

The Revelation of  
"The Things that Are"

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By Herbert H. Gowen



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THE REVELATION OF "THE  
THINGS THAT ARE"



# The Revelation of "The Things that Are"

An Exposition of  
Revelation IV and V

By the  
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## INTRODUCTION

**T**HIS little book is intended to provide a simple exposition of the third division of St. John's Apocalypse (chaps. 4 and 5), in which the Apostolic Seer anticipates the triumph of the New Dispensation which he sees accomplished through the Judgments of Part IV (chaps. 4-18).

The anticipation is described as realized in Part V (chaps. 19, 20).

It may be useful to preface the exposition of this single division by the briefest possible syllabus of the general movement of the Apocalypse, and by an analysis, a little more in detail, of the portion to be specially considered.

The Apocalypse is a poem in which the artificial arrangement of its parts takes the place of rhyme or meter. The artificiality is chiefly noticeable in its intricate numerical system, and the most prominent feature in this respect is the use of the number Seven, generally subdivided into Three, the number of Spirit, and Four, the number of the World.

Thus the greater divisions of the Book are seven in number, and it will be noticed that, while the central division contains the larger part of the action of the poem, the parts on either side are arranged in exact correspondence, 1 corresponding with 7, 2 with 6, and 3 with 5.

These divisions are as follows :—

- I. *Prologue* (chap. 1).

- II. *The Church militant*—in its imperfect stage, Spirit and World mingled together (chaps. 2, 3).
- III. *The Church's triumph anticipated* (chaps. 4, 5).
- IV. *The Great Day of the Lord.*
- |                                       |   |        |   |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|--------|---|---|
| Dragon<br>Wild Beast<br>False Prophet | } | versus | { | God on the Throne<br>The Slain Lamb.<br>The Sevenfold Spirit. |
|---------------------------------------|---|--------|---|---|
- The one side realizing in Man the Harlot City, and loosing Hell upon Earth.
- The other side realizing in Man the Bride City and bringing down the New Jerusalem from Heaven.
- This latter work is accomplished by means of a threefold Judgment,
1. The Seven Seals,
  2. The Seven Trumpets,
  3. The Seven Bowls ;
- and the result of this Judgment is the removal of the transitory dispensation of Judaism, and the establishment in the Earth of the New Jerusalem—the Christian Church (chaps. 6–18).
- V. *The Church's triumph realized*, fulfilling on Earth what St. John sees in Heaven in Part III.
- VI. *The Church perfected*, purified from all the worldliness rebuked in Part II.
- VII. *The Epilogue*, corresponding to Part I.

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The analysis of Part III, the portion to be considered in the ensuing pages, reveals the following scheme:—



- 
- A. *The Entrance of the Seer into the World of Spirit.*
- I. The Door opened.
  - II. The Inviting Voice.
  - III. The Translation (chap. 4 : 1, 2a).
- B. *The perfect Vision (sevenfold) of the World of Spirit.*
- I. The Sovereign Power of God.
  - II. The Church of all Time.
  - III. The Omnipresent Spirit.
  - IV. The World in the Sight of God.
  - V. The Universal Creation.
  - VI. The Seven-sealed Mystery of God.
  - VII. The Slain Lamb as the Opener of the Seals of Mystery (chaps. 4 : 2b-5 : 6).
- C. *The Victory of the Cross anticipated.*
- I. The Great Undertaking.
  - II. The New Song of Creation to Creation's Priest.
  - III. The Worship of the Lamb (chap. 5 : 7-14).

With this scheme the following pages will deal, not commenting on details so much as attempting a broad survey of the revelation contained in two of the most wonderful chapters in Scripture. The writer believes that no more appropriate title could be found than that which he has chosen—THE REVELATION OF "THE THINGS THAT ARE."

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An analytical transcription follows, which, we believe, will enable the reader to follow the Apostle's meaning from point to point.



## Analytical Transcription of Revelation 4 and 5.

### *The Revelation of "The Things that Are."*

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#### A. *The Invitation to the Seer.*

After these things I saw and, behold, a Door  
opened in Heaven,  
And the first Voice which I heard, as of a  
Trumpet speaking with me—one saying,  
Come up hither,  
and I will show thee what must  
come to pass hereafter.

Straightway, I was there in spirit.

#### B. *The Sevenfold Vision of the World of Spirit.*

##### 1. *The Sovereign God.*

And, behold, a Throne set in Heaven, and  
upon the Throne One sitting,  
And He that sat was to look upon like a  
Jasper and a Sardius,  
And there was a Rainbow round about  
the Throne like an Emerald to look  
upon.

##### 2. *The Ideal Church.*

And round about the Throne Twenty-  
four Thrones,

And upon the Thrones Twenty-four Elders sitting,  
 Arrayed in White Garments, and on their heads Golden Crowns.

3. *The Universal Spirit.*

And out of the Throne proceeded  
 Lightnings,  
 and Voices,  
 and Thunders,

And Seven Lamps of Fire burning before the Throne,

Which are the Seven Spirits of God.

4. *The World in the presence of God.*

And, before the Throne,  
 As it were a Glassy Sea,  
 Like unto Crystal.

5. *The Universal Nature.*

I. And in the midst of the Throne,  
 And round about the Throne,  
 Four Living-ones full of Eyes before and behind.

II. And the first Living-one was like a Lion,  
 And the second Living-one was like a Bullock,  
 And the third Living-one had a face as of a Man,  
 And the fourth Living-one was like a flying Eagle.

III. And the Four Living-ones, having each of them six Wings,  
 Are full of Eyes round about and within,

And they have no rest day and  
night,

IV. Saying,

Holy, Holy, Holy,  
The Lord God, the Almighty,  
Which was, which is, and which  
is to come.

V. And when the Living-ones shall  
give

Glory,  
and Honour,  
and Thanks

To Him that sitteth on the Throne,  
To Him that liveth forever and ever,

VI. The Twenty-four Elders shall fall  
down and worship Him that sit-  
teth on the Throne,

And shall worship Him that liveth  
forever and ever,

And shall cast their Crowns before  
the Throne,

VII. Saying,

Worthy art Thou, our Lord and  
our God, to receive

the Glory,  
and the Honor,  
and the Power,

For Thou didst create all things,  
And because of Thy will they  
were and were created.

6. *The Seven-sealed Mystery.*

And I saw, in the Right Hand of Him  
that sat on the Throne,

A Book written within and on the back,  
Close sealed with Seven Seals.

---

*Episode, illustrating the insolubility of the mystery  
by man, and preparing for its solution by the  
Lamb.*

[a. *The Challenge.*

And I saw a strong Angel pro-  
claiming with a great Voice,  
Who is worthy to open the  
Book,  
And to loose the Seals  
thereof?

b. *Human Despair.*

And no one was able in the  
Heaven,  
or on the Earth,  
or Under the Earth,  
to open the Book,  
neither to look thereon.  
And I wept much, because no  
one was found worthy  
to open the Book,  
or to look thereon.

c. *The Solver at hand.*

And one of the Elders said unto  
me,  
Weep not,  
Behold, the Lion that is of the  
Tribe of Juda,  
the Root of David,

Hath overcome to open the  
Book, and the Seven Seals  
thereof.]

7. *The Slain Lamb the Solver of Mystery.*

And I saw

in the midst of the Throne,  
and of the Four Living-ones,  
and in the midst of the Elders,

A Lamb standing,

as though it had been slain,  
having Seven Horns,  
and Seven Eyes (which are the  
Seven Spirits of God sent forth  
into all the Earth).

C. *The Victory of the Lamb anticipated.*

1. *The Task accepted.*

And He came and He taketh it out of the  
Hand of Him that sat upon the Throne.

2. *The New Song of Creation to Creation's Priest.*

I. *From Nature and Man.*

And when He had taken the Book  
the four Living-ones and the  
Twenty-four Elders

fell down before the Lamb,  
Having each one an Harp,  
and Golden Bowls full of Incense  
(which are the prayers of the  
saints),

And they sang a New Song, say-  
ing—

*(The Song).*

Worthy art Thou to take the Book,

And to open the Seals thereof,  
For Thou wast Slain,  
And didst purchase unto God  
with Thy Blood  
men of every Tribe,  
and Tongue,  
and People,  
and Nation ;  
And madest them unto our God  
a Kingdom and Priests,  
and they shall reign upon  
the Earth.

II. *From the Angels.*

And I saw,  
And I heard a Voice of many  
Angels  
round about the Throne,  
and the Living-ones,  
and the Elders ;  
And the number of them was Ten-  
thousand-times-ten-thousand  
and thousands of thousands ;  
Saying with a great Voice —  
(*The Song*).  
Worthy is the Lamb that hath  
been slain  
To receive the Power,  
and Riches,  
and Wisdom,  
and Might,  
and Honor,  
and Glory,  
and Blessing.



III. *From the Universe.*

And every created thing which is  
in the Heaven,  
and on the Earth,  
and Under the Earth,  
and on the Sea,

And all things that are in them,  
Heard I saying —

*(The Song).*

Unto Him that sitteth on the  
Throne,

And unto the Lamb

Be, forever and ever, the Blessing  
and the Honor,  
and the Glory,  
and the Dominion.

3. *The Worship of the Lamb.*

And the Four Living-ones said,

Amen ;

And the Elders fell down and worshiped.



# I

## THE IDEAL HEAVEN

*"After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven."*—REV. 4 : 1.

WHEN King Arthur came to his kingdom, and won a realm from the heathen, he built a fair city called Camelot. Here the King and his Round Table Knights formed an ideal society, sworn to live pure and knightly lives and to fight unceasingly against the evil within and around them.

And the poet tells us how Gareth, the last tall son of Lot and Bellicent, heard of the fame of this city, and at last obtained leave from his mother to journey thither, that he might enlist for service under Arthur if only to serve as scullion or kitchen-knave. Taking two servants with him disguised as tillers of the field, he set out. Across the plain,

"Far off they saw the silvery misty morn  
Rolling her smoke about the royal mount,  
That rose between the forest and the field,  
At times the summit of the high city flash'd ;  
At times the spires and turrets half-way down  
Prick'd through the mist ; at times the great gate shone  
Only, that open'd on the field below.  
Anon, the whole fair city disappear'd."

Then were they greatly amazed. One said, "Go no further; it is a city of enchanters." The other "Lord, there is no such city anywhere, but all a vision."

But Gareth pushed them all unwilling to the gate, and though he saw marvels enough to make his companions still to doubt whether there was any city at all, yet he found within such reality as he had never dreamed, a city of royal life and loyal service, a city where

"All about a healthful people steep  
As in the presence of a gracious king."

Does not this story well describe the uncertainty which sometimes takes hold on the heart of man as to the existence of the City of God, the world of eternal realities, where the Lord God reigneth, and His servants serve Him and see His face?

Is there any such world? What is it? How can we thither attain? Is anything real? It is the question of questions. Does life rest upon a real basis, or do we invent the phrases, "I ought," "I ought not," "It is right," "It is wrong"?

Many different answers have in time past been given to this question.

The old Hindu philosophers did not hesitate to give the answer: This life of ours is all illusion, a phantasmagoria of hallucination. What we deem the sternest fact is no more real than the mirage of the desert or the will-o'-the-wisp.

What we see and do are all phenomena for which the Soul of the Universe is responsible. The world is nothing, but God is all.

Less wise than this is the answer given by the modern school of Positivists, Materialists, and Secular-

ists, who say that God is nothing, the soul is nothing, but the world is all. True religion, they say, consists in the recognition of facts ; but when we inquire for their facts we find they are " observed phenomena " ; and phenomena, as the Hindu perceived, are not facts. What is behind the phenomena observed by us in our daily life ? The human mind. And what is beneath the universal Phenomena ? The universal Mind. The Thinker and the Worker are behind the Thought and the Work. That is, call it by whatever name you will, the ultimate fact is God.

And resting ourselves upon this ultimate fact, we shall find other facts such as Hindu philosophy disbelieved. The Creator gives of His own reality to the work of His hands. He who believes life to be illusion will make it illusive ; he who believes life to be secular will make it secular ; but he who acknowledges that every part of human life proceeds from the Eternal Mind to fulfil an eternal purpose, that it lays hold upon the world of realities, will govern his life by the laws of the real world and will choose for his portion not the shadow but the substance of life.

But what, we ask, is this world of realities ? Can we enter therein and can we live therein ?

It is not, to begin with, the world of sense.

It may be quite beyond the reach of our senses, as so many worlds are—as the world of Sirius, of Arcturus, of the Polestar above us, as the world of the drop of water below us. Huxley has told us how in the leaf of a tiny plant there are such currents of life passing to and fro, through every tiny hair, through every infinitesimal channel, that could we hear them all we should be stunned as by the roar of a great city.

Further, it may seem quite contrary to the evidence of our senses, as so many things are till our reason and experience come to correct the testimony of our eyes and ears. The real power of the spiritual world is not all in evidence. We should quite misapprehend history if left to the evidence of our senses. At first sight power seems the prerogative of brute force. Only gradually we learn that the empire of man is made by its Moltkes as well as by its Bismarcks, and there are lessons still beyond this. So the world of realities, so far from always staring men in the face, is often a world unseen by our bodily eyes, unapprehended by our physical senses.

And yet it is a world believed in passionately and fervently wherever the heart of man has risen to see that wealth, or pleasure, or power, as men conceive them, are but the shadows of the things which really are.

Men are taught by the inner voice to be dissatisfied with the world of phenomena, and they strive with the eyes of the spirit to get glimpses of the world beyond, the world of realities, which we call Heaven.

The Buddhist, perceiving that pain comes from unsatisfied desire, dreamed of it as Nirvana, the quenching of all desire in the bosom of God, the extinction of the spirit-thirst, and with it of consciousness itself. This is his highest bliss, his heaven of heavens.

The Mohammedan, learning in this life the dregs at the bottom of pleasure's cup, dreamed of heaven as a land where pleasure should be perennial, and unattended with satiety, exhaustion, or fatigue.

The Scandinavian looked forward to it as the drinking of mead from the skulls of his vanquished enemies,

the undisturbed and never-ending banquet with Odin in the halls of Valhalla.

The aboriginal Australian looks forward to it as the time when he shall become a white man.

“The door is opened in Heaven.”

Let us content ourselves for the present, with the inquiry, “What is Heaven to the Christian?”

St. John answers the question very clearly for the benefit of the Churches of Asia. They are all vexed and persecuted and tired, weak, perplexed and terrified. What seem to them appalling realities are pressing in upon them. The Dragon, the Wild Beast, the False Prophet seem real enough. Hell is let loose upon them, and their comfort is only vague and visionary.

Then the eagle-eyed Apostle tears away the veil, as Elisha had done for his trembling servant, and shows them things as they are, another world, hitherto unknown to them, a world where things are real, a world not of the future but of the present, where God sits enthroned. This is Heaven. This is the picture we are going to study, the world where God and good principles reign.

I. It is the world of *being*, just as earth is the world of *becoming*. Here we see the things which are eternal, the things which cannot be shaken. Here nothing is transitory, nothing is imperfect. Everything is ideal, absolute, consummate.

II. It is not a creation of the future. It exists. It is the eternal present. We enter therein as often as we take off our hearts and our eyes from the passing things of earth and time. So Christ speaks of Himself as “the Son of Man who *is* in Heaven,” even though He was then living upon earth.

III. How did St. John know it? Through fellowship with Christ. His hopes had not deceived him. The older he grew the more confident he became that He whom his eyes had seen and his hands handled was in very truth the Word of Life. So far from becoming with age pessimistic and querulous, he became more and more certain that his fellowship was forever with Christ, and through Christ with God. This "acknowledgment of God in Christ" was stronger than temptation, stronger than sin, and therefore he pleaded with all men to know through Christ "the true God and the life which is eternal." "He that hath Christ," he would say, "hath the life."

IV. And by what means did St. John strive to realize this fellowship with Christ?

Was it not through his Church life? He made all his worship here below a chariot of flame to lift him into the eternal presence of God. We see this from the fact that his ideal Heaven is a glorified reproduction of the Temple and the Temple worship. The mercy-seat suggests to him the Throne of God; the brazen laver, the sea of crystal; the seven-branched candlestick, the seven Spirits of God; the cherubim above the mercy-seat, the Living-ones; the ministering priesthood, the four-and-twenty elders; and the victim upon the altar, the Lamb of God.

All these things to many Jewish worshipers were formal and meaningless pieces of ritual and ceremonial which caught the eye but produced no emotion in the soul. To St. John they became angels ministering between earth and Heaven and bearing upwards his spirit to the worship of Heaven.

And now to come, for the present, to a practical



conclusion. If this door be open to Heaven, from all the perplexities and tribulations of earth, for us as well as for the Christians of Asia Minor, what shall we do?

I. Let us not speculate about it, but live in it. We can, just as easily as St. John. It is a higher privilege even than that of leaning upon Christ's bosom at supper, in the days of His earthly ministry. It is ours to be caught up by the Spirit into the world of being, and to see things as they are.

II. Let us enter it through fellowship with Christ. It is Christ who teaches us what are the real things. He shows us the real power in the Cross of Calvary, the real wisdom in the bearing it humbly after Him, and the real goodness in becoming like unto Him.

III. Let our Church life here below help us to realize this. Let us not rest in hearing the Word, but become doers of it. Let us not rest in prayer, but reach forward for the answer. Let us not rest in sacraments, but partake of the grace beyond the visible sign.

As Jacob at Bethel, with the open country for his sanctuary and the stones for his altar, scaled Heaven by his worship and opened a door for himself into the presence of Jehovah; and as Isaiah amid the gorgeous ritual of the Temple courts pierced the veil with his devotion and entered into the glories of the celestial Holy of Holies; and as St. John in Patmos lifted up his spirit from the dark problems of earth to seek refuge in the tabernacle of the Highest,—so may we find in worship and in life the ever-open door, and entering therein join with angels and archangels and the whole company of Heaven in the Trisagion of praise.

character is that will, good or bad? And if good, will He take notice of us His Creatures?

Here are the three most important questions of life, the three questions which lie at the base of all faith in a God.

I. *Is God perfectly powerful?*

II. *Is God perfectly good?*

III. *Does God trouble Himself about us?*

Let us see what St. John has to say on these points—that is, as to the *Power*, the *Character*, and the *Providence* of God.

First let us get St. John's ideal picture of Heaven well before our minds. It possesses seven features, the sevenfoldness testifying to its perfection.

I. There is a Throne, with One sitting thereon, a feature suggested, as we have seen, by the Mercy-seat.

II. There are seven Lamps of fire burning before the Throne, suggested by the Seven-branched candlestick.

III. The Sea of glass, forming the floor of Heaven, suggested by the brazen sea which took the place of the laver.

IV. The twenty-four Elders representing the perfect ministry of the Church, suggested by the twenty-four courses of the Jewish priesthood.

V. The four Living-ones, representing universal Nature, suggested by the winged cherubim or griffins.

VI. The sealed Roll of the Divine decrees, suggested by the sacred roll of the Law.

VII. The Lamb as it had been slain, the antitype of the victim of the daily sacrifice.

For the present, we confine ourselves to the con-

sideration of the Throne of God, with its immediate accessories, the Seven Lamps, and the Crystal Sea, to learn therefrom, as I have said, what St. John learned from Christ, of the Power, the Character, and the Providence of God.

1. *The Power of God.*—In the eternal world there is a Throne. Do we always remember all that this means? In Europe and elsewhere at the present time great alarm is sometimes felt with regard to Anarchists. Suppose their efforts everywhere successful. Suppose every man doing what is right in his own eyes, and society broken up as in the Revolution of 1789, when the tumbrils went morning by morning laden to the guillotine. Suppose this existed throughout all the world, and extended from the world of men to the world of Nature. Suppose a world where gravitation is abolished, where stars, suns, seasons, heat and cold, rain and drought, forget the laws which govern them. If you can imagine such a world, you have a picture of the world without God reigning from His Throne.

God's power is shown, not, as some imagine, in the infraction of Law, but in the keeping of Law. As our poet sings,—

“Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,  
And the most ancient heavens through Thee are fresh and  
strong.”

Nor is the Throne empty. Nor is it filled with a multiplicity of powers ruling the world with divided counsel. There is one Will, one Intelligence, one Power. “The Lord is King.”

Here is no circle of deities, as on Olympus, mutually

jealous, working one against the other, fighting one against the other. Here are no emanations, as in Gnosticism, no lower gods managing the world as God's viceroys, and bungling His policy.

One God is on the Throne, regnant, "working even until now." His hand paints every flower, and shapes every leaf, forms every bud on every tree. He watches like a mother over the insect which sleeps away the night in the bosom of a flower, throws open the golden gates of day, and draws around a tired world the curtains of the night. He measures out the drops of every shower, the whirling snowflakes, and the sands of the life of man. He watches over the fall of a sparrow, and the fate of a kingdom, and so rules every tide of human fortune, that, come joy or sorrow, a man may say, "It is the Lord."

The wisest of the heathen felt this to be the sheet-anchor of life.

"I am He that is, and was, and shall be," was the impressive inscription upon the great Temple of Isis in Egypt.

"What flows from His heart works on, and what He hath spoken stands for eternity," was the testimony of the Temple at Dendera.

"The world," says Plutarch, "has a mind, a reason, and a helmsman."

"God was, and is, and shall be," is the confession of Pausanias.

"Seated on loftiest Throne," sings Æschylus, "thence, though we know not how, He works His perfect will."

The Mohammedan legend tells us how He watches over things great and small, from King Solomon on

his throne to the little ant struggling through the rain.

Whenever we look forth on Nature we cannot help feeling, what Napoleon felt beneath the starry sky of Egypt, that the order of the heavens is sufficient proof of the strong will of God. "Gentlemen," he answers the sceptics, "your arguments are very fine, but who made all these?"

In a little while we share the poet's ecstasy:—

"Motionless torrents! silent cataracts!"

Who made you glorious as the gates of Heaven  
 Beneath the keen full moon? Who bade the sun  
 Clothe you with rainbows? Who with living flowers  
 Of loveliest blue spread garlands at your feet?  
 God! let the torrents like a shout of nations  
 Answer, and let the ice-plains echo, God!  
 God! sing, ye meadow streams, with gladsome voice.  
 Ye pine-groves, with your soft and soul-like sounds!  
 And they too have a voice, ye piles of snow,  
 And in their perilous fall shall thunder, God!"

2. But what is God? What is He like that sitteth upon the Throne? Simonides, asked to describe God, demanded first of all a day to prepare his answer, then a week, then a month, then a year, finally gave the matter up as impossible of solution.

And St. John does not tell us what God is like. He is One, because there is no room for more than one God; but St. John cannot describe God. He can only behold Him with the eyes of his spirit, and describe to us His attributes in symbols and figures such as the mind of man can comprehend.

He allows us to see the character of God, for that is

infinitely important. What avails it to have an omniscient God, if His character does not satisfy our souls! What avails it to have a god like Jupiter, whose attributes are those of a thief, an adulterer, a murderer! Man will never be better than his gods. We long, therefore, to know the character of God, for the promise is that we shall be perfect as our Father is in Heaven.

St. John describes the character of God by the symbol of the three precious stones, the *jasper*, the *sardius*, and the *emerald*; the white stone, the red, and the green.

The translucent gleam of the jasper is to teach the perfect purity and holiness of God. The whiteness is not the whiteness of snow, but the whiteness of heat. God's purity is the purity which gleams white through the fire of Judgment.

The red glow of the sardius is the symbol of God's love—not the scarlet of the beast, but the red-hot glow of love such as the painters and poets of old represented by flames of fire. God's heart is on fire for us, flaming with love.

And the green of the emerald circling like a rainbow round about the Throne reminds us at once of the rainbow given after the Flood, the emblem of hope, the green of the spring earth which has passed through the judgment of winter, and now looks forward to a joyous summer and a generous harvest.

We cannot have a better idea of the Character of God than that given us by these three stones, God, the God of holiness, of love, and of hope.

This revelation of the character of God came to St. John through Jesus Christ, Who teaches us further-

more that the character of God is our own ideal. In the walls of the City of God the jasper, the sardius and the emerald have their place as well as about the Throne, and the walls of the City of God are builded up of the souls of redeemed men. If we then would be living stones in the great temple of souls, we must conform our characters to that of God, striving after God's white purity with the hands of faith, striving after God's warm love with the perfect love of our human hearts, and rising by hope above all temptation and despair, praying that His mercy may save us, not from judgment, but through judgment unto His eternal Kingdom.

3. There is one more revelation of God necessary. Power and Character are well, but there is one question more. Does God trouble about us? St. John says emphatically, Yes. "I can," he would say, "through fellowship with Christ, reveal to you not only Power, not only Character, but also Providence. God concerns Himself with you." His whole experience with Christ has been one long lesson to this end.

Of this Providence there are three instruments placed before our minds.

I. Thunders, lightnings, and voices from the Throne.

II. Seven lamps of fire before the Throne.

III. The sea of glass before the Throne

What do these imply?

I. The Thunder and Lightnings remind us of Sinai, when God gave the Law. This is His first indication of interest in man, that He gives us Law.

And He is still the Lawgiver. His thunders sound

in our ears against sin, His voices speak to us through our consciences. His Lightnings gleam before our minds and intellects. "I am the Lord," He witnesses to man; "keep My laws."

II. The Seven lamps bring before our minds the Seven Spirits of God which run through all the earth, that is the perfect witness of the Spirit of God in the dispensation of the New Testament. The Lawgiver of the New Covenant comes with the flames of Pentecost to add to the confession "I ought" the power to say "I can." When we hear the thunders of Sinai we are afraid, but we pray, "Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law," and the fire of God's Spirit melts our hearts. So God shows His Providence not only in teaching us His will, but also in giving us grace to fulfil it.

III. The sea of glass which forms the floor of Heaven is the world before the feet and under the eyes of God. With men, that sea, as we learn in another place, is tossed with waves; then under the influence of God's judgments it is mingled with fire. But before God the sea of human destiny is forever clear as crystal. Human life to Him is no riddle. He who has created life sees His way to the perfecting of it. He sees beyond Time, and Death, and Hell to the day when His judgments which are like the great deep will be easy to understand.

Can we need greater comfort than that conveyed to us in such a revelation as this?

To know that God is able to help will give us courage to start out on the journey of life. Who will venture to resist His power? Shall we not rather harness ourselves to it, make it our own, and



so make ourselves, as the allies of God, omnipotent over sorrow and sin?

To know that God is holy, and loving and merciful will speak to us of the direction in which we are to struggle, and the voices from within which we must heed. Shall we not strive to conform ourselves to the ideal suggested by the jasper, the sardius, and the emerald?

To know that God Himself is helping us more than we ever wished to help ourselves, ought not this to shut up forever the dungeons of despair?

That God has given us a Law to keep,

That God has given us Grace wherewith we may keep that Law,

That He sees all our life spread before Him like a map, that He is looking into this space of eternity we call Time, and sees all as in a mirror, who would not believe in such a God? who does not find Him a God satisfying to every faculty of mind and spirit?

It is no wonder that St. John felt that Christ had revealed to him the "real God and the life which is eternal," and that he cried out with his latest utterance, "Little children, guard yourselves from the shadows."

And his assurance should be our own.

"There is an Eye which never sleeps  
Beneath the wing of night ;  
There is an Ear that never shuts  
When sink the beams of light ;  
There is an Arm which never tires  
When human strength gives way ;  
There is a Love which never fails  
When earthly loves decay."

### III

#### THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

*“ And round about the Throne were four-and-twenty thrones : and upon the thrones four-and-twenty elders sitting, arrayed in white garments ; and on their heads crowns of gold.”—REV. 4 : 4.*

**W**E have now seen what constitutes a real God, whom man can worship,—a God perfect in power, perfect in character, whose holiness is white as the jasper, whose love burns like the sardius, and around whom the emerald rainbow witnesses eternally to Divine mercy and human hope; a God Whose Providence is exhibited perpetually, Who sends forth the thunders, lightnings, and voices of Sinai to teach us His Law, Who gives the sevenfold Spirit of Pentecost, that we may incline our hearts to keep this Law, and Who sees in the mirror of the crystal sea the future destiny of the Creation He has made.

Let us now pursue further our reverent gaze into the opened Heaven, and see around the Throne the Ministry of the Ideal Church. May I remind you again that by the opened Heaven we mean, “ not the discovery of a distant or future paradise, but the revelation of the Kingdom of God which is in the midst of us, the Divine order which is hidden from the eye but apart from which nothing that the eye beholds has any meaning or substance” ?

Knowing what God is, and knowing that He cares for the world, it must necessarily follow that the world should desire to worship Him. The organization of this worship, among those who hear His thunders, receive His Spirit, and trust His Providence, is what we call the Church.

We ask then, "What is the aspect of the Church before God? What is its ideal? What its duty?"

The complete answer is exhibited in *tableau* in the words of the text.

The Apostle sees around the Throne four-and-twenty thrones (not seats, as in A. V.). On these thrones four-and-twenty elders are seated.

They are clothed with white garments.

They have on their heads crowns of gold.

They worship God by bending before Him, and casting at His feet their golden crowns with songs of praise.

Such is the *tableau* which gives us in marvelous reality the character, the purpose, and the duty of the Church in the presence of God.

Let us learn first the simple meaning of the symbols.

I. The thrones around the Throne of God signify the fact that because God reigns and rules, His people also shall reign with Him. There is a sphere in which the Church of God is to be co-regnant with God, not in any earthly and temporal sense; for "My Kingdom is not of this world," but in the spiritual realm. The Church is to be revealed as the woman, crowned with the luminaries of Heaven, with her foot upon the Dragon's head. "Ye also," said Christ to the Apostles, "shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The Divine Founder of the Church

commits of His power to the Church. "All power is given unto Me: go ye therefore."

This is an important fact, and marks the great gulf which separates so many pious people from the outward visible Body of Christ. The authority of the Church is from above, not below, not from the minister, not from the people, but from Christ. The congregation is not the personal following of the clergyman, but the body of Christ and members in particular. The minister is not the delegate of the congregation, but the minister of Christ, steward of the mysteries of God, responsible to Christ for the souls of those committed to his care. The Church is not the society of a number of men who band themselves together, win a position, an influence, a solidarity, and then offer it to Christ as a present, but on the contrary the body created by the Spirit of God to conquer the world, and divinely empowered to fulfil a divine commission.

II. The number of the thrones, probably suggested by the twenty-four courses of the Jewish priesthood, speaks of the perfect circle of ministry, the ministry which never fails, which is unbroken by death or change. It may also enshrine the idea of the union of the dispensations of the Old and New Testaments symbolizing the Church of all time, the Church of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Twelve Apostles. And the number twelve describes the completeness of the dispensation, composed as it is of the factors 3 and 4 ( $3 \times 4$  signifying the result of spirit working in the world, as  $3+4$  makes 7 the number of rest).

From whichever aspect we consider it, we have a picture of the whole Church before God. With the Eternal there is no time. The Church of God is ever

before Him. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob appear with Peter, James and John. The Church of all ages, of all climes, of all stages of development, unites to form the perfect Priesthood which reigns and worships before Him. It is a grand thought, and should help us to think of the Church in its corporate and historic character, as the sphere of grace, the guardian of truth, the ark of safety, as the body of redeemed humanity. Such a thought often before us would save us from much narrowness and misunderstanding. As the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb form the twelve courses of the walls of the New Jerusalem, so in our picture of the eternal world we see the Twelve Patriarchs and the Twelve Apostles forming one ever-serving ministry. Thus the symbols and services of the Church become to us not an "earthly machinery for scaling a distant Heaven, but the witness of a Heaven nigh at hand, of a God dwelling in the midst of His people, of His being surrounded by spirits who do His pleasure, hearkening to the voice of His words."

III. Next the character of the Church is shown to be twofold.

The elders are clothed with white garments down to the feet as Christ appears in the prologue to the Book. That is, they are clothed like Him, in the Priestly robe of the Temple of God. They have on their heads crowns of gold.

Thus the Church has the twofold function of Priests and Kings. It is, as St. Peter tells us, "a royal priesthood," or, as St. John says, "a kingdom of priests."

Let us keep this in mind—the Church has her royal and her priestly office.

I. She is *royal*, crowned because Christ is crowned.

The function of the Church in the world is not only to proclaim the Kingdom of God, but to realize the Kingdom of Man. Christ is the source of human power, and the Church is its sphere. The best Christian will be the best man, the strongest man. He will rule over Nature, over temptation, and over sin, the sin within and the sin without. He will rule over death, because he knows that death cannot separate him from the love of God.

And the Church is meant to enable man to attain this royalty, in the presence of God. Conquest over the last enemy of man, over death, can only come by conquest over sin, for the sting of death is sin, and no man is a king while he remains the slave of sin. The ambassador of Pyrrhus spoke of the Roman Senate as an assembly of kings. So says St. John of the ideal Church. Every man should be a king through Jesus Christ —

"The Son of God goes forth to war,  
A kingly crown to gain,"

and every "man who would be king" may accomplish his desire by following in his Master's train.

Christ's is a kingdom where every man is a king. General Gordon was wont to call his boys his "kings." It was because his love burned to make them grand, good men, victorious over sins and circumstances. Thus his love made them a kingdom. And God has appointed the same for us—His Kingdom and our own.

II. And the Church is also a *Priesthood*, "a royal priesthood." This is true in two ways, in a Godward and a manward aspect.

The priest in the Old Testament had two duties to perform, to offer sacrifices to God and to make intercession for man.

So the Church has as her priestly office —

1. To offer worship and adoration to God. In the Church, we are at the heart of the life of God. We move among the mysteries of God. We “are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all.” Oh! if we realized this, how very different our worship would be! Angels continually around us! The Holy Spirit within us! God before us accepting our willing sacrifice! It will be a wonderful day when, after this body is put off, we are clothed upon with higher faculties; but oh! it is more wonderful still to believe that we can already be in the “heavenly places” and dwell therein with Christ. The Heaven of the future is after all only the expansion and unfolding of the great things God hath already wrought for us and in us.

2. The manward part, in interceding for and helping man, teaching those who are ignorant and out of the way. This is a very solemn part of the duty God has committed to us. The Church is intended to be the golden link of society, to reveal God, to reflect Christ, to take of the leaves of the Tree of Life for the healing of the nations outside, to act as watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem, crying aloud day and night to tell of the good hand of our God upon us, to take the hand of the feeble and bring them to God, to be, in short, the very reincarnation of the Christ who makes atonement for the sins of the world. How far from this is the ideal of some Christians, who, occupied with their own salvation, think themselves dispensed from

all notice of the outside world, imagining, as the Jewish Church did of old, that God had chosen them for a salvation which was apart from service!

How truly grand an idea can we form of the Church of God as described by St. John, receiving all power from Christ, in His Name going forth to conquer, ruling over all the principalities and powers of evil, crushing underfoot the Dragon's head, and at the same time standing before God to present the hopes, the prayers, the aspirations of all mankind, standing like Phinehas between the living and the dead, pleading that God would spare His people, and then going forth to all those who are wounded and helpless on the road of life! Grand, I say, to conceive such a picture, but grander still to realize it!

Let us try individually, with no self-conceit, no thinking of the Church apart from Christ. Let us bend down from the royal thrones of our Christian privileges before the one Throne of the Eternal Father. Let us cast the crowns of our triumphant manhood before the feet of the Eternal Godhead, and praise Him with heart and voice who has made us and redeemed us, and is sanctifying us by His Holy Spirit. For the supreme glory is the glory of worship such as this —

“ Kings their crowns for harps resign,  
Crying as they strike the chords,  
' Take the Kingdom, it is Thine,  
King of Kings and Lord of Lords.'  
Round the altar priests confess ;  
If their robes are white as snow,  
'Twas the Saviour's righteousness  
And His blood that made them so.”



## IV

### THE IDEAL NATURE

*“And in the midst of the Throne, and round about the Throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face as of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.”—REV. 4 : 6-8.*

**W**E have now advanced several steps in the consideration of the world of realities as revealed to St. John.

We have seen something of the nature of the real God—a necessary step, since, as Hierocles said long ago, “the whole force of worship lies in the knowledge of that which is worshiped”; and, in the second place, we have seen the dispensation of God towards man as revealed in the picture of the Ideal Church. We saw there all dispensations gathered together into one—Man enthroned, crowned with glory and honour, Man as a Divine priesthood ever engaged in the worship of God and the service of man.

We now go one step further, and see another comprehensive picture unfolded before us—one, moreover, it is of the utmost importance we should keep before our eyes, viz., Universal Nature before the Throne of God.

There never was a time when Nature was more thoroughly being explored than now, a time when

men were so earnest and so honest in learning the lessons of the universe. In one direction we find a rivalry in the construction of enormous object-glasses for telescopes, and immense cameras for the photographing of the heavens; and in another direction a similar rivalry to obtain a higher power in the objectives of the microscope. One man spends his life in the investigation of the tongues of butterflies; another shuts himself up in the forests of Africa to learn the speech of gorillas. One condemns himself to years of exile in Polar seas, and another risks his life among African savages.

In our schools Natural Science is made easy and attractive, and now of almost every child, as of Agassiz, the poet's words are true,—

“Nature, the old nurse, took  
The child upon her knee,  
Saying, ‘Here is a story-book  
Thy Father has written for thee.  
Come wander with me,’ she said,  
‘Into regions yet untrod,  
And read what is still unread  
In the manuscripts of God.’”

But with all this it is very startling to see how little the religious nature of such studies is realized. How little do men and children alike seem aware that they are working or playing with “the living garment of God”—“a mighty sum of things forever speaking” and telling of the glory of the Creator of the universe.

What mistakes are made!

Some fancy that such subjects are entirely secular, and look with jealousy upon every fresh discovery,

as though it might perchance upset the truth as we have it from God.

Some make Nature a god in itself, and speak of "Holy Nature leading onward the kindred of the gods"—so falling into an idolatry as gross as that of the sun-worshiper.

Some make Nature a blind, pitiless force, working the way of fate, like a blind Samson grinding in the prison-house of the Philistines.

Some make it nothing but a haphazard aggregate of capricious atoms, the ultimate result of whose kaleidoscopic combinations can never be predicted—the sport of chance.

Some again speak of Nature as though it were a wound-up clock whose key has been given to the Angel of Time, a sort of machine which God made once, but for which He cares nothing now, revealing His presence but occasionally in what men call miracles.

That all these theories are wrong it is scarcely necessary to prove. Many would say to-day with some complacency, "Ah, we have grown to know better!" Let us see to-day that more than eighteen centuries ago Christ taught us better, that we have in the vision granted to St. John a picture of Nature which gives us the whole truth respecting the relation of God to His works.

Let us first form a mental visualization of the picture. Around the Throne are *four Living-ones* (not "beasts," as A. V. so unhappily renders it—*Zōon* not *θηρ*).

They are full of *eyes* before and behind, and each has six wings as in the vision of Isaiah. In form they

resemble respectively a *lion*, an *ox*, a *man*, and an *eagle*. As for their occupation, they are continually chanting before God the Trisagion,—

"Holy, Holy, Holy,  
Lord God, the Almighty,  
Who was, Who is, Who shall be."

I need not say that all the symbols employed are old and well worn in the literature of Judaism. St. John collects them from various parts of the Old Testament, and reclothes them for Christian use. Let us see briefly what they teach us about Nature.

I. *Nature circles around the Throne of God.*—It is not independent, not a goddess, not a department of the universe hostile to, or disowned by, God. Nature operates in the very presence of God, so that he who goes to study Nature goes before the Throne of Deity. All true students of Nature have felt this, from the Psalmist confessing, "The heavens declare the glory of God," to the latest explorer of the vastness of God's works. Truly, "the undevout astronomer is mad," and equally so "the undevout biologist" or "the undevout botanist."

II. *Nature is homogeneous and universal*, as is taught by the use of the number "four." It is not divided up into antagonistic powers, like the Nature conceived of by the Persians. Ormuzd and Ahriman, God and Satan, do not strive for ascendancy. The whole is God's—the darkness and the light. "I make the light, and I create the darkness." "He maketh the winds His ministers, and the flames of fire His messengers." "He rode upon the cherubim, and did fly; He came flying upon the wings of the wind."

III. *Nature is living.*—So we are taught by its expression in the “Living ones.” God’s purpose still throbs within the heart of the universe. His Spirit still inspires its manifold operations. His will lives in stars and suns, in meteors and comets, in winds and storms. They move obedient to His word. Gravitation is but the expression of Divine volition. As the Book of Wisdom tells us, God’s Almighty Word leaps down from Heaven out of His royal Throne to accomplish the effects of Nature.

IV. *Nature is full of eyes.*—It is not blind. It “looks before and after.” There is design behind, and there is purpose ahead. Even Science teaches us thus much. We do not need a God more powerful or more wise than Darwin’s “Natural Selection,” although we need more than Natural Selection to reveal to us the *love* of God. The more we study Nature, the more we shall see that far back in the primordial chaos there was a pattern revealed from God’s holy mount to the myriad atoms who were made to fulfil His purpose. And with regard to ourselves we have individually the conviction, “Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in Thy book were all my members written.”

V. *Nature is winged.*—Not only does Divine omniscience accompany Nature in its action, but the symbol of the wings tells us that the created work of God does not grovel in the dust, but soars “unweariedly to higher and ever higher heights of excellence.” Since the purpose of Nature is to reveal the character of God, it must ever ascend. What is this but what we learn in the doctrine of Evolution, a doctrine which shook some men’s faith when first announced, but

which it now seems difficult to conceive of apart from the Christian revelation ?

VI. *And Nature's wings are sixfold*, or rather, as described in Isaiah's vision, arranged in three pairs. "With twain they covered their face, with twain they covered their feet, and with twain they did fly."

Two wings, that is, for *worship*, for reverent veiling of the face in the presence of God.

Two wings for *waiting*, for restraining the feet from unbidden activity.

Two wings for *working*, for flying forth on the wings of the wind upon the errands of God.

Such is the service of Nature, the perfect service—*Reverence, Restraint, and Activity*. That is the model of all service, the way to do God's will on earth, as it is done in Heaven.

VII. But what is meant by the grotesque shapes which are borne by the "living ones" ?

St. John took his images from the Eastern idea of the cherubim or griffins—composite creatures intended to represent the manifold aspects of God in Nature. We find the image used in many parts of the Old Testament. God placed cherubim at the gates of Eden. They were placed above the mercy-seat of the Ark in the Tabernacle. They appear in Ezekiel's vision as forming the living chariot of Nature. It is from this vision that St. John borrows them, making them four instead of fourfold.

They represent to us the *manifold aspects of Nature*.

The *Lion* brings before us the courage, majesty, and peerless might of God in Nature, the Assyrian ideal of Deity, God going forth to judge, searching for His

prey, rending every evil beast which opposes the path of man.

The *Ox* (or Bull-calf) brings out the Egyptian ideal of God in Nature, the ideal of usefulness, patience, industry, the power in the universe which turns all toil into fruitfulness, all sacrifice into gain.

The *Man* witnesses to the Greek ideal,—Nature luminous with wisdom and intelligence, exhibiting reason and forethought, wisely ordered and humanely inspired.

And the *Eagle* embodies symbolically the Roman ideal, and indeed the ideal of the West generally, Nature working out a “progressive evolution in the purposes of God,” working upwards with intelligence, penetration, and discernment to the central Sun of the universe.

In these seven points is gathered up the inspired conception of Nature, and the whole is put before us, not as a fossil into whose bosom men dig, turning over the strata and saying “Here’s law, where’s God?” but a living creation worshiping God, praising Him as our “*Benedicite*” suggests it should, and crying, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts; the whole earth is full of Thy Glory.”

Have we not here a wonderful picture, and one which puts a new force into St. Paul’s words, “The earnest expectation of the Creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subject to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God?”

But what has all this to do with us practically? The example of Christ ought to enable us easily to see. Christ is not only a part of Nature, but "the first-born of all creation," the epitome and the goal of all Nature; He is Nature in its ideal conception, and Nature in its ultimate perfection—the absolute affirmation and consummation of God's design. Earth, says a Chinese proverb, is "Yes, no," but Heaven is "Yes, yes." So Christ is Nature's eternal "Yea."

And in Him we are able to behold all the ideal characteristics of Nature realized. He is Nature *living, ascending, full of eyes* before and behind. His is the perfect service, the *service of worship, of waiting and of work*. And as the four Evangelists have in turn regarded Him, He is the expression of every attribute of God's perfect work,—the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Man of infinite wisdom and of sorrow, acquainted with all human grief; the Ox enduring, suffering, offered up as sacrifice; and the Eagle soaring up into the counsels of the Eternal Father, the Word of God, and *with* God.

And as His followers, we are called upon to be Nature's epitome in the same way. *Physiologically*, we are this in very fact. We are meant to be so *spiritually*. We are meant to help on the redemption of all creation, to lift up all things to God, to give God our life, to stand worshiping before His Throne, to stand waiting for His orders, to go forth winged on His service, to continue in His sight strong and royal like the lion, patient and suffering as the ox, wise and benevolent as the man, soaring and aspiring as the eagle.

Then shall our praise be perfect before God. The groaning of struggle and trial shall issue in the



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Trisagion of praise for glory perfected. Our eternal song shall be in unison with all created things :—

“Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.”

“O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord : Praise Him, and magnify Him forever.”

“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of Thy glory ; glory be to Thee, O Lord most high.”

## V

### THE SEVEN-SEALED BOOK

*“And I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the Throne a book written within and on the back, close sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a great voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no one in the Heaven or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look thereon. And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon.”—REV. 5: 1-4.*

**I**T must have been no small consolation to the Apostle to see what has already been unveiled in the fourth chapter of the Apocalypse. He looked up from a world bathed in blood, a world reeking with corruption and shaking with earthquakes, wars, and revolutions, to a world serene in the brightness of God's presence, stable and strong upon the hills of holiness. Rising on the wings of the spirit from a world daily growing worse, a world in which the state of the Church daily grew more hazardous, it must have been an indescribable satisfaction for St. John to see the vision of a Throne set high in Heaven, a government whose energies were full of eyes of purpose and wings of power. It must have come to him with a peace and hope which made him as “the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” to those who sought his counsel.

But there is more to come.

St. John looks again at Him who sits upon the Throne, and perceives in His right hand a book, or rather a roll written upon both within and without, and sealed with seven seals, that is completely and closely sealed.

There is but little difficulty in determining the first meaning of this.

St. John takes the symbol from the prophets of his nation.

In Jer. 36 : 2 we read how the prophet, at God's direction, sends a roll to King Jehoiakim, full of God's decrees of judgment against the idolatrous King and nation.

In Ezek. 2 : 9, 10, a hand is sent to Ezekiel, and lo, a roll of a book is therein. "And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe."

And in Zech. 5 : 1, the prophet is shown a flying roll containing the judgments of God against the wicked of the land.

Therefore we may safely say that we have in St. John's vision the book of God's eternal decrees, the counsel of His will, the purpose of God with regard to the Church and the world, as exhibited in His dealings, first towards Jerusalem, and secondly towards the Roman Empire.

When a decree was promulgated, to make it of certain authority, it was written and signed. So the Decalogue was graven upon tables of stone. So the Babylonian princes caused King Darius to make a decree and cause it to be written, signed, and sealed with his own signet, that it might be like the decrees

of the Medes and Persians, which alter not. So again, when Christ appealed especially to the eternal laws of God, He said, "It is written," "Γέγραπτι"—"*It standeth written.*"

Thus the immutable decrees of God are said to be written. Many of us have been puzzled to imagine how the freewill of God could coexist with the freewill of man. It is one of those paradoxes against which we inevitably run in pursuing any metaphysical question beyond a certain point. A straight line infinitely produced becomes a circle. The best proof of the belief that freewill in God and in man does in either case exist lies in the impossibility of believing one without the other,—in believing that God has freewill, while man is only a slave, an automaton governed by a tyrannical fate; or that man has freewill, while God's plans may be eternally baffled by human choice. We may see, too, some glimpses of a solution in learning that man is only free as he gets free from the bonds of sin, and that his highest freedom is in power to do the will of God. The liberty of the sons of God is the liberty to do what God wishes His children to do, the liberty to obey the voice of the Spirit speaking within.

And from such a point of view the belief in God's decrees need never savor of fatalism and pre-damnation. As an able writer puts the matter: "Many of us have been jealous of the doctrine that God has a written plan for each separate human life, to which every will must bow by grim necessity. We have regarded such a doctrine as fatal to freedom, to morality, to religion, and as time has passed our contention has been justified by an ever-increasing concurrence of opinion. But we have had no jealousy of the doctrine

that God has foreordained what He Himself shall bring to pass—that God has settled plans, the counsel of His own unerring wisdom, by which He ever works and guides the world to its certain destiny. Such a faith is of prime necessity when men are called upon to struggle for the true and right in the face of odds that might well appal the stoutest heart. It was a faith essential to the earliest pioneers of Gospel truth, as they flung themselves into the midst of savage hordes to conquer or to die. Without this faith the fires of persecution would have withered the spirits of our own reforming forefathers. Instead of battling against mighty odds with a faith that rarely died, and a strength like the very strength of God, because they held themselves to be guided by a Will that was invincible, they must needs have yielded to despair and crept into their mountain caves to die like beaten dogs. Through the faith that their cause was God's and that God marches to certain victory, the weakest was made mighty to labour and to endure.”<sup>1</sup>

The main distinction which prevents such a doctrine from degenerating into fatalism is the assurance that the Book of decrees is in God's *right hand*—that is, held by the instrument of His almighty power. God is able to bring what He has willed to good effect.

In Greek mythology Zeus himself is subject to an overshadowing fate. In the Scandinavian Eddas Odin and all the Æsir are powerless to alter the decrees of the fateful Norns. But in Christianity the legislative and executive branches of Divine rule are in One—one all-wise Will, one almighty Arm.

And, because this is so, we may be content to learn

<sup>1</sup> Brown: “The Great Day of the Lord,” p. 34.

that nothing can be added to or taken away from God's dispensation with regard to the world. His book is written within and without. There is no space for further writing. No man can add to what God has decreed.

How very often it seems as though men have been making history for themselves, as though men like Cæsar, Luther, and Napoleon were by their own individual prowess and will diverting the whole current of events. Yet there needs only a century or two to elapse before it might be maintained, on the other hand, that they had been but puppets in the hand of destiny. Both views are wrong. Men are neither the makers of history nor the puppets of fate. But the interplay of the freewill of God and that of man brings about in the end what God has foreordained, and no line is added to the Divine writing.

And, for the present, the roll is sealed, close sealed—concealed from every eye but His who sits upon the Throne.

It is one of the commonplaces of moralizing to speak of this—to say how little man can foresee the future, to show how in all ages men have strained their eyes in the darkness and have seen nothing but visions of the night, the creation of their dreams.

The cry of all the ages has been, "Who can open this book? Who can break the seals which lock its contents from the eyes of men?" And no one in Heaven, or in earth, or under the earth, with the one exception St. John is soon to relate, has been able to accomplish this task.

On this account the world has been full of weeping. There has been such consternation as that which seized

the nobles of Babylon in the palace of Belshazzar when they saw writing on the wall which they could neither interpret nor read.

It has been the lament of half the world's poets and philosophers that the counsels of God are hid by so dense a cloud that the human spirit is baffled in its struggle to pierce the veil. Consequently, in all ages, not least in our own, the world has demanded and paid for its augurs, its prophets, its necromancers, its astrologers, its fortune-tellers, and its wizards.

Yet the times and the seasons are kept in the Father's hands.

And there is a solution.

What that solution is we shall see in our next chapter, but, so much we may say for the present, the Book of God may be read, and shall be read when One appears who has "a perfect apprehension of the mind of God," and "a perfect apprehension of the wants and longings of the human heart." Intimate relationship with God will supply the needed knowledge; intimate relationship with man will supply the interpretation for human ears.

So the tears—human as they are—may be dried, while Hope poises above us with halcyon wings.

Yes, meanwhile, while we wait for the great solution, surely we may learn the lesson of the old patriarchs who themselves received not the promises, yet reached out into the darkness, and trusted God's love and wisdom in the dim future of the unknown life. Surely we may trust God as they did.

When God's decrees are made known to us, the revelation will not be all sweet. The open book which God will set before us, not only to read but to digest,

not only to look upon but to eat, will be both sweet and bitter—sweet in the knowledge of His love, bitter in the knowledge that His judgment too must have its place in us. So St. John found it for himself and for Jerusalem; so Ezekiel found it for himself and for the Jerusalem of his day; so must we find it for ourselves.

But knowing the need of the bitter as well as of the sweet, knowing that His judgments are medicinal, educative, strengthening and purifying, we may trust Him.

“Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown;  
Jesus we know—and He is on the Throne.”

Yes, “He is on the Throne.” The secret of our life and its discipline is not in the hand of some one hostile to us. Our fortune is not governed by some unlucky or baleful star. It is in the hands of Him who is

“Too wise to err, too good to be unkind.”

One is coming who shall reveal it all, and then we shall know as we are known. A day will come—it cannot be very long for any of us—when every seal shall be broken, and the whole book of life spread out before our eyes.

And this, I think, will to our eyes be the strangest part of the revelation, that although we shall see clearly our life to have been guided and directed by the Providence of God, we shall also recognize that every line has been traced by our own hand as well. No interference has taken place with our own freewill, yet every graven character is our own. Our life has been written as the impalpable wind writes the record of the anemometer.



May God grant that long before this revelation is given us we may have had from the Lamb slain on Calvary light upon and insight into our present life, to know its secret and its power!

## VI

### THE SLAUGHTERED LAMB

*“And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome, to open the book and the seven seals thereof. And I saw in the midst of the Throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth. And He came, and He taketh it out of the right hand of Him that sat on the Throne.”—REV. 5: 5-7.*

**W**E were left weeping, because no one in Heaven, or earth, or under the earth could break the seals of the Book of Mystery in the right hand of God. They were human tears for what seemed the complete failure of man to compass the designs of God.

But we were also left to comfort ourselves with the faith of the Old Testament, to trust in God, to repose in God's faithfulness and truth, to rest in the confidence that in His right hand the record of life was safe.

That was something. It is indeed something to have attained a share of the faith of Abraham, “the father of the faithful,” of Joseph, and of Job. But after the Old Testament comes the New. “God hath provided some better thing for us.” There is a new answer. So much the Old Testament itself promises us. The dying Joseph encourages his children, “God

will surely visit you," and the afflicted Job triumphs over the corruption of his flesh with the assurance, "I know that My Redeemer liveth."

In accordance with this St. John sees one of the elders—one of the representatives of this Old Testament Church—come forward to proclaim the wiping away of tears in the arrival of a Champion for distressed and bewildered mankind. Who shall it be? Moses, the giver of the Law? One of the old prophets? Nay, but One of whom both the Law and the Prophets speak.

So he goes on to proclaim Him by two titles, one from the Law,

“The Lion of the tribe of Judah,”

and one from the Prophets,

“The Root of David.”

They are titles which connect the Deliverer with the brightest hopes of Israel, the grandest promises of the old prophetic word. He who is coming is the conquering seed of David, the man of war, and of Judah, “Chosen to be ruler.” He is “the mystery which hath been hid from all ages and generations, but now hath been manifested to the Saints.” In Him the darkness is passing away and the true light already shineth.”

So much could the seers of the Old Covenant say of the coming King, pointing Him out as John the Baptist pointed out the Christ on the banks of Jordan.

But in what form does the Lion-stem of David present Himself to St. John? Ah! just as all Israel was astonished at Him, so may St. John well have been surprised. For the elder spoke of the Lion, and be-

held a Lamb; he spoke of a conquering Hero, and beheld a slaughtered Victim.

What did this mean?

It was not altogether contradictory of Jewish expectation. As the light of prophecy got clearer, the inspired Jew could see that the Deliverer to spring from his down-trodden and suffering race must be in one respect like the race itself, a sufferer, a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief.

So although still proclaiming Him as Prophet, Priest, and King, the Evangelical Prophet predicts of Him that He is to go as a lamb to the slaughter and like a dumb sheep into the hands of the shearers.

And though many in Israel heeded not the words, yet some did, or St. John Baptist would never have cried as he did, "Behold the Lamb of God."

So again we find in the Book of Enoch—written, at least in parts, B. C.—the Messiah spoken of in one place as a sheep appointed for sacrifice, and in another as "a white steer." Again in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs we read of the Virgin appearing in Judah, out of whom shall come a Lamb unspotted. Against Him the beasts of the earth contend, but the Lamb treads them underfoot and reigns. And in the same work Joseph is represented as calling the Messiah "the Lamb of God."

The Idea then was one of long growth, rooted in the great central doctrine revealed by God in Christ that the law of Sacrifice is the law of Life.

To develop and illustrate this wonderful revelation, a revelation which must inevitably revolutionize a man's whole conception and plan of life, we have presented before us seven characteristics of the Lamb,

which taken together mark His perfect fitness to be the Solver of the problems of existence.

I. The Lamb has been *slain—slaughtered*. There in Heaven the red wounds show, before angels and men and God Himself. Christ wears His wounds not as marks of failure, but as gems of victory.

II. The Lamb is *in the midst of the Throne*—at the heart of the omnipotence of God. As a writer already quoted puts it: “Blind unbelief so proud to be ‘unduped of fancy,’ says,

‘He is dead. Far hence He lies  
In the lone Syrian town ;’

but to those who have eyes to see, God has made it plain that Christ has really ascended up to imperial power and splendor in the heavens.

“God is never in the future to be severed from this Lamb. His Throne is never to be seen apart from Jesus crucified; in its very thunderings and lightnings there is the spirit of gentleness and love that suffered unto death that we might live.”<sup>1</sup> In all directions the energies of God flow out through the principles of self-sacrifice and mercy. God’s Throne is stablished upon the principle for which Christ died.

III. He is *in the midst of the Living-ones*. From Nature the Christ arises, not unnatural, not a monstrosity, but Nature’s crown, the supremely Natural, the Centre and Topstone of the universe. He is “the first-born of all creation; for in Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones

<sup>1</sup> Brown : “The Great Day of the Lord.”

or dominions or principalities or powers ; all things have been created through Him, and unto Him, and He is before all things ; and in Him all things consist." <sup>1</sup>

IV. He is *in the midst of the mystic circle of the elders*. He arises not only from Nature but from the Church of God. He is the true development of the operation of God in all dispensations, the true end and fulfilment of all the religious aspirations of men. For "He is the Head of the Body, the Church : who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead ; that in all things He might have the preëminence. For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fulness dwell ; and through Him to reconcile all things unto Himself, having made peace through the blood of His Cross ; through Him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens."

V. And though a slain Lamb, He is mighty to rule. The government of the Lamb is not to be one of weak amiability or incompetent benevolence. *He has seven horns*.

The horn in old Hebrew poesy is always the symbol of force. Hannah confesses in her song her belief that Jehovah "shall give strength unto His King, and exalt the horn of His Anointed." Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made horns of iron to typify the might of Ahab against Syria. <sup>2</sup>

Here the seven horns is the symbol of perfect strength. The Lamb is mighty to subdue all things

<sup>1</sup> Col. 1 : 16, 17.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Sam. 2 : 10 ; 1 Kings 22 : 11 ; cf. also Zech. 1 : 18 ; Ps. 75 : 10 ; 22 : 21.

unto God. Thor in vain attempted to bind Fenris-wulf with the strongest chains ; but Tyr, sacrificing his own hand, bound the monster with threads of gossamer. So does the sacrifice of the Lamb of God bind the fury of hell. The lords of this world must cry, "Galilæan, Thou hast conquered." The idols of this world must tumble from their pedestals and be cast to the moles and the bats. The symbol of a malefactor's death shall become the glory of a rejuvenated world, the cross of shame the banner of conquest.

VI. Further, the Lamb is invested not only with powers of judgment, but with powers of quickening. *He has seven eyes*—that is, He is dowered with Divine omniscience, to discern even to the thoughts and intents of the heart. He is infinite in wisdom as He is infinite in power. If a man would go to school to learn the wisdom of God, he must go to the school of the Lamb, and sit beside the Cross, and learn that

" Knowledge by suffering entereth,  
And life is perfected by death."

VII. And, lastly, we have described to us the great act by which the kingdom of the universe is committed to the Son of Man. The Lamb takes—"*hath taken*" that is, *takes to keep*—the book out of the right hand of Him that sits upon the Throne. Here we behold the Old Testament revelation dissolving into the new light of the Gospel morning. The dispensation of angels, of Moses, of Aaron, of Joshua, is changing into the dispensation of the Son, who as master of the house is taking His authority to

reign. "The Lamb is now the power of God. Henceforth it must be known that all highest power must take the form of love, and that they alone know God who see Him through this once suffering, now triumphant Mediator."

The apotheosis of the Lamb we shall consider soon, but we may well pause here to note that St. John is describing to us in an apocalyptic form and from an ideal standpoint the very facts which the Church commemorates on Palm Sunday. As we see our Lord riding into Jerusalem upon an ass, surrounded by the Apostles and the Multitude, riding on to die, what is it but the advance of the Lamb out of the midst of God's Throne, out of the midst of Nature, out of the midst of the Church, to receive from the hand of God the seven-sealed book, to the end that gazing upon the Cross we all might read in large letters the story of God's loving purpose in the destiny of man?

Are we not convinced that here we have that which puts all our doubts and fears to shame? God's "love is discovered almighty." Not only does sacrifice commend itself to us as heroism, as worthy of monuments and poems and Victoria Crosses, but it commends itself too as the highest wisdom and the highest power. By such means the universe itself is governed, even by the eternal crucifixion of God for man.

And such must be our course if we would hereafter bear the palm and wear the crown of victory.

Here the mockery, the crown of thorns, and the awful scourge; there the victory, the joy, the knowledge of the secrets of God.



Those who shun the Cross may spend their days and nights in toilsome study of Nature's secrets, but they will find the seven-sealed book closed forever, and will end their days as despairing pessimists; but they who humbly take up the Cross and follow Christ will learn in their pilgrimage a "wisdom the weary schoolmen never knew," and at the Lamb's great feast on high will join in the song of Nature, and of the Church and of all the jubilant host of Heaven.

Then the victory, the knowledge of the hidden counsels of God, and the reception from the right hand of God of the royalty and dominion of glorified humanity.

Shall we not strive to make this ours ?

"Up and follow, Christian men,  
Press through toil and sorrow ;  
Spurn the night of fear, and then,  
Oh, the glorious morrow !  
Who will venture on the strife ?  
Blest who first begin it !  
Who will grasp the hand of life ?  
Warriors, up and win it !"

## VII

### THE TRIUMPH OF THE LAMB

*“ And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the four-and-twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art Thou to take the book and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with Thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth.*

*“ And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels round about the Throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a great voice Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing.*

*“ And every created thing which is in the heaven and on the earth and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things that are in them, heard I saying, Unto Him that sitteth on the Throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion, forever and ever. And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the elders fell down and worshiped.”—REV. 5: 8-14.*

**W**E have now come to the close of our seven-fold picture. We have seen God revealed in His almighty power and wisdom; and we have seen before Him the Sea of human destiny clear as crystal and smooth as glass; around Him we

have beheld the double circle of Elders and Living ones representing the universal Church and universal Nature; proceeding from Him we saw the sevenfold Spirit of holiness going forth into all the earth; in His right hand we saw the seven-sealed Book of Mystery. And in our last chapter we saw the Lamb slain from the foundation of the earth—that is, the eternal principle of sacrifice revealed in the death of Christ as a means whereby the Book of God might be opened for man, and man permitted to know the meaning of life.

It is true that God seems to keep some things veiled from us. There are secrets still, for

“it is not well for life  
To learn too soon the lovely secrets kept  
For them that die.”

But it is indeed true that, when we know Christ, there is no more seven-sealed book for us. We have then

“Enough for guidance and for victory  
O'er doubts and fears, enough for quiet rest;  
And if some veil'd response we cannot read,  
It is not hid from Him—this is enough indeed.”

And as a fitting close to such a revelation as this, we have the magnificent description of the universal praise given to the Lamb for His victory.

The description is ideal, but it sets the standard for our praise. Our worship will be pleasing to God just in the degree in which it unites with this.

Let us see of what this grand outburst of praise consists.

The Lamb is on the Throne, clothed with the royalty of Heaven and earth, and all ranks and orders

of created things are present to offer before Him their tribute of praise.

First comes Nature, represented by the Living ones. She has groaned, with man, in travail of spirit, waiting for the redemption of all creation, and now she too may share in the victory. And do we not feel the truth of this on Easter Day? Do we not feel Nature bearing triumphant witness to the victory achieved through death and pain over death and sin?

“Earth with Joy confesses, clothing her for Spring,  
All good gifts return with her returning King;  
Bloom in every meadow, leaves on every bough,  
Speak His sorrows ended, hail this triumph now:  
Hell to-day is vanquish'd! Heaven is won to-day!  
Months in due succession, days of lengthening light,  
Hours and passing moments praise Thee in their flight;  
Brightness of the morning, sky and fields and sea,  
Vanquisher of darkness, bring their praise to Thee:  
‘Welcome, happy morning!’ age to age shall say.”

Is it not for this reason that we bring into God's house the beauties of God's earth, the flowers and the foliage which not only witness to the victory over the winter's death, but witness also to the triumph of the Lamb, because they tell us that only through the winter's death can come the life of spring?

Next comes the Church, represented by the four-and-twenty Elders, to add its voice to that of Nature. The Church reaches the height of her great mission when she proclaims this glorious truth. All over this round world, in every language, among all peoples, nations, tongues, and kindreds, the four-and-twenty hours, clothed in light, move like ministering priests

to awake from the universal Church her Easter song.  
From east to west, through every zone, the anthem  
rises to the Lamb,—

“ Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us ;  
Therefore let us keep the feast.”

We bring forth our *harps*—the symbol of our praise  
—giving God the best of our talent, our heart’s desire  
to tune our voices according to the melodies of  
Heaven.

We bring our bowls of odorous *incense*,—the sym-  
bol of our prayers, praying that the Easter message  
may speak with all power to our hearts and save us  
from the death of sin to the life of righteousness.

Our song is called a *new song*, because it is the  
pæan of new life won for man, because it tells of tid-  
ings so good that for very joy we scarce can credit  
them, that the hungry maw of death is stopped, that  
Death, “ the old Serpent’s son,” which had once “ a  
sting like its sire,” has now been captive led and made  
a porter at the gate of life. As the Jews of old made  
their new songs when they came back from captivity  
by Babylon’s sad waters, so we too know a new song,  
the song of the new creation, the song of redemption  
by the blood of the Lamb, a redemption by which all  
who partake of it are raised to higher glory and fairer  
beauty.

The “ new song ” is of three strains. Worthy is  
the Lamb—

- I. For He was slain,
- II. And hath redeemed us,
- III. And hath made us a kingdom, and priests,  
that we may reign upon the earth.

And it awakes, as all true praise must awake, a responsive strain from multitudes of whom we have so far not yet heard. Beyond the Throne, and beyond the circle of the Living-ones, and beyond the circle of the Elders the Apostle sees and hears a wider circle extending to the utmost bounds of universal space, a multitude in number ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.

For indeed true praise has no bound, no limit, in time and space, but makes fresh circles, widening for all eternity. Down to the unseen depths of being there can be but one response. Wherever the victory of Christ is proclaimed in the highest Heaven, or in Hell deeper than plummet could sound, God must be revealed as the God of reconciliation and of progress, of increasing light and of larger liberty.

Sevenfold is the ascription of the Lamb—that is, perfect is His praise. The Lamb is worthy to receive the Power, and the Riches, and the Wisdom, and the Might, and the Honor, and the Glory, and the Blessing.

Then to the universal Song—so spontaneous that it is joined in by everything in Heaven, in the earth, under the earth, and in the sea, so universal that there is no room for any discordant or dissentient voice, so omnipresent that there is no place for any opposing power—there is added the great AMEN of creation. "Amen, Amen!" is the cry of Nature, and the glorified Church has her heart too full for speech—she can only fall down in silent worship.

Handel doubtless had this passage in his mind when to his oratorio of the "*Messiah*," trying to bring it to a worthy close, after telling in sonorous music the

story of the Saviour's Passion and victory, he added his wonderful "Amen Chorus." But moving as that chorus is, how does it fade away like silence before this inspired conception of the whole universe, from the remotest star to the things around us and beneath our feet, one in feeling, one in heart and soul and expression, uttering in all the multitudinous voices of Nature, like the sound of many waters, which musicians say is the only sound in Nature which includes all the notes of music, the great Amen to the creative and redemptive work of God!

Oh! let us join in that song and bear its strains with us all our life; not like shell-music heard faintly and from afar, but like the music of the spheres in which we live, and of which our life forms a high and harmonious part.

Blind are we, deaf are we, dead are we, if we do not know the triumph for which the swelling song of Heaven rises to God. If St. John could know it when earth seemed keeping the carnival of hell, if the Churches of Asia could know it when the Dragon seemed enthroned and the Wild Beast had power to kill and devour and destroy, when to be a Christian was to drink to the dregs the cup of the world's hatred and despite, how much more should we know, when eighteen centuries of Christian history are behind us to teach that the Lamb is the mightiest power the earth has known, that He rules the destinies of nations, and that the Kingdom which will not acknowledge Him shall fall and perish!

When the Lamb of God beheld the nations from the Cross, He knew that before Him lay His inheritance. He could say, in the beautiful words of Browning,—

"So shall I lift up in My pierced hands,  
Beyond the reach of grief and guilt, . . .  
The whole creation."

"And we are witnesses of these things" to-day  
Knowing what He hath done for us, and in us, and in  
the world around us, knowing that this is only the  
earnest of glories yet to come, we can indeed add our  
*Amen* to creation's chorus,—*"Worthy is the Lamb that*  
*was slain. He hath redeemed us from the death. He*  
*hath bought us for God with His blood. He hath*  
*made us a kingdom and priests, that we may reign*  
*upon the earth."*

"This hath He done, and shall we not adore Him;  
This shall He do, and can we still despair?  
Come, let us quickly fling ourselves before Him,  
Cast at His feet the burthen of our care;  
Flash from our eyes the glow of our thanksgiving,  
Glad and regretful, confident and calm,—  
Then through all life, and what is after living,  
Thrill to the music of Creation's psalm."





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