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The Twelve Foundation-Stones of the Heavenly Jerusalem.¹

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'And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.'—REV. xxi. 19, 20.

A FEW months ago an interesting model was exhibited in London of the Heavenly Jerusalem as described by St. John in the Apocalypse, with the measurements in proportion, and the real twelve stones set in the walls, by an eminent jeweller. Though, to some minds, the Johannine description seems grotesque and incoherent, the remarkable thing was, that when the various elements of the description were gathered together into a unity, a singularly beautiful and charming model was the result,—a model which gathered round it thousands of distinguished critics, who pronounced it about as perfect a reproduction in precious stones, pearls, gold, and crystal as it was possible for human hands to frame.

The symbolism of the twelve stones of the City of God has all along proved a source of interest to Christian people, and some brief account of the interpretations set upon the individual gems by mediæval divines may prove interesting to the reader. They are twelve in number, following the sacredness of that number, which, in common with three, seven, and forty, indicates perfection. Twelve patriarchs, twelve tribes, twelve stones in Jordan, and in Aaron's breastplate twelve apostles;

¹ *What the Stones Say; or, Sermons in Stones*, by C. H. Spurgeon, 1894. Cf. *The Precious Stones of the Bible, Descriptive and Symbolical*. (London: Nisbet & Co.)

and so in the Holy City there are twelve gates, twelve thrones, twice twelve elders, twelve stones.

Masonic writers have interpreted the twelve stones in their own occult way, and have found in them striking symbols of the Divine Presence, adding these emblems to those of the Unslumbering Eye, the Scales of Justice, the Pillars of Strength and Beauty, the Arch of Perfection, etc. Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, replied to those who asked her for her jewels by pointing to her two boys—'These are my jewels.' Queen Victoria once said wittily of this: 'They must have been cornelians.' The flash of the precious stone is seen all through ancient history, and illuminates many of the dark corners of the world. The lake in Central India which has received its jewel-tribute of heathen sacrifice for ages, could tell a tale of misguided and superstitious devotion. Symbols of power and wealth, they have taken their place in religious acts and places, and now, even in the Holy Jerusalem, they appear in glory on the walls of the Celestial Town.

The greatest and most reliable authority of the Middle Ages on this interesting subject is Marbodius, who was Archdeacon of Angers and afterwards Bishop of Rheims, dying in 1125 A.D. He wrote a 'prose' to be used at high festivals, and especially at the dedication of churches and cathedrals, entitled *Cives Cœlestis Patriæ*, in which he gives all the mystical interpretations of each of the twelve stones. It is a beautiful picture of the Heavenly Jerusalem in its 'gem-aspect,' and was enormously prized in the Middle Ages, being the delight of monastic reflection and the inspirer of ecclesiastical builders. Taking this accomplished spiritual lapidary of the twelfth

century as our guide, and adding to his interpretations those of others, both mediæval and modern, we find a distinct plan running through the stones; whether the stones are there to illustrate this plan, or whether the plan is simply a pious application of the subject, the individual reader may judge for himself.

The stones, according to Marbodius and kindred interpreters, are there to symbolise, in each individual case, (a) certain particular virtues; (b) certain particular doctrines of Christ; (c) the twelve clauses of the Apostles' Creed, with their corresponding ideas.

I. *Jasper*. 'The first foundation was jasper.' Jasper is a green stone, and sometimes is called 'the god-stone.' The foundation-fact, 'the first foundation' of the Church, is God's Being. This stone was believed to be a charm against all evil.

(a) Those who are founded in the faith can never suffer any evil—no Satan can destroy them. They fear God and know no other fear. Faith in God is the root of all goodness, virtue, and piety. It is the 'first foundation' of character, and is at the basis of all true prosperity. It is a green stone [green = fecundity], and is thus beautiful in good works, blessed examples, holy works.

(b) The Doctrine of Faith, glorified in the cases enumerated in Heb. xiii., is shown forth. That chapter is an illustration of the fecundity of Faith.

(c) Apostles' Creed. 'I believe in God the Father Almighty.' The 'god-stone' is the foundation of all. He is the Great All-Father, who whispered, and worlds awoke out of nothingness,—the Source of all Life, 'in whom all things live that live truly and blessedly.'

II. *Sapphire*, 'the second.' A blue stone, the colour of the sky. It is called 'the king of stones — reconciling, healing, consoling, giving sight to the blind.' Such are its distinctive virtues as laid down by the lapidaries.

(a) The Virtue of Heavenly-mindedness. 'Set your affections on things above (blue) — even while on earth, look upwards! 'The blue sky, the living air, and the mind of man' speak of God (Wordsworth); 'The glorious sky, embracing all' (Keble), calls man heavenwards.

(b) The Doctrine of God. Exodus: 'They saw the God of Heaven: and under His feet was

as it were the paved work of a *sapphire* stone.' The sapphire seems to say, as 'king of stones,' 'The Lord reigneth!' 'The sovereignty of God is my greatest consolation' (Edward Irving).

(c) Apostles' Creed. 'I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.' Though on the earth, 'He came down from heaven' (blue). He shared His Father's sapphire throne, and, coming down to earth, brought with Him heavenly light (blue), which has purified and beautified the world. Though 'sapphire' is called 'the *second* foundation,' yet it is the 'king of stones': hence, though Christ is God's Son, He is God's co-æqual, co-ëternal, co-infinite partner. 'Equal in power and glory.'

III. *Chalcedony*, 'the third.' 'A pale stone, which does not shine in a house; but which glitters in the open air. It resists those who would cut or scratch it. When heated, either by the sun or by the finger, it attracts straws and dust.' A quaint and curious account by the monastic lapidary.

(a) The virtue of humility and humble good works. 'Thou, when thou fastest,' etc. Its paleness speaks of its quiet unobtrusiveness. It is 'the third,' and yet it is the perfection of virtue,—three being the perfect number, and humility the foundation of all piety.

'It will not allow men to cut or engrave it'—so humility dislikes a grand name and the brazen inscription. Cf. The legend of the Prince building an Abbey, and emblazoning his name over the chancel-arch; and during the night the angel-hand substituted for the royal surname the name of an old woman, who, in her poverty and desire to do something for God, gave the horses that dragged the abbey stones 'a wisp of straw.'

'When heated by the sun (God), or by the fingers (*i.e.* the symbol of the gifts of the Holy Ghost), it draws straws (*i.e.* poor men who are but "as grass") and dust (perishing humanity) to it.' The last becomes first; and men at last crown Humility and love the humble. Cf. the Magnificat, 'He hath put down,' etc.

(b) Doctrine of Kenosis. Christ emptied Himself of His divinity and became of no reputa-

tion, and yet draws all men unto Him. Doctrine of Christ: 'If any man will follow Me, let him take up his cross. 'Via crucis, via lucis.'

- (c) Apostles' Creed. 'Conceived by the Holy Ghost, *born of the Virgin Mary.*' The Incarnation a marvel of humility: 'His companions the rude cattle, less rude only than we; the ox and the ass—emblems of our untamed, rebellious nature.'

IV. *Emerald*, 'the fourth.' 'A very green stone, surpassing all gems and herbs in greenness. It is found only in dry and uninhabitable parts of the earth, and is greatly prized. It is generally found in deserts, where griffins and infidels abound.'

- (a) Virtue of Sacrifice. 'They wandered in deserts and dens and caves of the earth—of whom the world was not worthy.' Voluntary self-denial and self-banishment, for the good of others. Hence this self-sacrifice results in fecundity (green) and blessing to others. 1. The most eloquent preachers step forth from the desert of meditation and solitude. Moses' face shone when he came down from the Mount. Paul 'in Arabia,' St. John the Baptist in the desert, Christ in the wilderness, were in the land of the emerald, and stepped forth rich with blessing and adorned of God. 2. Great spiritual gifts,—grace and truth, prayer and piety,—which bless the world, are born in the desert. This is true of life—hard effort crowned with success: of morals—self-denial brings reward: of religion—'De Profundis' comes before the 'Magnificat.'

- (b) Doctrine of Self-abasement. 'Except ye become as little children.' Self-denial and self-sacrifice are doctrines as well as moral principles.

- (c) Apostles' Creed. '*Suffered* under Pontius Pilate.' 'No cross, no crown; no pain, no palm; no tears, no throne.'

V. *Sardonyx*, 'the fifth.' 'A stone of three separate colours: the lowest line is black; the middle, white; the top, red.'

The old spiritual lapidaries see in this stone a very unique and striking picture of the story of Redemption. Black = the darkness of Good Friday; white = the grave-clothes of the Holy Sepulchre and the radiant whiteness of heavenly death and angelic guardianship; red = the glory

of sunrise,—the brightness and ruddy hope of Easter Morn.

- (a) The Virtue of accepting Christ. If such, in symbol, is Christ's history, so is it the Christian's. Black = man's sinfulness; red = redemption through Christ's blood; white = made clean through Christ and the sanctification of His Spirit. The black likewise = humility, white = purity, red = martyrdom and self-sacrifice—the three great virtues.

- (b) The Doctrine of Christ's Death and Atonement and Resurrection.

- (c) Apostles' Creed. 'Was crucified, dead and buried: He descended into hell: the third day He rose again from the dead.'

VI. *Sardius*, 'the sixth.' 'A stone blood-red and bright.'

- (a) The Glory of Martyrdom. The blood-red stone in the Holy City speaks of the place of honour which they obtain who, for Christ's sake, lay down their lives. The brightness of the joys of resurrection and Paradise.

- (b) The redness and the brightness bear the doctrine of the glory of Christ through suffering and death and martyrdom. On the sixth day ('Sardius') of the week Christ died,—Good Friday,—the day of suffering. In the old mediæval lectionaries, Christ's martyrdom and expiry on the cross formed the 'sixth' of the 'Mysteries of the Cross.'

- (c) Apostles' Creed. 'He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.'

VII. *Chrysolite*, 'the seventh.' The stone of the perfect number, χρύσεος λίθος or chrysolite = gold-stone: 'a gold-coloured stone which emits fiery sparkles: it shines as gold by day and as fire at night.'

- (a) The Virtue of Charity,—'the greatest thing in the world,'—the perfection (seventh) of all virtues and religion.

The greatest thing in nature and in man: nay, even in the divine nature, for 'God is Love.' Love binds the Trinity together. If for one moment through eternity the Father ceased to love the Son and the Spirit, the Son ceased to love the Father and the Spirit, the Spirit ceased to love the Father and the Son,—the Trinity would be destroyed, because love is the basis of their coexistence. Well

is it called 'the gold-stone,' for it also keeps together the 'City of God' above.

It 'shines as gold by day'—in good works and generous deeds; as 'fire by night'—the wrath of Love, which is as much a reality as the love of Love. This points also to the final separation of good and evil, when God's Love will be seen not only as gold, but also as Fire. Even in man we see this,—the union of gold and fire.

(b) Doctrine of Last Judgment and Final Separation.

(c) Apostles' Creed. 'From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.' The gold = the quick: those who have the brightness and glory of life; the fire = those who are being dissolved.

VIII. *Beryl*, 'the eighth.' 'The beryl shines as water that reflects the sun: more especially the peculiarity of this stone is that it warms the hand that holds it.'

(1) The beryl is a type of nature, the only glory of which is that it is a reflection of God. All things bright and beautiful,—all the beauty of earth and sea and sky,—'are but reflections, Lord, of Thee.'

It is also (2) a type of human nature, which is its best a weak and watery composition, and the only glory of which is when it reflects the Sun of Righteousness.

(a) The virtue of receiving thankfully the Holy Spirit to glorify our poor dust and ashes and make them shine. The man who has the Spirit of God 'warms others by his good works of charity.' 'It warms the hand that holds it.' How true this often is: a poor invalid, an aged parent, a seemingly lost and useless life sheltered in a home by others, often 'warms the hand that holds it'; and when most useless, seemingly does most good, brightening and warming all around,—a messenger from heaven. The blessing we receive for sheltering the 'beryl' in our homes is that our own hearts and homes and lives are warmed. Blessing others, we ourselves are blessed. 'The virtue of the beryl is to cause love, to bestow power, to give healing,' and such offices are often performed by seemingly weak instruments.

(b) The Doctrine of the Necessity of the Holy Spirit. 'As many as are led by the Spirit of

God, these are the sons of God.' 'Without Me, ye can do nothing.'

(c) Apostles' Creed. 'I believe in the Holy Ghost.'

IX. *Topaz*, 'the ninth.' 'A curious stone, partly grey, partly gold.' This is generally taken to be symbolical of the Church, which is partly of earth and partly of heaven—one portion of the army triumphant, the other militant. Also it is emblematic of the spiritual state of the Church militant,—'partly golden, partly grey,' good and evil strangely mixed together. 'When the topaz is golden,' says the monastic lapidary, 'it surpasses in brightness all gems. The more the sun shines on it, the more golden does it become.' The more Christ's presence shines in the Church, the more golden does it appear. 'The day was,' said the cynical father, 'when we had wooden chalices and golden priests; now we have golden chalices and wooden priests.' The beauty of the Church depends on Christ's presence. 'When Christ comes,' is the inscription on Melrose Abbey, 'the shadow goes.'

(a) The Virtue of Contemplation. The greyness of the topaz speaks of the calm, quiet life of good men within the calm of God's Church; 'a hodden-grey life,' apparently, to some, but a golden life when rightly understood and wisely led.

'Beyond all gems the topaz rare
Hath value, therefore, past compare;
It shines, albeit of colour grey,
Clear as a fair ethereal ray:
And notes the part of them that live
The solid life contemplative.'

(b) The state of the Church,—partly unworldly, partly worldly. 'Were there not *ten* cleansed, but where are the *NINE*?'

(c) Apostles' Creed. 'I believe in the Holy Catholic Church.'

X. *Chrysoprasus*, 'the tenth.' 'A purple stone with drops of gold in it.' It is taken as a type of the state of the Christian while on earth,—a state partly of joy, partly of sorrow,—purple being the colour of mourning and fast, but relieved by drops of gold,—the symbol of gladness. The purple stands for sorrow for sin and 'much tribulation,' the gold, for gladness and communion with God and the good. The state of the Ten Tribes, the breach of the Ten Commandments, may be compared with 'the tenth, a chrysoprasus.'

- (a) The blessing of penitence and forgiveness and communion with God.
- (b) The state of the Christian,—partly amid sins forgiven and unforgiven, partly in communion with God and heaven.
- (c) Apostles' Creed. 'I believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins.'

XI. *Jacinth*, 'the eleventh.' 'The jacinth changes its appearance with that of the sky. It is colourless in itself, but reflects colours according to its surroundings and the sky.'

- (a) Virtue. (1) It is taken as a type of Christian prudence, and a wise, well-regulated life, which ought to be a reflection of the life of heaven. (2) It is also a type of the preacher who gives milk to babes and strong meat to men, and suits his words and ways to his surroundings. 'The Faithful Priest' is the theme of many mediæval symbolical pieces,—the famous analogy between him and the brazen cock on the top of the steeple being not only very shrewd, but very amusing. St. Paul made himself 'all things to all that he might gain some.' The aim of this action is to teach and elevate and ennoble surrounding lives.
- (b) The Doctrine that it is only the Heavenly Life that can uplift and raise a soul.
- (c) Apostles' Creed. 'I believe in the resurrection of the body.'

XII. *Amethyst*, 'the twelfth,'—a perfect number. 'The amethyst has a colour like unto the *sunrise*, and shoots out *rosy flames*.'

(1) This is typical of the coming glory,—the sunrise of Christ's second coming, when He will fill the whole earth with His glory, and send His blessings over all the world,—when the whole globe shall be rolled to the foot of the Cross.

(2) It is also typical of the 'good time coming' for the individual Christian and for the world,—the golden age restored. The sunrise colour, the crimson glory, speak of hope.

(3) The crimson colour also speaks of earthly suffering 'even unto blood.' The 'rosy flames coming out of it,' of charity and prayers springing out of a heart wounded sore.

(4) The sunrise colour also speaks of the beatific vision.

(a) Virtue of Hope for the future.

(b) Doctrine of Final Restitution of all things, of a glorious immortality.

(c) Apostles' Creed. 'I believe in the life everlasting.'

Thus the twelve stones of Heavenly Salem speak of (1) Faith in God, (2) Heavenly-mindedness, (3) Humility, (4) Self-sacrifice, (5) Redemption, (6) Martyrdom, (7) Charity, (8) Human Nature, (9) The Church, (10) The State of the Christian, (11) Christian Prudence, (12) The Coming Glory.

They also symbolise each a separate Christian doctrine; and in an image set forth, each, one clause of the Apostles' Creed.

Marbodus' final verse is a suitable ending for this sermon on stones—

'These stones arrayed in goodly row
Set forth the deeds of men below,—
The various tints that there have place,
The multiplicity of grace.
Who, in himself, such grace displays
May shine with these in endless rays.'

[For the development of the various symbols and ideas, the writer has been mainly indebted to *Mediæval Hymns*, by the Rev. Dr. J. Mason Neale, who not only translates Marbodus' poem, but also adds elaborate explanatory notes, which, indeed, form the elementary basis of this paper.]