

The founder of this great movement is Mr. James L. Houghteling—a wealthy Chicago banker—whose portrait is at the head of this sketch. He is still the President of the Council. Those who attended the convention held in Toronto in 1892, will not soon forget his manly form, his sound, common sense, and, above all, his devotion to the cause of Christ and his love for young men.

The effect of such a society as this cannot but be great in promoting the welfare and growth of the Church—for the brothers are ceaseless in their work. In Church, in business—in holidays—always their thought is “Christ and his Church.” They strive to be living evidences of Christianity by showing men that a Christian is a better man every way than one who is not. How, then, can such a brotherhood fail to be of the greatest help to the Church in gathering in wanderers to her fold?

## THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA.

### VI.—THE FIFTH MESSAGE.

“And unto the Angel of the Church in Sardis write.”—*Rev. iii. 1.*

**S**ARDIS was a large city of Asia Minor, and was once the capital of a kingdom. It was the place where Croesus—famous for his wealth—held sway and died. To the Church at this place our Lord spoke, as he had done to the other neighbouring Churches, describing Himself as the one who had “the Seven Spirits of God and the Seven Stars.” To no other Church had he described Himself in this way. The number seven in Holy Scripture denotes completeness. The expression “Seven Spirits of God” may then be taken to mean the fulness of God’s Holy Spirit. This is what the Lord Jesus possessed.

He was one with the Father, so also He was one with the Holy Spirit. This indicated great searching power on the part of Him who was investigating His Churches, and, in the case of Sardis, it carried with it a solemnity which was ominous for her. It showed that she had already incurred divine displeasure. “Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead!”

Here is a message then to a dead Church,—a thought of sufficient solemnity. But, worse than all, it was dead while it seemed to be alive. It was reputed to be a live Church, but it was dead. Better is it to have death in all its ghastliness than to have it under the appearance of life, an appearance which can only deceive for a short time. The North American Indians had a savage custom, which illustrates this. After making an attack upon some unprotected house and killing the people they might find there, they would wash the dead bodies and

prop them up in some natural position, seated, it might be, by a stream with a fishing rod thrust into the dead hand, or reclining against a tree as if in repose. They took savage delight in the idea that their friends would receive a worse shock in finding them dead when they seemed to be alive, than in coming upon them as they lay unmistakably dead with the marks of violence around them. They found their loved ones with a name that they lived, but they were dead. Such was the Church at Sardis.

But who could judge of such a solemn matter as this but our Lord Himself? We can only speak of those Churches who, by their charity and good deeds, have a name that they live. For this much we can rejoice. The rest we must leave to God. But how God sees us sometimes! There was Sardis, to all appearance, a living Church. No flagrant wrong was in her midst; no open scandal was bringing discredit upon her name. Her members were respectable and apparently in earnest. Yet a deadly chill was creeping over her. She was, in the eyes of God, “dead while she lived.” How difficult then is it for us to judge, for we have appearances only to guide us. Better then to judge not anything before the time.

But at the same time we may all judge ourselves. We may seek to apply these solemn words to ourselves. Have we a name that we live? Does the community in which we live recognize us as respectable, charitable and good? If so, we alone, of all people on earth, can tell whether, in the eyes of God, that means life or death to us. Could anything be more solemn?

And we may apply it to congregations. The greatest evil that can creep into any congregation or Church is selfishness. Churches were not built simply for the spiritual luxury of those who built them. Christianity can never grow on selfish soil. Every Church and congregation, both in spirit and in deed, should be missionary. What would St. Paul or St. John, or indeed, the Saviour Himself, have thought of a Church that was not of a missionary spirit? How could Christianity ever have grown if the spirit, which existed in early days, had not been missionary?

When Christian people, either personally as individuals, or collectively as Churches or congregations, cease to lend a helping hand to the general cause of Christ, that moment the chill of death will begin to steal over them.

But it was not all dead with Sardis. A few things remained. “Be watchful,” ran the message, “Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die. Remember—hold fast,—repent!”

And what was the cause of this hope so solemnly, so wildly expressed? It was that there were “a few names *even in Sardis*, which had not defiled their garments.” All honour to