

The ELECT LADY--ELECTA

I. Introduction--Asia Minor

Dying, as Jesus died, upon the tree--
Was ever worthier sacrifice than hers?
Sacred the Cross, the nail, the thorn, for He
Who suffered has redeemed them from the curse
Just as she passed to blest Eternity
She plead forgiveness to her murderers. --Rob Morris

The scene of the fifth Star Point is laid in Asia Minor, a peninsula lying between the Black Sea on the north and the Mediterranean Sea on the south. On the west coast of the peninsula in Lydia, near the mouth of the Cayster river, situated on high ground of a fertile plain, is Ephesus, the residence of Saint John from about 67 A.D. to the end of his life. Except for occasional visits to established churches in Asia Minor, St. John most probably rarely went out from Ephesus. Asia Minor is a region of extraordinary fertility and beauty, but has been ruined by centuries of waste and misgovernment. The exact date of the writing of the Epistle is not known, but is placed between 85-95 A.D.

II--The Roman Empire

The Roman Empire at the death of Augustus in 14 A.D. consisted of twenty-four organized provinces. This territorial acquisition continued until 70 A.D. when Judea, or Palestine, became the 37th organized province of the Roman Empire. At the close of the third century the number had increased to 120 provinces. It is a little difficult to conceive of the vastness of the empire which roughly included all Southern Europe, most of Western Europe, Northern Africa and Western Asia.

III--Ephesus

Ephesus has become a great center of commerce. Through it flowed the chief trade between Asia Minor and the West. Strabo, the geographer, writing during the reign of Augustus, says: "Owing to its favorable situation, the city is in all respects increasing daily, for it is the greatest place of trade of all the cities of Asia west of the Taurus." It ranked of the

the Roman provinces of Asia as "first of all and greatest," and was called the "Metropolis of Asia." After Jerusalem and Antioch, it became the third great home of Christainity.

The evidence is almost incontrovertible that after the death of Saint Paul, Ephesus became the home of Saint John. Iranaeus says that John, the disciple of the Lord, published a gospel "during his residence at Ephesus in Asia." Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus, in his Epistle to Victor Bishop of Rome (190-200 A.D.) writes: "And moreover John that leaned back upon the Lord's breast, who was a priest bearing the plate of gold, and a martyr and a teacher,--he lies asleep at Ephesus." He died about 100 A.D. and was buried on Mount Prion. Ephesus thus became the center from which Saint John directed the activities of the Christain Church of Asia Minor for almost a third of a century. Next to Rome and Alexandria there could have been found no more important centre than Ephesus. The Christain Church at Ephesus had been founded by Saint Paul about 55 A.D., and some eight years later he wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians, which in reality was a circular letter addressed to other Christain Churches as well as to the church at Ephesus. There is every reason to believe that there was a considerable number of Christains in Asia Minor resulting from the conversion of many Jews and heathen. Furthermore, it is reasonable to believe that not a few Christains settled in Ephesus and Asia Minor after the destruction of Jerusalem in 69-70 A.D. During the Apostolic Age, Ephesus was a great center for idolatrous worship. Here ^{was} the famous temple of Artemis, one of the wonders of the world. It had 127 columns, 6 feet in diameter, 60 feet high, each column being the gift of a people or a prince. Its magnificence had become a proverb, "The Gods had one house on earth and that was at Ephesus." The temple became not only a place of worship and a sanctuary but also a museum, an asylum for fugitives from justice and a great bank.

Thus it came about that all sorts of scandals arose out of the abuse of the sanctuary, whereupon several provinces were ordered to submit their charters to the Roman Senate. "Ephesus was pre-eminently the city of astrology, sorcery, incantations, amulets, exorcisms, and every form of magical imposture." The idiocy and vice of the people would seem to have been beyond the imagination, much less of description. Dr. Plummer says, "Who would not weep to see religion made the vehicle of brutal superstition and nameless abomination! There was not a man in Ephesus who did not deserve hanging. Wicked folly of this kind had tainted the early Christian community at Ephesus."

IV. The Conflict of Religions

The death of Jesus was of boundless import. Slowly, and perhaps reluctantly, the apostles moved out into the great unknown, unconscious of the great issues they carried. A careful study of the Gospels leaves no doubt as to the personality of Jesus, and the impression He made upon those with whom he came in contact. The center or core of this so-called new religion is not an idea nor a ritual act, but a personality. In this connection, Professor Glover says: "Two things stand out, when we study the character of the early church—its great complexity and variety, and its unity in the personality of Jesus of Nazareth. In spite of the general leveling which Greek culture and Roman government had made all over the Mediterranean world, the age-long influences of race and cult were still at work. Everywhere there was a varnish of Greek literature; everywhere a tendency to uniformity in government, very carefully managed with a great tenderness for local susceptibilities, but none the less a fixed object of the Emperors; everywhere cult was blended with cult with the lavish hospitality of polytheism; and yet, apart from the denationalized men of letters, artists, and dilettanti, the old types remained and reproduced themselves. And when men looked at the Christian community, it was as various as the Empire."

Christainity had its beginnings on Jewish ground, and likewise this new faith died there. It was the transplantation alone that made Christainity possible, the outcome being that the new faith should become universal. What a marked and wide contrast between the attitude and teachings of Jesus to human life at this time, and the views of the world at large about him! Philosophers were anxious to keep God clear of contact with matter. Yet on the other hand men were anxious to be right with God and sought some kind of safety in their position. We can well appreciate how the principles or doctrines of this new religion appealed to the unprejudiced and thinking people of the time. Its teaching were so simple and plain. "It was a new thing when Religion in the name of truth and for the love of God, abolished the connection with a trival past." Jesus set religion free of all taboos and ritual. The recruits to this new religion came from almost every known race of mankind—Jew, Greek, Roman, Syrian, Phrygian,—making it utterly impossible for the church to be anything but universal. They were sincere in their convictions for the truth and for the light, as set forth by the teachers and expounders of this new religion. "The converts were astonishingly upright, pure and honest; they were serious; and they had in themselves inexplicable reserves of moral force and a happiness far beyond anything that the world knew. They were men transfigured, as they owned. Some would confess to wasted and evil lives, but something had happened, which they connected with Jesus or a holy spirit, but everything in the long run turned upon Jesus." Slowly but surely the teachings of the great Apostles took root and the followers of the Christ became a factor to be reckoned with by the Roman Government.

"Men were changed," says Professor Gover, "and were conscious of it. Old desires passed away and a new life began, in which passion took a new direction, finding its center of warmth and life not in morality, not in religion, but in God as revealed in Jesus Christ. 'To me to live is Christ,' cried Paul, giving words to the experience of countless others.

Life had a new center; and duty, pain and death turned to gladness. The early Christain was conscious of a new spirit within him. It was by this spirit they could cry 'Abba Father'; it was the spirit that guided them into all truth; it was the spirit that united them to God, that set them free from the law of sin and death, that meant life and peace and joy and holiness. Paul trusted everything to what we might call the Christain instinct and what he called the Holy Spilit, and he was justified. No force in the world has done so much as this nameless thing that has controlled and guided and illumined--whatever we call it. Anyone who has breathed the quiet air of a gathering of men and women consciously surrendered to the influence of Jesus Christ, with all its sobering effect, its consecration, its power and gladness, will know what Paul and his friends meant. It is hardly to be known otherwise. In the conflict of religions, Christainity had first to face Judaism, and through the encounter left its record upon the conquering faith, it secured its freedom from the yoke of the past. It gained background and the broadening of the historic imagination. It made the prophets and psalmists of Israel a permanent and integral part of the Christain literature--and in all these ways became more fit to be the faith of mankind, as it deepened its hold upon the universal religious experience."

V. The Early Christain Community

The early Christain community had been tainted with all kinds of wicked folly. They had accepted the teachings of the Apostles, yet strictly adhered to their magic. With this complex and horrible situation, we get a gleam at least of a situation that would require volumes to portray. We can the more readily appreciate the stern insistence on the part of St. John, as set forth in his writings, that the members of the Christain Church should hold steadfastly to the true faith in the Father and Son and to keep themselves pure, avoiding worldly things and guarding against false teachers. The exact nature of the false teachings denounced in the epistles of Saint John have been

widely disputed and is still a matter of controversy. Some have held it to be the Jews or the Judaizing Christians, others that it refers to non-Christian Jews. The epistles give us a valuable contribution to the history of an obscure period. Each church is independent and receives from the outside only brotherly advice. The danger of heretical teachers who travel from place to place is perfectly evident. After the ascension of Jesus, the twelve Apostles were active in spreading the teachings of their Master. Their activities would seem to have been confined chiefly to what we now know as Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor. Saint Paul made four distinct missionary journeys into Asia Minor. Saint John was the last of the Apostles. The activity of the Apostles and the Christian converts, their teachings and ultimate strength gave no little concern to the Roman Government under whose territorial jurisdiction they now were. It will be recalled that Christ and the Apostles, including Saint Paul, and they to whom they gave the power, were the only persons who ever performed miracles. The performing of miracles naturally aroused the greatest of interest. The teachings of the Apostles brought people to think and to see that there was a stern reality in the new religion they proclaimed. "The unity of the early church lay in the reconciliation with God, in the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ—a unity soon felt and treasured. 'There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all.' The whole body of Christians was conscious of its unity, of its distinctness and its separation."

VI. Saint John's Ministry

Saint John was the last survivor of the Apostles to carry on the leadership of the Christian religion. For three years he was under the direct tuition of Jesus. He is spoken of as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," returning that love with a deep absorbing and unwavering devotion. He was

thoroughly fitted both to do and to write Christ's mission; to work miracles; to reveal Christ's character; and to give instruction to converts to the Christian religion. He is often referred to as the "Apostle of love." He constantly manifested a zeal for his Master's glory. "The image mirrored in his soul is that of the Son of Man, who is also the Son of God." The men selected to carry on Christ's work were instructed, trained, and disciplined men. The chief end of Christ's mission was, perhaps, to prepare those to whom He was to commit the work of establishing His kingdom. He knew both the secrets of the heart and likewise of the mind as well.

VII. The Elect Lady--Electa

We have endeavored to give a rather comprehensive setting of the physical surroundings, the unsettled political condition and the unrest in religious affairs, with a view to a clearer comprehension of Saint John's Second Epistle, and to a better understanding of the lessons to be derived from the story of Electa.

Saint John the Evangelist in the Second Epistle of John, addresses a short letter to "the Elect Lady and her children." The message consists of thirteen short verses of about two hundred and fifty words. There have been many conjectures and surmises as to the identity of this lady. The names Adah and Electa, given respectively to the first and fifth Star Points, would seem to be the creation of the writer of the ritual, for the names given to these Star Points have no meaning or significance outside of the Order of the Eastern Star. It is, therefore, to tradition and to contemporary history that we must look largely for the history of "the elect lady," called Electa. The only scripture allusion to Electa is in the Second Epistle of St. John. No account of this celebrated woman, with the name Electa, is to be found anywhere in the scriptures. The Epistle is brief, indistinct, and subject to varied interpretations. Saint John begins his message as follows: "The elder unto the elect lady and her children." These

words have given rise to the most extended research and criticism.

The Elder. Some writers maintain the designation means the writer himself,

Saint John, in the latter years of his life. Others hold the Elder was used as the title of his office and that he used this title instead of Apostle. Elder is more clearly the title of an ordinary minister of the church. The language of the time was the Greek, and it seems quite evident from the Greek word used, that Saint John describes his office, and not his age. Westcott says, "In this connection there can be little doubt that it describes not age simply but official position." This statement takes a sort of neutral position. The title, Elder, seems to be very appropriate, and its use not uncommon.

"The Elect Lady and Her Children". This statement has baffled the research of writers for centuries to know just exactly what is meant. There seems to be no degree of absolute certainty about it even up to this time. Every letter of the Greek used in the phrase, the elect lady and her children, has been carefully dissected and analyzed. The question is whether the Sacred Epistle is addressed to (1) the whole church or the church at large; (2) a local or particular church, i.e., to a community; or (3) an individual, i.e., some lady known to Saint John.

(1) The whole church. It has been frequently supposed that by this appellation the Apostle intended to denote the entire Christian Church as a whole. The chief argument against this contention is that there is no good reason why Saint John should have resorted to a style so mythical and allegorical. Dr. Plummer in his commentary on the Epistles of St. John says: "The Epistle is not addressed to the Church at large, but either to an individual or to a particular Church." Many other well-known writers hold the same view.

(2) A Local Church. This would seem to be the opinion adopted by most of the modern commentaries. Dr. Plummer, however, says that "it is impossible

to determine with anything like certainty as to whether a particular church or an individual is meant." In favor of the contention that a particular church is meant, Dr. Davidson says, "There is no individual reference to one person; on the contrary, the children 'walk in truth'; mutual love is enjoined; there is an admonition, 'look to yourselves'; and 'the bringing of doctrine' is mentioned. Besides, it is impossible that 'the children of an elect sister' would send a greeting by the writer to 'an elect Kyria and her children.' A sister Church might naturally salute another."

(3) An Individual. A great deal depends on the translation of the opening words. These words may be rendered in four ways: (1) To the elect lady; (2) To an elect lady; (3) to the elect Kyria; (4) to the lady Electa.

The first two renderings might refer to either a community or to an individual. The phrase "the elect lady" might be a figurative name for a church, or for the church, i.e., a particular church. The question then is whether the Greek word for "lady" is not to be rendered as the name of a person addressed. Curia or Cyria is a woman's name. "If the name is given at all," says Dr. Brooke, "it must be found in Kyria and not in Electa. Kyria as a proper name is found occasionally and even in Asia Minor." But whether Curia or Cyria is a proper name or not, Saint John doubtless had in mind a pious woman.

Concerning the fourth interpretation, "To the lady Electa," Dr. Plummer holds it untenable on account of the statement in verse 13, which would make two sisters bearing the unusual name Electa, "The rendering 'to the lady Electa' may be safely dismissed, if only on account of verse 13. If Electa is a proper name here, it is a proper name there; which involves two sisters bearing the same extraordinary name." On the other hand, Dr. Brooke says that "The language of verse 13 makes it very unlikely that both words are to be regarded as proper names."

However, Clement of Alexandria says that Electa is a proper name.

This view has been supported in recent years by Dr. J. Rendel Harris. Dr. Brooke says that "the usage of individual address would necessarily be followed by a writer who wishes to personify a community to whom he writes. And the language of verse 13 is almost fatal to the supposition that Electa is here used as a proper name."

Many contend that Saint Paul has in mind an individual, although her name is not recorded. I am sure that this was the conclusion of Dr. Rob Morris. I have read with the most profound interest Dr. Rob Morris's article on "The Organization of the Eastern Star," together with other publications by the same author in which he discusses the Star Points. I am thoroughly convinced that so far as Electa is concerned he had an individual woman in mind. "The fifth point," says he, "introduced me to the early history of the Christain Church, where amidst 'a noble army of martyrs', I found many whose lives and deaths overflowed the cup of martyrdom with a glory not surpassed by any of those named in Holy Writ. This gave me Electa, 'the Elect Lady', friend of Saint John, the Christain woman whose venerable years were crowned with the utmost splendor of the crucifixion." The fact that the name of this estimable woman cannot be ascertained with certainty does not lessen our interest nor the value of the many lessons taught. The story is true enough, but it is the name only, so to speak, that does not have a basis of fact. It seems to me that nothing is lost by accepting the statement "the elect lady" to be an individual. The lessons taught can be just as widely and wisely applied as if they referred to a local church.

Although brief space has been accorded to some of these faithful "ordinary women", like Leah, Rebecca, Lydia, and the "Elect Lady," yet their quiet and lasting influence, in the various forms of service which they rendered, cannot be too highly praised by thoughtful people of our own country.

It would seem that Saint John, in one of his apostolic visits to some church in Asia Minor had met some of the elect lady's children and was greatly impressed with their Christian life and character and devotion to Christ's truths. Whereupon, on his return to Ephesus, he took occasion to write this letter. It is not quite clear whether Saint John means to convey that some of Electa's children were not walking in the truth or whether he had only met some of her children, with no allusion to such of her children whom he had not met.

IX.-Exhortations and Warnings

Saint John exhorts her to love. It is a personal request laid on both alike by the Master himself. It is without question Christian, brotherly love that the writer has in mind. "The highest expression of this love is found in obedience to all the commands (however variously expressed) which God has enjoined in regulation of the relations between the brethren. The clearest expression of love is obedience to the will of God, so far as He had revealed His will in definite precepts." It is a sort of command that she should abide steadfastly in what she now knows and believes and let this knowledge regulate her life.

No one could have been in a better position to know and to judge the trend of things than Saint John. His home was in the very centre and hotbed of paganism, as we have already seen. He had every opportunity of getting first-hand knowledge of what was going on. Saint John warns Electa against deceivers who deny that there had been any real manifestation of Christ in the flesh. "This is the deceiver and anti-Christ." It was against attempts that might be made by these false teachers to destroy the very souls of those who had accepted the teachings of Jesus. He further warns her and her children against any partnership or fellowship with these false teachers.

"Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God; he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If anyone cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching,

receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting; for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works." Dr. Macdonald says that "the works, hospitality, and salutations which John forbids in the apostolic age were significant signs of Christain communion and confidence. We have no right to bid Godspeed to errorists and deceivers." These warnings were against both false warnings and false charity.

X- Traditional History of Electa

The growth and activity of the Christain religion was bound, in the very nature of things, sooner or later to stir up some action on the part of the Roman government. A very vivid picture of what took place is clearly set forth by Dr. Macdonald. He says that "the last three years of the reign of Domitian form one of the most frightful periods in the history of ancient persecution. He banished literary and cultivated men from Rome and claimed divine honors for himself. Flavius Clemens, the consul, one of his cousins, being accused of atheism and Jewish manners, the common charge against Christains, was put to death; and his wife, Domitilla, the Emperor's niece, was banished. Ecclesiastical writers attribute to him a general persecution of the Christains, in which doubtless many known and dear to Saint John perished. Domitian fell by the dagger of the assassin in the year 96. Thus perished the last of the Caesars, of whom it has been truly said, only four deserve the respect of posterity: Julius, Augustus, Vespasian, and Titus.

Electa Our information concerning Electa is based, for the most part on Masonic tradition. She was born and brought up in Asia Minor and, naturally, reared under the principle of paganism. She seems to have been well advanced in years when the edict of the Roman government was issued against the followers of Christ. It is quite apparent that she was converted to the Christain faith under the preaching of Saint Paul. Furthermore, she appears to have been a very influential woman in her community. She apparently spent her income in relieving the poor; devoted much time to the care of the sick; and kept open house for indigent and hungry travelers.

Benevolence seems to have been the great passion of her life--she sought out those who were lost and ministered to them.

The Christain religion, as we have endeavored to make clear, had become quite abnoxious to the people, and pressure was brought to bear upon the Roman Government for some action. Electa's mansion was said to have been the most splendid in the province. The edict of the Roman Government was issued against everyone who professed the religion of Christ. All Christains were bound to renounce it under penalty of death. Soldiers were enjoined to execute the law without mercy. All those suspected of holding the Christain faith were commanded to trample upon the cross that was handed to them as a testimony of their renunciation. Electa absolutely refused to comply with the edict. She spurned the test and said that she would never renounce her religion. She and her family were forthwith cast into a dungeon for twelve months, at the end of which time the judge appeared and offered her another opportunity to recant from Christainity, and again she refused. Thereupon she was dragged forth and savagely scourged to death. They were then taken in oxcarts to the nearest hill where she and her entire family, one by one, were nailed to the cross. She was the last of the family to be crucified, and thus witnessed the tragic death of her husband and children. She may well have uttered with her expiring breath, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

She professed her faith to the whole world, although she knew what reproaches, persecutions even unto death, that she must undergo for the stand that she took. It meant the loss of a good name, wealth, of means of doing good, of liberty, of husband and children, and of life itself. Yet she was willing to undergo all these for the love of Christ and for the Christain religion in which she showed the most implicit faith. What a rich heritage is hers!" For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."