

of a direct exertion of omnipotence. But not so the conformity of their spirits to His glorious spirit : that must be accomplished in the world that now is, the world of probation. It is the glory of our inheritance as sons that we shall see God in His incarnate Son : God, otherwise than in the face of His incarnate Son, "no man hath seen, nor can see." Then if we are to "see Him as He is," not as reflected from the mirror of His word but in Himself and face to face, we must be first made "like Him": like Him in purity, like Him in righteousness, like Him in the utter, perfect, and eternal destruction and absence of sin. The apostle leaves the filling up of the argument to us, to our faith under the influence of the "unction from the Holy One," by which we "know all things." The death of all life that is not "the life" which he hath who "hath the Son" must take place before we can be said to be "like Him;" for purity like His and righteousness like His both imply the spiritual life of which these are only attributes. But there is no provision for this beyond the range of the present life. There is no sanctifying process in the interval between death and the day when we shall "see Him as He is." There is no "doing of righteousness" beyond the grave. Nor is there in death physical any virtue to annihilate the sinful life of nature which has come to us through the fall. All this argumentation the holy apostle leaves, I say, to be supplied by us. He sums the whole in the text : "He was manifested to take away our sins. And in Him is no sin." To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory for ever. Amen.

## THE INTERIOR FEAST.



“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock : if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne.

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”—REV. iii. 20, 21, 22.

THESE are the last words of our Saviour's new communications from heaven : wherein He speaks, not as formerly in His visible person, but by the Holy Ghost. It is His voice that we hear, and not another's : “I stand and knock.” And yet it is said, “He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.” In fact these epistles are really a continuation of the four Gospels, adapted to the change that took place with Pentecost. It is the same Jesus ; the tone and accent are the same ; the style and address unchanged throughout. And, if we did not know what has taken place in the interval, we might suppose that the Lord was visiting His churches in person ; and that He was addressing to them warnings and promises just as He used to administer to the old church in the temple or His new church as represented by the apostles and disciples. That almost perfect identity we must keep in mind throughout.

Hence it will not be regarded as fanciful to say that these last words of the new Gospel are in precisely the same key as the last words of the old Gospel. The final promise was that He would be the Indwelling Saviour and Lord of each of His true disciples : "Abide in Me and I in you." "I will come unto him and manifest Myself unto him." Do we not hear in our text the very echo of these words? They are precisely the same with a slight change of expression, and the circumstances and context surrounding them are the same. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to give us that ear to hear which He seeks, and then to speak these words to our hearts : words which offer to us the blessedness of the hidden life in secret fellowship with our Lord.

### I.

We hear the same Jesus as of old ; the same by this token, that He is still looking for individual devotion in the midst of the crowd : the crowd being the Laodicean church, whereas it used to be the multitudes in Galilee and Jerusalem and the temple. You recall the old familiar appeal to the individual made by our Lord when "there went great multitudes with Him ; and He turned and said unto them, If any man come to Me!" Always in the enthusiastic, demonstrative, unthinking masses He sought this man and that, the one among the many. Now observe how precisely this is reproduced here. The Lord is in His church, with its multitudes. He walks in the midst of the candlesticks. He is marking all that passes. He is the central Presence,

around which, around Whom, all gather. But He does not know the crowd, even though a baptized crowd, as such. It might almost seem as if He was indifferent to the congregation as a whole, so anxious is He to impress it upon all that He seeks a home in the individual heart. He walks in every church as in a temple, fulfilling the prophetic word, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them;" but He desires to make a temple of each of its members. "I stand at the door and knock": if these words refer to the outer door of the church, or the temple, or the house of the Lord, they certainly also refer to the door of the heart of each person within it. Thus the last saying of our Lord, still and for ever reverberating through the assembly of His people, is, "If any man hear My voice!" Let every ear be attuned to hear it now!

Here we must pause to make one thing plain: this implies no disparagement or undervaluation of the church as such. You may be sure that these words give no encouragement to those who think that interior fellowship with Christ is everything, and that external fellowship with Him among His people is nothing or comparatively nothing. Remember that constantly throughout the New Testament the indwelling of Christ by the Spirit has a twofold significance. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." "He, the Holy Spirit, shall abide with you for ever." This for the indwelling among us: in the church as a corporate body, inhabited by Christ precisely as the spirit of a man inhabits his bodily organization. But again, "Abide in Me and I in you,"

“He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit,” “I will come unto him and make My abode with him.” This for the indwelling in us : in the personal soul, heart or spirit of the man who loves his Lord and keeps His commandments.

The truth of our lesson is that the Lord seeks the individual in the visible church. Not a word is said about His going up and down the earth, seeking His rest in isolated souls. As He did not go beyond the Jewish congregation in the days of His flesh, but sought His sheep one by one among the lost sheep of Israel, so He seeks them now within the fold of the baptized. Our text is spoken within the church of Laodicea. I do not say that He never meets by the wayside—in some Gaza, or desert—a stray Ethiopian. But these exceptional and scattered cases we have not here to do with. The lesson is that in the midst of His visible assembly, joined to Him externally by a confession of faith and sacred ordinances of worship, the Lord seeks His own one by one : that they may be His both inwardly and outwardly for ever.

## II.

But it is not simply that the Lord seeks the individual in the midst of the crowd. There is more than that here. His offer of His interior presence follows a stern and sharp rebuke of the external formality, hypocrisy, coldness, apathy, self-complacency, self-deception, and spiritual blindness of His people : that is, their general lack of all interior religion.

However we cling to the blessed thought of the

Lord's ever-anxious, affectionate knocking at the door of the individual heart, we cannot but feel that this knocking suggests the Judge who gives warning of His judgment. He knocks at the door of the house where His church meets, as a Witness and Judge in one. You remember how Jehovah appealed as a Witness and Judge to His Old Testament people in Malachi. It is lamentable to think that, while an apostle is still alive, and before the glory of the ascension of Jesus has died away from around it, the Christian community should be so nearly like that old apostate congregation. There is something, however, monitory as well as sad in the picture. It is drawn as if it would serve for many churches besides Laodicea; and the features of decline are such as we can too well trace among ourselves. They need not be expounded; they are not our text, only the background or setting of it. And we have to do with the description only as it depicts by opposites what that interior religion is to which the Saviour invites. Then what does the Lord condemn? A condition of things in His church which is defined as neither hot nor cold: the apathy, torpor, indifference which will know nothing of enthusiasm for Christ and His cause. This seems to refer to the lack of fervour in devotion, as appears from the threatening: "I will spue thee out of My mouth." "You shall not have a place in My fervent intercessions, if you know not how to pray ardently for yourselves." Or to the lack of ardour in the confession of His name: which in the sight of the Lord is of great price. "If you do not earnestly and with glowing zeal proclaim My name

before men, I will not confess you heartily as Mine." Thus it is like a rehearsal beforehand of that fearful compensation, requital, and return of denial which the Lord will deem consistent with His dignity. "Him will I also deny before My Father and His holy angels." He condemns, secondly, a state of things in which the church is self-deceived; and that in two senses. The people think themselves furnished with the graces of religion when they have only the outward semblance of those graces. They think they worship aright when they have only the forms of worship. They think they are Christians, when they only have the outward name. They discharge many duties, and give much substance, and make many sacrifices, in external matters; but the inward work of religion, and its inward poverty, and its inward discipline, they know nothing about. They are profoundly self-deceived as to themselves. And they are equally deceived as to their Lord. To Him their eyes are holden; rather they are blinded; they do not see, having never had or having lost that sacred eyesalve or unguent that would make them see their Lord and everything clearly. Now all this is exhibited as the opposite of the interior religion which the Lord offers to every one in the church who is zealous and repents.

Accordingly, the incoming and indwelling of the Lord is the cure of that which He rebukes and condemns. Observe the strict connection of the two. The Redeemer speaks of His interior revelation to the heart as the one and only cure of the externality, formalism, and spiritual deadness of His people. We generally think of this text as describing the first

approach of Jesus to an unconverted soul, and His persistent long suffering when His call is refused. But it is better to expound it as what it plainly is here: the Lord's solicitude to come into the back-sliding or half-converted members of His church to give them life and that they may have it more abundantly. It is hard to distinguish between the unconverted who are dead in sins and the nominal Christians who have a measure of life, but not the secret of regeneration. The Lord is for ever in the church knocking at the hearts of those who have not given Him full admission: that He may complete in them what He has begun to do and teach. This, dear brethren, is the constant ministry of our gentle long-suffering Lord. He is amongst us, but that is not enough. He is not content with our external service. He desires to possess and animate and sanctify our inmost souls. In every variety of appeal and endeavour—by preaching, by affliction, by secret solicitations of the most tender kind—He is drawing us nearer to Himself, and seeking to open our hearts and bring us to yield up ourselves entirely to Him. That is His appeal to you this day. He comes to seek you, and ask your more entire devotion. "Open and give Me thine heart, and let Me no longer remain on the threshold."

### III.

Hence, further, you perceive the emphasis laid upon the "open:" "If any man open the door." The high privilege of a more intimate fellowship and more perfect union between Christ and the soul is one that is not forced upon any man. We must be led to feel how great, how inestimably great, the



honour is ; and pay down the price for it. It has been said that the voice of Christ is the same now as before. It was always His law that an entire and perfect consecration should be entered on by absolute renunciation of all. "Whosoever he be that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple." You remember the two parables of the treasure hid and the pearl sought and found ; and you remember also that in each case the application is that all is sold to win the treasure. And when the Lord explained to St. Jude how it was that He would manifest himself to His elect, He said that it was because of the full obedience of the disciple who loved Him that He would come and make His abode in his soul. As it was in the beginning, it is now and it ever will be, in the distribution of this high and precious privilege. Let us note three things.

First, there must be the most absolute surrender of the mind to the voice as heard : "If any man hear My voice!" Let this be impressed upon us if possible in all its emphasis. Why are there so many thousands of Christians cold and dead and self-righteous and contented with their little attainments? Why is the church crowded with half-converted members, who have only the life of conviction and uneasiness and fear? The reason of both is that the calm, tranquil voice of Christ is not listened to. He says, "I am come that you may have life, and that you may have it more abundantly ;" and this He is for ever saying, day by day, sabbath after sabbath, sacrament after sacrament ; but few there be who hear Him, that hear Him effectually and to good purpose : they hear Him plainly enough ; but they do not listen and

give heed. And he who will not think and ponder how great a blessing is offered him shall never have that slighted blessing.

Let us, however, ask more particularly what the voice is. The preceding verse tells us that it is the voice of Him who counsels us to study our own blindness, ignorance, poverty, wretchedness apart from our Lord, and the blessedness offered through His indwelling presence by the Spirit. Hence the preparation for this high blessing is the deep study of our emptiness without it. To know this is to listen effectually to His voice. We shall never hear Him outside so long as we are contented with ourselves and our secret fellowships and enjoyments. But if we consider Who our counsellor is, and deeply reflect on His advice, we shall soon let Him enter. And it is a very solemn matter that He gives only counsel. He is deeply solicitous to enter: that is meant by the knocking; as in His own parable, where there is the asking and then the seeking and then the knocking. One might say that if it were possible He would Himself open the door and set right all that is wrong within. It is of importance to remember that it is only counsel. He does not in majesty cry, "Open thy heart to its Lord!" but He gives His earnest advice. Therefore, if you would come to the knowledge and enjoyment of this unspeakable blessing of an inward Christ and inward religion you must meditate deeply upon what He says. You must think that without Him you have nothing but sin and disappointment and misery, here and hereafter, and that He is counselling you to let Him come in and make all things new.

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Secondly, there must be an opening of the door. And, after all that has been said, it will be plain that this does not signify so much our co-operation as the warm and hearty welcome we give Him who offers Himself. He does not require any more of us than that we throw open the door of our hearts and give Him access. The emphasis does not seem to lie upon anything we arise and do in opening the door, but upon our welcoming the Lord on His own terms. Of course, "on His own terms" implies that we do what in us lies to prepare the place for Him. But, after all, the preparing the place is little more than the willingness to have it prepared. It must be emptied of the great usurper, swept of all traces that sin has been there, and garnished with graces of repentance. But these His coming in really brings with it. What he wants and must have in us is such a use of the preparatory grace He has bestowed as opens the door of the will and says: "Lord, enter this unworthy, disorderly, tumultuous, distracted, divided heart, and make it what Thou wouldst have it be." If He remained without until the soul were worthy of His entrance, there would be no hope. But He brings the preparation, when He is welcomed; cleanses the temple and cries, "Take these things hence;" and all becomes orderly and what it should be, if not immediately yet as the certain result of His entering. To give this welcome, however, to One who comes with such unsparing rigour is not a small matter. There are some of us who keep Him on the threshold for years because of some slight thing that proves we are not wholly willing to give Him the control on His own terms. Suffer me to urge on

you the word of exhortation. Ask yourself what that one thing is which you know He would command you to give up; or what more than one there may be concerning which He would cry "Take these things hence!" Still remember the counsel. It is better for you! You will never know peace until the great surrender is made. That made, life and peace and victory and heaven would at once enter with Him!

Much has been said about this interior religion; but we have not yet listened to our Lord's own description of it. Judging by the significant allusion to the eyesalve, we might have expected Him to say over again, "I will come in to him, if he will open the door, and will manifest Myself unto him." Of course, that is precisely what is meant here. True religion is the inward experience of Christ which is or results from His manifestation to the soul. "I will manifest Myself unto him." Unto him: not to his eyes, his hands, his mind, his thought, or anything that is his: but "unto him," unto the hidden man behind all these. And, as he that seeth the Son seeth the Father also, our Lord adds, "My Father will come unto him, and We will make our abode with him." It is this then at last, that your whole nature is to become a temple of the most Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in their unity sanctified within the heart. But you observe that all this is not said: it is only implied. Our text is not literally an echo of the former in the Gospel, but a variation upon it.

First, then, it is communion. The ascended Saviour uses a figure which He had not used before

the sacred supper was instituted. It almost seems as if He beheld His disciples partaking of the common table ; and at once took His illustration from that and protected the outward ordinance from abuse. All that the supper is to the Christian assembly, joyfully commemorating accomplished redemption, and pledging vows of eternal fidelity to the Lord while the Lord pledges His goodwill to them, this internal supper is to the individual Christian. He and his Lord sit at the same table, and alone. It is a feast which is a token and pledge of perfect amity and concord ; in which there is mutual entertainment, the Saviour being refreshed with His servant's society and His servant made supremely happy in the society of his Lord ; and in which there is discourse on both sides, though the Lord rules the conversation, and so speaks that the ministering angels delight to hear. Yet they do not hear : for this fellowship is a secret and precious mystery. The tenour of the New Testament represents the intercourse between the Lord and the individual soul as the most tender, intimate, and precious that can be conceived. As man and wife are one flesh so he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. We cannot help thinking of the Song of songs : " I sleep, but my heart waketh : it is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh." " I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine." There is no figure that can express what the Scriptures promise, and the saints have experienced, of the blessedness of personal fellowship with Jesus. And His very last word from heaven was the promise of this interior communion of souls between Him and us.

Secondly, this is more than communion : it is union.

The peculiarity of this interior supper is that the sacred food is the Lord Himself. In fact, we must drop the figure of the common repast, and fix upon the other, that of the entering in. Here, brethren, is the profound mystery of the interior life, the life hid with Christ in God, the life of God in the soul of man. We are very familiar with the figures, and we delight in them : those which represent us as having a house or temple or home within to give our Lord. We almost instinctively speak of His coming in to us somewhere : where, we never step to ask. What does that mean ? One thing cannot enter another. One being cannot enter another. One creature cannot enter, literally, another. But God's life can fill and replenish and absolutely rule our life. And Christ, as the Incarnate Son of God, can be the very life, the new life, of our souls. You see that the upper room furnished is not referred to, where the Saviour and His people may find a common meeting-place. The upper room furnished has become the inner chamber furnished ; and, our own spirit being the place of this fellowship, Christ must become our new life. "I in you!" "As I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me shall live by Me." What then follows but that we eat and drink the nourishment of a new life which is Christ within us. This, dear brethren, is the real meaning of the interior repast. If we more earnestly considered all the wonders of the promise, we should put away every other inferior satisfaction and dedicate our souls to this! Meanwhile, He ever says : "Eat, O friends : drink yea, drink abundantly, O beloved !"

## IV.

We must not close without the final lesson that is so solemnly and so gloriously added by our Lord. How sudden and as it were abrupt is the transition : "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit down with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father on His throne." It is not necessary to expound this at large. There are two points, obvious enough, that belong to our subject.

The interior life of fellowship with Christ is perfectly consistent with, and indeed bound up with, an external fellowship with Christ in conflict. One might almost think that conflict out of the question. Is the feast to break up, the noise of the enemy to be heard without, and the guest or companion of the Lord's supper to go out and fight for the home and the table which his Lord has accepted? It is not precisely so. These are all figures. The reality of the religious life is that, concurrently with the peaceful enjoyment of internal religion, there is the trial of faith in an unfriendly world. The Bride of the Song has to cry, "I will rise now and go about the city; in the streets, and in the broadways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth : I sought Him but I found Him not." A false mysticism says "It is all interior;" and would shut the world out if it could, but it cannot. The mysticism of Scripture unites the peace within and the war without. He who says "I will come in and sup with him" says immediately after, "To him that overcometh will I give." The fact is that there are two senses in which the external conflict is of great importance. First, it is, as we have seen, the guarding that secret treasure. We cannot move

about in the world without, or in the world within, the church, without endangering at every step our inward peace. And of this does the Guardian of our souls warn us beforehand. Secondly, and chiefly, we are one with Christ in the external struggle of His kingdom and cause; and must contend for it while we live, and sometimes even unto death. Happy are they who unite the two. They are the perfect Christians. They can say, like their Lord, "I have meat to eat that the world knoweth not:" but they are also found saying, with Him, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me and to finish His work."

In His boundless condescension our Lord leaves us with His further promise: that if we are faithful in the interior and exterior work of religion we shall share His throne and His triumph. The most gracious and special part of our internal fellowship shall cease with our probation. Our union with Him shall be confirmed eternally; but our communion with Him shall be not so much in hidden intercourse when the mystical church is complete. We shall so rejoice in our Lord's great triumph throughout eternity, and be so swallowed up in the blessedness of His finished work—never a "finished work" till then—that we shall forget ourselves, forget that we have a "hidden man of the heart." Religion will be all external, "on the throne." Each of us will find his place, higher or lower, on the steps of the throne, according to the measure in which his human faithfulness has approached the measure of the faithfulness of Him who overcame as a Divine conqueror for us. To Whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory for ever.