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The New Name.

BY THE REV. ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D.

“To him that overcometh will I give . . . a new name . . . which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”
—REV. ii. 17.

THE series of sevenfold promises attached to these letters to the Asiatic churches presents us with a sevenfold aspect of future blessedness. They begin with the reversal of man's first sorrow and the promise of regaining the lost Paradise, the return of the “statelier Eden,” and full access to the tree of life. They end with that beyond which nothing higher can be conceived or experienced—a share in the royalty and the throne of Jesus Christ Himself.

There may be traced in them many interesting links of connection and sequence, as well as, in general, a correspondence between them and the trials or graces of the church addressed. In the present case the little community at Pergamos was praised because it held fast Christ's name, and so there is promised to it a new name as its very own. I need not trouble you with any discussion about what may be the significance of the “white stone” on which this new name is represented in the text as written. Commentators have indulged in a whirl of varying conjectures about it, and no certainty has, as it seems to me, been attained. The allusion is one to which we have lost the key, and, as I do not know what it means, I do not pretend to explain. Probably it means nothing separately, and the “white stone” only comes into vision as the vehicle on which is inscribed the “new name,” which is the substance of the promise. At all events, it is that alone to which I desire to turn your attention.

I.—Consider, first, the large hopes which gather round this promise of a “new name.”

Abraham and Jacob, in the Old Testament, received new names from God; Peter and the sons of Zebedee, in the New Testament, received new names from Christ. In the sad latter days of the Jewish monarchy, its kings, being deposed by barbarian and pagan conquerors, were reinstated, with new names imposed upon them, by the victors. In all these cases the imposition of the new name implies authority and ownership on the part of the giver; and generally a

relationship to the giver, with new offices, functions, and powers on the part of the receiver. And so when Christ from the heavens declares that He will rename the conqueror, He asserts, on the one hand, His own absolute authority over him, and, on the other hand, His own perfect knowledge of the nature and inmost being of the creature He names. And, still further, He gives a promise of a nature renewed, of new functions committed to the conqueror, of new spheres, new closeness of approach to Himself, new capacities, and new powers. Can we go any further? The language of my text warns us that we can go but a little way. But still, reigning in fancy, and trying to avoid the temptations of cheap and easy rhetoric and sentimental eloquence which attach to the ordinary treatment of this subject, let me just remind you that there are two things that shine out plain and clear in the midst of the darkness and vagueness that surround the future glories of the redeemed. The one is their closer relationship to Jesus Christ; the other is their possession, in the ultimate and perfect state, of a body of which the predicates are incorruption, glory, power, and which is a fit organ for the spirit, even as the present corporeal house in which we dwell is an adequate organ for the animal life, and for that alone. And if we hold fast to these two things—the closer proximity to the Lord, and the wondrous new relations into which we may enter with the old Christ, and, on the other hand, the emancipation from the limitations imposed upon will and perception and action by the feeble body, and the possession of an instrument which is up to all the requirements of the immortal spirit and works in perfect correspondence with it—we can at least see such things as the following.

The “new name” means new vision. We know not how much the flesh, which is the organ of perception for things sensible, is an obscuring, blind and impenetrable barrier between us and the loftier order of things unseen, in which this little sphere of the material and visible floats, perishable as a soap-bubble with its iridescent hues. But this we know, that when the stained glass of life is shattered, the white light of eternity will pour in. And this

we know, "Now we see through a glass darkly: then, face to face." By reason of the encompassing flesh, we see but a reflection of the light. According to the great myth of the old Greek philosopher, which Paul, in the words quoted, has put his "Amen" to, we stand as in a cavern with our back to the light, and we see the shadows reflected passing before the mouth. But then, with the new name and the closer relationship to Jesus Christ, we shall turn ourselves from the reflections and to the light, and shall see face to face.

The "new name" means new activities. We know not how far these fleshly organs, which are the condition of our working upon the outward universe with which they bring us into connection, limit and hem the operations of the spirit. But this we know, that when that which is sown in weakness is raised in power, when that which is sown in corruption is raised in incorruption, when that which is sown in dishonour is raised in glory, we shall then possess an instrument adequate to all that we can ask it to perform—a perfect tool for a perfected spirit. And, just as the fisherman, when he was taken from his nets to be an Apostle, was rechristened, so the saint, who has been working here, down amidst the trivialities of this poor material world, and learning his trade thereby, shall, when he is made a journeyman and set free from his apprenticeship, be renamed in token of larger functions on a nobler sphere and wider service with better implements. "His servants shall serve him." The strengths that have been slowly matured here, and the faculties which have been patiently polished and brought to an edge, shall find their true sphere in work, of sorts unknown, to which, perhaps, the conditions of space that now hamper us shall be no impediment.

Further, the "new name" means new purity. There are two words very characteristic of this Book of the Apocalypse. One of them is that word of my text, "new"—the "new Jerusalem," "new heavens," and a "new earth," a "new song," a "new name," and the grand, all-comprehensive proclamation, "Behold, I make all things new." The other is that word "white," not the cold, pallid white that may mean death, but the flashing white, as of sunshine upon snow, the radiant white that means purity smitten by Divinity, and so blazing up into lustre that dazzles. There are

"white thrones," and "white robes," and "white horses," and all these express one and the same thing, that one element in the newness of the "new name" is spotless purity and supernal radiance. Here, at the best, our whiteness is but blackness washed, and on the road to be cleansed.

The "new name" means new joys, which, in comparison with the gladnesses of earth, shall be like the difference between the blazing sunshine on an ordinary June day, and the dim transient gleams of an ordinary frosty December day. Here and now, we know joy and sorrow as a double star, one bright and the other dark, which revolve round one centre, and with terrible swiftness take each other's places. But there, "thou makest them drink of the river of thy pleasures," and no longer shall we have to speak of them as being—

"Like the snowflakes on the river,

A moment white, then gone for ever,"

but as sealed with the solemn seal of perpetuity, and clarified into the utmost height of purity, and calm with the majesty of a divine tranquillity, after the pattern of His joy that was full and abode an undisturbed, unchanging blessedness.

So, dear friends, new perceptions, new activities, new moral perfectnesses, new gladnesses, these are the elements which, without passing beyond the soberest interpretation of the great promise of my text, we may fairly see shining through it.

II.—I ask you to look, secondly, at the connection between Christ's "new name" and ours. There is another promise in one of the other letters, which is often read as if it covered the same ground as that of my text, but which, in reality, is different, though closely connected. In the next chapter we read, in the 12th verse, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and I will write upon him"—perhaps we may carry the metaphor of the pillar onwards into its clause, and think of *it* as inscribed with what follows—"the name of My God"—in token of ownership—"the name of the city of My God, which is the 'new Jerusalem'"—in token of citizenship—"and I will write upon him My 'new name.'" That great promise links itself with that of my text as being the plain ground of it, as will appear if you will give me your attention for a few moments.

What is this "new name" of Christ's? Ob-

viously, remembering the continual use of the word "name" in Scripture, the new name of Jesus is a revelation of His character, nature, and heart; a new manifestation of Himself to the glad eyes of those that loved Him, when they saw Him amidst the darkness and the mists of earth, and so have been honoured to see Him more clearly amidst the radiances of the glories of heaven.

Only remember that when we speak of a "new name" of Christ's as being part of the blessedness of the future state to which we may humbly look forward, it is no antiquating of the old name. Nothing will ever make the Cross of Jesus Christ less the centre of the revelation of God than it is to-day. The world sweeps on, and when the great ages of eternity have come, there will sink beneath the horizon of the past many a tall column that stands high and flashes lights from its summit to-day. But no distance onwards, nor any fresh illumination, will ever pale the light that shines from the earthly manifestation and bitter Passion of the Christ, the Revealer of God. We antiquate none of that because we look for a deeper understanding of what it reveals when we come to the loftier station of the heavens. And as for earth, so for heaven. The paradox of this Apostle is true, and Christ Himself will say to us then, "Brethren! I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. Again, a new commandment write I unto you, because the darkness is past and the true light now shineth." But the new name is the new name of the old Christ.

Then what is the inscription of that name upon the conqueror? It is not merely the manifestation of the revealed character of Jesus in new beauty, but it is the manifestation of His ownership of His servants by their transformation into His likeness, which transformation is the consequence of their new vision of Him. "I will write upon him My new name," is but saying, in other words, "The new revelation of My character, which he shall receive, will be stamped upon his character, and he shall become like Myself." It is but putting into picturesque form what this same Apostle said in more abstract words when he declared, "When He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Here we see Him as He has become for our sins,

and the imperfect vision partially works likeness; there seeing Him as He is, we become as He is. The name is inscribed upon the beholder as the sun makes an image of itself on the photographic plate. If thou wouldest see Christ, thou must be as Christ; if thou wouldest be as Christ, thou must see Christ. "We all, with unveiled faces, mirroring," as a glass does, "the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image."

So, then, our "new name" is Christ's new name stamped upon us. On the day of the bridal of the Lamb and the Church, the bride takes her Husband's name, and all who love Him and pass into His sweet presence in the heavens are named by His new name because they partake of His life. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit," and Christ's name is his name.

III.—Again, notice, in the third place, the blessed secret of this new name.

"No man knoweth it save he that receiveth it." Of course not. There is only one way to know the highest things in human experience, and that is by possessing them. Nobody can describe love, sorrow, gladness, so as to awaken a clear conception of them in hearts that have never experienced them. And so poetry goes side by side with man through the ages, and is always foiled in its efforts, and feels that it has not yet reached the heart of the mystery that it tries to speak. Its words only awaken *memories* in those who have already known the things, and you can no more impart a knowledge of the deepest human experiences to men who have not experienced them than you can describe an odour or a taste. That is eminently true about religion, and it is most of all true about that perfect future state.

"No man knoweth it saving he that receiveth it." Well, then, when we go one inch beyond the utterances of Him that does know—that is, Jesus Christ—then we get into dreams and errors. And we can no more conceive that future life, apart from the utterances of our Lord, either from His own lips or through His inspired servants, than an unborn child can construct a picture of the world that it has never seen. A chrysalis, lying under ground, would know about as much of what it would be like, when it had got its wings and lived upon sweetness, and blazed in the sunshine, as a man when he lets his imagination attempt to con-

struct a picture of another life. * I abjure all such. I try to speak plain inferences from manifest certitudes of Scripture. And I beseech you to remember that for us the curtain is the picture, and that the more detailed and precise descriptions of that future life are, whether in popular religious books or elsewhere, the more sure they are to be wrong. Death keeps his secret well, and we have to pass his threshold before we know what lies beyond.

But more than that. That same blessed mystery lies round about the name of each individual possessor, to all but himself. That sounds a questionable joy. We know how sad it is to be unable to speak our deepest selves to our dearest ones, and feel as if no small part of that future blessedness lay in the thought of the power of absolute self-impartment down to the very roots of our being. And I do not think that my text denies that. The New Testament teaches us that the redeemed shall "be manifested," and shall be able, therefore, to reveal themselves to the very secret foundations of their being. And yet each eye shall see its own rainbow, and each will possess in happy certitude of individual possession a honeyed depth of sweet experience which, after all glad revelation, will remain unrevealed, the basis of the being, the deep foundation of the blessedness. Just as we shall know Christ perfectly, and bear His new name inscribed upon our foreheads, and yet *He* has "a name which no man knoweth but He Himself," so the mystery of each redeemed soul will still remain impenetrable to others. But it will be a mystery of no painful darkness, nor making any barrier between ourselves and the saints whom we love.

Rather it is the guarantee of an infinite variety in the manner of possessing the one name. All the surrounding diamonds that are set about the central blaze shall catch the light on their faces, and from one it will come golden, and from another violet, and another red, and another flashing and pure white. Each glorified spirit shall reveal Christ, and yet the one Christ shall be manifested in infinite variety of forms, and the total summing up of the many reflections will be the image of the whole Lord. As the old Rabbis named the angels that stood round the throne of God by divers names, expressive of the divers forms which the

one Divine Presence assumed to them, and called one Gabriel, "God, my strength;" and another Uriel, "God, my Light;" and another Raphael, "God, the Healer;" and another Michael, "who is like God;" so, as we stand about the Christ, we shall diversely manifest His one glory, one after this manner and another after that.

IV.—Lastly, note the giving of the new name to the victors.

The language of my text involves two things: "To him that overcometh" lays down the conditions; "Will I give" lays down the cause of the possession of the "new name"—that is to say, this renovation of the being, and efflorescence into new knowledges, activities, perfections, and joys, is only possible on condition of the earthly life of obedience, and service and conquest. It is no arbitrary bestowment of a title. The conqueror gets the name that embodies his victories, and without them a man cannot receive it. It is not dying that fits a man for heaven, or makes it possible for God to give it him. God would give it him if He could, but God cannot. His limitation, inseparable from His being, and from the nature of the gift, lies here—"To him that overcometh," and only to him, "will I give." The name corresponds to the reality, and in heaven men are called what they are.

But while the conquering life here is the condition of the gift, it is none the less a gift. That heavenly blessedness is not the necessary consequence of earthly faithfulness. It is not a case of evolution, but of bestowal by God's free love in Christ. The power by which we conquer is His gift. The life which He crowns is His gift, and when He crowns it is His own grace in them which He crowns. "The gift of God is eternal life."

So, my friends, here is the all-important truth for us all. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith;" and that faith is victorious in idea and germ as soon as it begins to abide in a man's heart. If he were to die the one moment, having the moment before yielded himself to Christ in faith, he would be a victor, and capable of the crown, which God will give to those who overcome, whether they have fought for the twelve hours of the conflict or but for a moment at its close. This great promise is held out to each of us. It opens before us the sure prospect of blessedness, progress,

power and joy, shoreless and infinite, unspeakable after all speech, and certain as yesterday. Either that prospect is before us, or its dark opposite. We shall either conquer by Christ's faith and in Christ's strength, and so receive His divine name, or else be beaten by the world and "the flesh and the devil," and so bear the image of our conquerors. I beseech you, make your choice that you will be of those who, having got the victory over the beast and his image and the number of his name, stand at last on the sea of glass with the harps of God, and sing a song of thanksgiving to Him by whom they have overcome, and whose image and name they bear.

Point and Illustration. Providence.

By Dr. JOHN KER.

SOME are constantly reading the hand of Providence in every little incident. It is right to feel that God is in all things, but wrong to say we know for what special purpose He takes every step,—*respice finem*. Let God in His providence finish His sentences, and do not interrupt Him at every word. Some will not be completed here. The magnet has to do with every vibration of the needle, but we wait to see where it points.—*Thoughts for Heart and Life*.

A Wonderful Providence.

By Dr. A. A. HODGE.

Men often talk absurdity when looking at truth from a merely subjective point of view. A man, who was driving along a road near Dr. Witherspoon's house, was pitched out of his vehicle, but escaped unscathed. Hurrying into the Doctor's study, he told his story in an excited way, and ended with the ejaculation, "Wasn't it a wonderful providence?" "Hoots, man, that's naething of a providence compared to what I can tell of," quietly remarked the sagacious old Scotchman; "I've driven doon that same road for years and years, and my horse hasna been allowed even to run off wi' me!"—*Princetoniana*.

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