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THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

SARDIS, REV. 3:1-6.

"To the messenger of the congregation in Sardis write." Sardis is said to mean – that which remains; as if it were perhaps a useless remnant; or something out of which the life or virtue had gone. "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." They had the appearance of being what they were not, having the form of godliness without the power. Hypocritical, perhaps, without knowing it. A kind of carnelian, Sardian stone, is found near Sardis, from which it received its name. It is of a blood-color, sometimes covered with a thin layer of white. Thus it may look like purity, but a close examination will reveal the deep red or flesh-color below the surface. To outward appearance and by profession spiritual, but in heart animal, fleshly, carnal. Sardis was the remains of the true Church which had been driven into the wilderness; but when persecution began to abate, her zeal also subsided. Persecution has always developed the life and vigor of the Church: ease brings languor. Thyatira was specially commended for her works (Rev. 2:19). Sardis for the [R492 : page 4] opposite – "I have found no works of thine fulfilled before my God" (REV. VER.)

Their love and understanding of the Scriptures had evidently decreased. They were warned to "Remember how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent." God's Word is spiritual food. He who continually feasts upon it will grow vigorous, healthy and powerful. He who neglects to eat, or fails to digest this living bread must be weak and sickly; remaining at best only a spiritual dwarf, powerless to discern "the signs of the times," ignorant of what the Lord is doing, or what his plans are.

Many having the Sardis characteristics are living to-day; to such there is a fatal warning in the declaration: "If perchance, then, thou mayest not watch, I WILL HAVE COME as a thief, and in nowise mayest thou get to know during what kind of hour I SHALL HAVE COME upon thee." (Rotherham's trans.)

They do not expect him to come "as a thief," stealthily, silently. Seven times his coming is so described. To those only who are watching is the thief's approach known. Those who are in bed know nothing of his whereabouts until after he has entered the house. Those asleep will only be awaked after he has taken full possession. As he progresses in his work of destruction they gradually wake up. They wonder what that noise means. They rouse themselves, but it is too late; they have been "overtaken." Thus he will be present – invisible and unknown (except to the watchers) for some time (years) after his arrival, and will only be recognized by the sleepers as the noise gradually increases, and they slowly realize what it is. The reason many cannot comprehend his presence now is that they are looking for, first, a fleshly Christ, visible to the fleshly eye, and with an imposing demonstration, which they cannot mistake; secondly, they suppose that from the moment of his coming there will be commotion in nature and among men. Thus they are unable to understand "the signs of the times." Failing to recognize the fact that spiritual bodies cannot be seen (without a miracle) by human eyes, they cannot understand HIS PRESENCE while all things continue as they were since the beginning of creation.

"But thou hast a few names in Sardis which did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." Here are a little flock who are pure all the way through; these are entitled to wear a covering of spotless white: they are what they appear to be. "He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in nowise blot his name out of the book of life,

and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." Having been once cleansed and having our name written in the book of life is no guarantee that we shall always retain this position. We may become so defiled that our Lord will be ashamed of us, and drop our names from the record. "Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."

When the Lord would revive his work and bring to an end "the dark ages" by giving increasing light and knowledge in spiritual things, he did not give it to Sardis. She was "dead." He went into the stronghold of idolatry, and called one out who, like Abraham, cared not whither he went so long as he knew he was led of God. Luther came out of Rome.

It was easier to start a new tree from fresh and vigorous seed, even in a "Romish dunghill," as he called it, than to cause to sprout a decayed and lifeless stump. Even so it is now. The nominal Church has become too proud to represent the Meek and Lowly One, who humbled himself and preached the gospel to the poor. The Lord is calling out those who will speak his truth and do his bidding without consulting Babylon.

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