were rich with his own un-

searchable riches, that they had laid up their wealth where neither rust nor moth corrupt and where thieves do not break through and steal. Their state was the very antithesis of that which we shall afterwards find described as that of the Church of Laodicea, and in that deep poverty of theirs they were wealthy, beyond the dream of avarice, in the "gold tried in the fire."

The stress thus laid on one special incident of the tribulation of the church of Smyrna prepares us to understand the words that follow. I take the blasphemy of which they speak as coming from "those who said they were Jews and were not," as meaning, primarily, not direct blasphemy against God, but the words of reviling which were hurled in reckless scorn at the believers in the name of Christ. It was in the synagogue that they heard the words which reproached them as Nazarenes, Galileans, Christians, disciples of the Crucified ; and, as in the case of those of whom St. James writes, those who despised the poor, and whose contempt was aggravated by the fact that these poor were Christians, in reviling them "blasphemed also that worthy name" by which they had been called (James ii. 7). Upon all such, whether they were Jews continuing still in their unbelief, or, as is possible, professing some kind of faith in Christ, yet retaining all the vices of their original Pharisaism, the Lord of the Churches pronounces the sentence that they are no true Jews, that they do not belong to the Israel of God, that the synagogue of which they are the members is nothing else than the synagogue of Satan. His spirit was working in them, the spirit of pride and

hatred, and scorn, and unbelief, and it was well that they, who knew not what manner of spirit they were of, should have their eyes opened to the perils of their true state.

And then there came words which at once told them that they had to face evils that were greater than any they had as yet experienced, and enabled them to bear them. The storm was not yet over. They had but heard its mutterings and seen its distant flashes as compared with the violence with which it was about to break on them. "The devil"—for the antagonism to the Truth is traced up here, as elsewhere, beyond all merely human instruments, to the great enemy of God and man, the great accuser and slanderer, the head of all the human διάβολοι who made themselves instruments in his work—would "cast some of them into prison," and from that prison some of them should pass out to encounter death in all the manifold forms which the cruelty of their persecutors could devise. They were to be tried with this fiery trial that the gold of their true treasure might be at once tested and purified. That which was designed by their great foe as a temptation leading them to apostasy should work, like all the other "manifold temptations" to which they were exposed, so as to be fruitful in all joy.

The specific mention of the "ten days" during which the tribulation was to last has naturally suggested many questions. Are the days to be taken literally, and has the prediction therefore the character of a promise, encouraging the sufferers to stedfastness on the ground of the short duration of the trial? Are we to adopt what has almost come

to be assumed as an axiom to the interpretation of other parts of the Apocalypse, that a day stands for a year, and that the words point therefore to the persecution as at once severe and protracted, and calling for the faith which alone endureth to the end? Without adopting, or even for the present discussing, the "year-day" theory, I am disposed to adopt the latter view in its general bearings. The number Ten, the last of the scale of units, the total of the first four units, each of which had a mystic meaning of its own, is naturally, in the symbolism of numbers, the representative of completeness, and here, therefore, of persecution carried to its full extent, and lacking nothing that could make it thorough and perfect as a test.[1] It comes as the climax of the whole picture of the sufferings to which the Church of Smyrna was to be exposed. It implies the "death" which is prominently brought forward in the words of promise that follow. In those words we may perhaps find something of a local colouring, imagery drawn from the associations that were necessarily familiar to the Church of Smyrna and its Angel. In the great games of that city, as in the Isthmian games and those of Olympia, the victor in the strife received the "crown," or "garland" (*στέφανος*) that was the barge of conquest.[2]

[1] The usage of the Old Testament is not consistent. In Gen. xxxi. 41, Num. xiv. 24, Job xix. 3, the definite number is used to convey the idea of indefinitely frequent repetition. In Gen. xxiv. 58 Num. xi. 19, it is used, apparently, in its literal sense. The interpretation now given is based upon Bähr, "Symbolik," ii. 2, § 8.

[2] Canon Blakesley states, in the article already reffered to, but without giving his authority, that the "crown" was given to the priest who presided at the Dionysian mysteries, and that Smyrnean inscriptions record the names of many persons, men and women, distinguished

For that crown men were ready to endure and dare. It was the great joy and glory of their lives. And such a crown of victory the Lord of the Churches promises to him who is faithful unto death. It is to be "a crown of life," the genitive (as in the case of the "crown of righteousness" of 2 Tim. iv. 8) pointing to that of which the crown is, as it were, made up. Life, eternal life, is that which makes the reward of all faithful combatants, and that eternal life consists in knowing God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Now, as ever, He is Himself the exceeding great reward of those who serve Him truly.

The promise with which the message ends, though different and more general, as well as more mystical in its form, expresses substantially the same truth: "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." The word, so strange and awful, was, so far as we know, comparatively new. Nothing like it meets us in the Gospels, or in the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Paul. And, although we must believe that it had been used before in the teaching of St. John, so that it would not fall on ears to which it would convey no intelligible meaning, it is yet clear that it had not up to this time become part of the

as στεφανηφόροι. I cannot see any force in the objection urged by Archbishop Trench to this reference, that comparisons drawn from the games of Greece were foreign to the thoughts both of the writer and the readers of the Apocalypse, and that the crowns referred to are therefore the signs, not of victory in conflict, but, like the διαδήματα of Rev. xii. 3; xiii. 1; xix. 12, of regal majesty. The Asiatic Churches must have been familiar by this time with the imagery which had been so freely used both by St. Paul and the great unknown writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews; and the fact that St. John uses the other word where the other meaning is required is, at least, presumptive evidence that he uses this in its usual and more definite meaning.

current phraseology of the Church.[1] Yet the meaning of the phrase was not far to seek. One who had learnt that the life of the body was not the true life, must have learnt, as the complement of that truth, that there was a death more terrible than that to which the body was subject, the loss of the eternal life. The teaching of his Lord on earth had indeed implied that "second death." Men were not to fear those who were only able to kill the body, but Him who was able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. x. 28). Whosoever believed in Him should not see death, even though his body was committed to the grave; "though he were dead, yet should he live" (John xi. 25). More striking still, as bringing more fully into view the latent terrors of the phrase, is its recurrence in a later chapter of the Revelation. There it is said that the "second death" hath no power over the blessed and holy ones who have part in the first resurrection (xx. 6); and, again, that it is identical with "the lake of fire," into which both Death and Hades are to be cast, together with every one who was not found written in the book of life (xx. 14, 15).

Neither the scope of these papers, nor the limits assigned to them, permit me to enter into the wide eschatological questions which these passages open as regards the time and sequence of the events

[1] The date of the several portions of the Jerusalem Targum, to which Archbishop Trench refers as shewing that the word was not strange to Jewish ears, cannot, I believe, be fixed with precision; but it is at least possible that the Jews of Palestine had become familiar with the phrase through the paraphrase given of it in Deut. xxxiii. 6, and Psa. xlix. 11, in which the "second death" is that which comes upon the wicked in the world to come, and is used as synonymous with Gehenna.

thus mysteriously shadowed forth. We are compelled, however, to ask what light they throw upon the promise to the Angel of the Church of Smyrna. Is the "second death" to be interpreted by "the lake of fire" as implying a state of enduring pain? Are we to rob the lake of fire of its terrors by seeing in it only the "second death," of the loss of conscious life or utter annihilation? Here also we stand on the threshold of great problems which we cannot solve. But, as a question of simple interpretation, I am bound to express my conviction, that the evidence leads to the former, and not the latter, conclusion. The imagery of the fiery lake, like that of the worm and the flame of the Valley of Hinnom, may be but imagery; but it points at least to some dread reality which is veiled beneath those awful symbols. What that reality is we may infer from St. John's conceptions of the higher life. If the first death is the loss of the first or earthly life, then the second death must be the loss of that knowledge of God which makes the blessedness of eternal life—and that loss is at least compatible with the thought of continuous existence. What possibilities in the far-off future were shadowed forth by the mysterious words that "Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire," as though they were to be robbed of their power to destroy, and were punished as the great enemies of God and man, how far those who were cast in with them might even there be not shut out from hope, it was not given to the seer of the Apocalypse to know, nor did he care to ask. It was enough for the faithful sufferers under persecution, who overcame in that

conflict with the "plurima mortis imago," to which they were exposed, to know that this was all that their enemies could inflict on them, and that the "second death" should have no power to hurt them.

The date to which I have assigned the Apocalypse, and which gave a special interest to the message to the Church of Ephesus, as being probably addressed to the true son and fellow-worker of St. Paul, deprives me of what would have given an almost equal interest to that now under consideration. I cannot assume with Archbishop Trench and others; whatever latitude I may give to the duration of his life or the date of his conversion, that Polycarp, who suffered martyrdom in A.D. 168, could have been the Angel of the Church of Smyrna at the time when the Apocalypse was written. And yet the coincidences which these writers have pointed out are hardly less interesting on the assumption that though the message was not addressed to him, his life, as a Christian and a pastor, came, more or less, under its influence. In his long conflict for the faith — his stedfast endurance — his estimate of the fire with which men could destroy the body, and the fire that never can be quenched,[1] we find a character on which the promise to him that overcometh had been stamped indelibly. In the narrative of his sufferings, as in the Apocalyptic message, the devil is represented as the great instigator of the persecution of which he was the victim.[2] There also Jews were the most active instruments, as was their manner always, in the fiendish work, even to the point of

[1] Mart. Polyc. c. 2. [2] *Ibid.* c. 3.

heaping up the faggots which were to form his funeral pyre.[1]

It is perhaps worth noticing, as shewing the continuance in the Church of Smyrna of the same phraseology as that in the passage before us, that, in the Epistle which purports to be addressed to Polycarp by Ignatius of Antioch, the term "synagogue" is applied to Christian assemblies, and that the narrative of the martyrdom ends with describing him as having obtained the crown (στέφανος) of incorruption. E. H. PLUMPTRE.

THE PROLOGUE OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL.

III.—THE TRUTH AND IMPORTANCE OF THE CONCEPTION OF THE PERSON OF JESUS CONTAINED IN THE PROLOGUE (*concluded*).

IT was necessary, first of all, that He should lay aside all the attributes which constituted his Divine condition; and we have already seen that the text of Scripture teaches this renunciation both directly and indirectly. Next, it was necessary that the Divine Subject should consent to lose for a time the consciousness of Himself as such. The consciousness of such a peculiar relation to God, and the recollection of a life anterior to this earthly existence, would be incompatible with the condition of a true child and with a really human development. Now, the Gospel narratives nowhere attribute to Jesus, until his baptism, the consciousness of Himself as Logos. The saying which he uttered when

[1] Mart. Polyc. c. 12, 13.