



## THE SEVEN CHURCHES

CAROLINE GETTY

*(The Christian Science Journal, October 1917)*

As given in the book of Revelation, the messages to the seven churches of Asia are of deep significance to all Christian Scientists. Again and again do we read in them the words, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." It is also worthy of attention that our Leader in the Message to The Mother Church for 1900 has much to say about these churches which will richly repay careful study. The message to the seventh church, the church of Laodicea, seems to indicate a state of consciousness which has to be roused out of moral deadness, and it is probable that the preceding messages point to the steps by which animal magnetism has produced this most grievous condition in mortal experience.

It should be noticed that these messages are addressed to the enlightened thought represented by churches, and that therefore they are specially applicable to Christian Scientists today. Each church may well represent a certain state or stage of consciousness, and the error which constitutes the chief danger to a particular state of consciousness is pointed out and rebuked. May there not also be in some instances an indication of some special phase of error to be handled? In each of these messages, however, we gain the assurance of victory through repentance and reformation, and the promise of attaining heavenly realities.

Taking the seven churches in their order, we begin with Ephesus, and find there indicated a state of consciousness which is apparently good. There is patience and discernment and judgment, long-suffering and endurance, but joy seems to be lacking in this consciousness, which is apparently heavy laden; we miss the gladness and the enthusiasm of "first love." In seeking for the influences which might have produced this mental state, we find our Leader's description of the Nicolaitan doctrines, which had crept into the church at Ephesus, very illuminating. This false teaching was ever trying to destroy the unity and purity of the true consciousness or church.

Materiality opens the door to the error of so-called prophetic illumination on a material basis, and this needs to be distinguished clearly from true spirituality, which is neither ecstatic nor emotional and which is absolutely free from the reaction of the former. Let us then recognize the error of materiality, and realize how quickly this will remove our candlestick out of its place,—obscure our spiritual understanding,—unless we awake and

repent. Repentance, our Leader says on page 15 of the Message for 1900, "of all human experience is the most divine,"—a wonderful experience, enabling one to rise above all the pride, hardness, and self-importance of mortal selfhood and to enter into the great love of the Father, which is the first taste of true selfhood.

The state of consciousness represented by the church of Smyrna shows us works in the midst of tribulation, poverty, persecution, and prosecution; but here too the danger of mortal belief is indicated, namely, "the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." An enemy within the camp is much more dangerous than any outside, but mental malpractice is not to be feared, only to be handled as nothing, for it is not born of Love, the only real power. Poverty, tribulation, persecution, prosecution, even attempted mental assassination,—all these may be handled fearlessly and overcome, if we are but faithful, alert, awake. Our work, if based upon Principle, will lead not to death, but to the overcoming of the belief in it.

If we are not watchful in overcoming all error we are pretty certain to be hit by mental malpractice, and the effort of mental malpractice is to adulterate our sense of Truth. This condition is indicated in the church of Pergamos, where idolatry and material medicine obtained a following. How often this temptation comes to us in the guise of broad-mindedness, —a concession to the world's opinion, a pandering to the demand for material remedies,—something less than reliance upon Truth.

When one's sense of Truth has been adulterated by mental malpractice, one falls into the danger of personality,—of seeking good through persons and of believing that one's own personality is good. Accepting adulation, taking to one's self that which belongs to God, offering gifts or yielding obedience and adulation at the shrine of personality, is equivalent to eating "things sacrificed unto idols." The mental state of the church at Thyatira, represented as influenced by this error, is sometimes generous, spontaneous, and enthusiastic; therefore is this error all the more subtle. The overcoming through repentance of the sin of personality will bring the real power of Principle and the light of true spiritual understanding in Christian Science, for it is not until this error is understood for what it is, and overcome, that one progresses.

Here then we have a sequence of errors to be overcome through repentance, namely, a clinging to materiality; mental malpractice; adulteration of the truth; and devotion to personality, the one leading on to the next unless met and mastered.

In Sardis we come to stagnation, —"Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." How needful, then, to watch against this error, to rouse one's self when the suggestion comes that one has borne the heat and burden of the day and may now rest; that one has attained the place where one may withdraw from the organization. This state of stagnation is the offspring of mortal personality, of self-importance; and with the example of our

Leader before us, we are indeed inexcusable, nay even despicable, if we yield to it. With her the name of Christian Scientist meant the living in ever increasing measure of the life of a Christian Scientist; and it must be so with every one who apprehends in the least what the Christian Science movement stands for. Obedience to the Church Manual, membership in The Mother Church, and generally in a branch church, with obedience to its by-laws, activity in the work of the organization without self-seeking or self-will, keep us on a safe road through the wilderness that stretches from sense to Soul.

The message to the church in Philadelphia tells of the brotherly love that illumines all the way, that sweetens every experience, that wins back even those "which say they are Jews, and are not." With brotherly love we are kept "from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world." There is joy always for those who love; they are indeed pillars in the temple of our God, dwellers in divine Love, and worthy of the "new name," Christian Scientists.

The state of mortal mind called moral idiocy is most graphically set forth in the message of the Spirit to the Laodicean church. It reads: "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." It is also described as in a state of lukewarmness,— "neither cold nor hot," —being neutral between good and evil. This state is not one which comes suddenly upon the Scientist; he must first have given his consent to the entrance of error. Mrs. Eddy says, "When evil seems to predominate and divine light to be obscured, free moral agency is lost" (Miscellaneous Writings, p. 113). The one thus influenced becomes the slave of animal magnetism without being conscious of it,—the most deplorable of all the phases of mortal mind.

To be a target for animal magnetism should not be a cause for either fear or discouragement to the alert, wide-awake Scientist, for it is an indication that he is going against the current of mortal beliefs; but to become a victim is quite another matter. Christian Scientists must know that evil, with all its pretensions to place and power, is only nothing masquerading as something. They have learned and proved that Spirit, God, is All; that Spirit is our Father and Mother, and that the divine Mind includes all that is real and eternal. Strong in this knowledge they are abundantly able to meet and destroy the suggestions of animal magnetism that they are having "much to meet." What they have to meet is nothing, and nothing can do nothing at any time, in any place, to any one; and the practice of nothingness, which is all there is to mental malpractice, can accomplish nothing.

The mental state of the seventh church indicates spiritual deadness: but this too can be overcome, for just as material idiocy can be and has been cured by the glorious teachings of Christian Science, so this phase of moral idiocy can be cured. Let there not be lacking the gentle entreaty to buy "gold tried in the fire," and the "white raiment" of moral purity.

Let there be the anointing of the blind eyes which causes them to open once again to spiritual understanding,—for always and ever there stands at the door of human consciousness the Christ-idea, knocking for admittance, and ours it is to know that this knocking is heard and heeded. Repentance and overcoming tell of full awakening from an unreal dream into the glorious reality set forth in these words on page 536 of Science and Health: "The divine understanding reigns, is *all*, and there is no other consciousness."