Papers on the Revelation

William Kelly

Public domain. As published on plymouthbrethren.org.

Also online at https://plymouthbrethren.org/series/11608

KEE Ministry Library · Faithful Men
kee-ministry-library.netlify.app

Introductory Lectures on the Revelation

The Revelation.

Rev. 1 - 3.

That God should have chosen John to be the instrument of communicating the closing volume of the New Testament is worthy of our consideration. It is not a new thing for God thus to set out the strongest contrasts by the same inspired writer. He who was emphatically the apostle of the uncircumcision was the appointed witness of Christ to those who had been Jews. The final and above all the decisive message of grace, which called the Jews outside all earthly associations to Christ in heaven, was given neither by Peter nor by James, and by no other than Paul. So too the witness of grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ was, in His mind, if not in man's, the most suited medium for revealing the coming judgments of God. In truth, the moral reason lay in this: that Christ, if rejected as the object of faith, and the only channel of grace, becomes an executor of judgment. This we find formally and doctrinally in his gospel. (John 5) And now that grace and truth were about to be utterly set at naught, as He Himself had been before by that which bore His name on the earth, John was more than any other suited to let us see the solemn visions of God avenging the slighted rights of His own Son; and this, first, by providential judgments; lastly, by Christ Himself coming in the personal execution of judgment.

Hence, although there are the most complete contrasts in form, subject, and issues between the gospel and the revelation of John, after all the person of the Lord Jesus is pre-eminently kept before us as the object of God's care and honour in both; and therefore it is that even the souls that could not enter into the main topics of its prophetic visions have always found unspeakable comfort in the various displays of Christ Himself furnished by this book, especially in times of trial, rejection and persecution. Who that knows ecclesiastical history, who that has present acquaintance with souls, is not aware that the saints of God, with ever so little light, have been exceedingly nourished and helped by the Apocalypse; while men of learning have made it as dry as an old almanac?

It is "the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him." Even in the gospel, which is so fragrant with His divine love, we have the frequent — not to say constant — admonition of this remarkable position which Christ takes. In short He is carefully regarded as man on earth, as the sent One who lives on account of the Father — in the gospel as a man on earth, in the revelation as a man most truly wherever He may be seen, whether in heaven or on earth. This book then is the revelation of Jesus Christ, "which God gave unto him." In the gospel it is said, God gives Him to have life in Himself. Nothing can more demonstrate. how loyally He accepts, and will not speak inconsistently with, the place of man to which He stooped. For in Him was life: yea, He was that eternal life which was with the Father before the worlds were. Nevertheless, having become a man in divine grace, He speaks according to that lowly position which He entered here. In glory it is just the same, as we see in

the book before us. "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants." It is not now to bring them whether or not servants out of that position or even worse, and entitling them to take the place of children of God. This characterises the gospel, because it distinctively is the revelation of grace and truth in Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son. Here it is what God was going to do for His glory as the rejected man. He is going therefore to show unto His "bondmen" — a term that would suit not only Christians now, but those who might be in another relationship after we have been taken away from the world. Hence, evidently, there is a comprehensive term employed with divine wisdom, "to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass." It is not to make known what was in Christ before all worlds, but to disclose the great facts in which God was about to maintain the glory of the First-begotten, when He introduced Him into the world. "And he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John."

The angel, it is needless to say, is not without good reason named in relation to the revelations which God was here giving. In the gospel we bear of eternal life in the Son and this in the grace of God given to the believer. There the Holy Ghost was the only one competent to minister and effectuate such grace according to the counsels of God, and in the ordering of His love.

But here we have visions — visions of God's judicial ways — visions of what would call for judgment in the ever growing iniquity of man. He therefore "sent and signified this by his angel unto his servant John." It is another and a remarkable difference. In the gospel John

may speak, but he speaks as one who had seen the Lord, — as one who could bear his own personal voucher for whatever he utters. He may speak but seldom of himself, and this he does so effectually that there are not wanting those who have questioned whether after all he were "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Undoubtedly the inference is mistaken; still there is no possibility of charging the writer with putting himself forward in the manner in which he has written. This is a very significant circumstance, more particularly as in the epistles, which contemplate the Christian company or a family or a friend, the one aim and effort is to place the children of God in immediate communion through Christ with Himself: an inspired apostle writes it no doubt, and the various members of God's family, as well as the servants of the Lord, are owned in their place. At the same time it is manifestly He who is God and Father instructing, comforting, and admonishing His own.

We have intervention on every side. God gives a revelation of Jesus; and Jesus passes it on to His angel, or rather by His angel to His servant John; and then John at last sends it to other servants. Thus we have all sorts of links in the chain. And why so? For it is somewhat novel, especially in the New Testament. How comes this remarkable introduction of God to Jesus, then from Him through an angel to one servant, who sends to other servants? How is it that we here miss that character of direct dealing with us — that immediateness of address which is found elsewhere? The reason is as solemn as it is instructive. It is implied indeed in the analogy of the Old Testament; for God did not always address His people there. He did originally, as for instance in the ten words, though afterwards in

this very particular intervention came in. But habitually God's messengers were sent to Israel, even when prophets were raised up. At first all addressed the people in His name. The word of Jehovah was sent to Jehovah's people. But what an affecting change took place at length! The time soon came when the message was not sent to the people directly. It was given to a chosen witness — no doubt really meant for the people, but delivered to Daniel, and only so.

This prepares us for the true meaning of the remarkable chancre in the Apocalypse as compared with the rest of the New Testament. When the children of Israel had hopelessly betrayed the Lord — when their departure was complete before His eyes — not only in the first rent-off portion, the ten tribes of Israel, but even the remaining two, — when there was a stay and a lengthening of the tranquillity, — when not only Judah, but even the house of David, the anointed king, the last regular link between God and His people, failed, then we find that God addressed not His people, but an only chosen faithful servant as His witness. It was a sure token that all was over for the present, for any immediateness of communion between God and His people. God could no longer recognise them as His own. Applying this to the present time, and our own circumstances, is it not most grave? I do not in the least doubt that God proves Himself faithful in the worst of times. It would be the falsest possible deduction to suppose that Daniel and his three companions, possibly others also, were not personally as pleasant to the Lord as David was. Did He not look with exceeding satisfaction in His grace upon that servant who felt and answered to His own feelings about His people? It was

precisely because He did that Daniel received so exceptional an honour. In a certain sense it was better to be a Daniel in the midst of ruin than to have had the best position when times were prosperous, and when things looked fair. It was a greater proof of fidelity when all was out of course to stand faithful than to be faithful when all things were regular. Thus grace is always equal to every difficulty.

But it is a solemn thing to feel that such a crisis was even then come, as far as regarded the church of God here below. John stands in a position analogous to Daniel; he becomes now the object of the communications of the Lord Jesus, not that which still bore the name of the Lord here below. However the grace of the Lord might act, however He might animate as well as warn, still the address is made directly to His servant John, and not to the church; and even where we have addresses, as we shall find afterwards in the second and third chapters, they are not immediately to the churches, but sent to their angels. It is manifest that all carries out the same solemn impression.

John then, as it is said, "testified the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ." But this is here restricted: it does not mean the truth in general, nor the gospel in particular, though we cannot doubt that John did preach the gospel, and did nourish the church of God in all His revealed truth; but this is not the subject of the Apocalypse, nor the meaning of our text. All is here limited to what he saw. This is of importance to apprehend the scope of the passage and the character of the book. We may safely strike out the word "and," if we respect the best authorities. The meaning then is that John testified the word of God and the testimony of Jesus

Christ. But how are we to describe or understand "the word of God"? Is it any special part, or the word of God as a whole? What exactly is meant by "the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ" in this connection? The answer is given by the last clause when "and" is taken away: — the visions that he was going to behold and record in this book — whatsoever things he saw. Thus, besides what the apostle had in his ordinary relation with Christians, and his already lengthened tenure in the service of Christ, he receives now a new character of word and testimony.

Accordingly the apocalyptic visions can be slighted only by ignorant unbelief; for they no less than the gospel or epistles are here styled "the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ." They are thus carefully ushered in, but in that prophetic method which was morally fitting, in a series of visions which John saw. This is of so much the greater emphasis, as it is apparently designed in an express manner to counteract the tendency (but too common spite of it) to treat the Apocalypse as if it were of doubtful value and of precarious authority. But no: it is confessed to John by Jesus as the word of God and His own testimony. We know how many scholars have dared to insult the book in their folly, as I think we may say, with the justest rebuke of their offensive language. None the less is it "the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ," even if it consists not of that which ministers directly to the edification of the Christian in his own position, but indirectly as announcing the doom of such as despise God and do their own will in the face of His revelation. Nevertheless it is God's word and Christ's testimony, though as a whole composed of visions.

In order to make this more realised by the believers then or at any other time, be it remarked that we have another word remarkably annexed which lies altogether out of the beaten path of the Lord. May we not presume that it is for the express purpose of graciously encouraging His servants as well as to anticipate the doubts and cavils of unbelief? "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein."

The stated ground that follows is also to be weighed; for it is not, as men often assume, because we are to be in the predicted circumstances, it is not because the Christian or the church must pass through the troubles it describes: not a word to this effect is implied, but a different reason is given. In short, as the book itself afterwards shows that the church will be on high outside the scene of its varied troubles and inflicted judgments, so the motive assigned in the preface is of a strikingly holy nature, adapted to those who walk by faith, not by sight, and free from all selfish considerations — "for the time is at hand." It is not that the time is actually come so that we must go through all or any part; but the time is at hand. God therefore writes for our comfort, admonition, and general blessing in whatever way it may be wanted; He takes for granted that we are interested in whatever He has to say to us. "The time is at hand." It is a false principle therefore that we can only be profited by that which concerns ourselves, and supposes us to be in the actual circumstances described.

Then comes the salutation. Here too all is as peculiar as it is suitable to the book on which we enter: "John to the seven churches which are in Asia." In no other place do we find anything akin to this. We read of the saints in

one place or another. A particular assembly, or even the assemblies of a district (Gal. 1), may be addressed. Never but here occurs an address to a certain number of assemblies, particularly one so definite and significant symbolically as seven. Surely something is meant outside the ordinary course of things, where so unexampled a style of address is found. The spiritual usage of seven in prophetic scripture cannot be questioned. Nor is it confined to prophecy, for the same force holds good wherever symbol is employed. In typical scripture, as well as in prophecy, seven is the regular known sign of spiritual completeness. Who then but uninstructed minds can doubt that the Lord meant more than the actual assemblies that were addressed in the province of Asia? That letters were written to literal congregations from Ephesus to Laodicea seems to be unquestionable; but I cannot doubt that these were chosen, and the addresses so shaped to them as to bring before those who have ears to hear the complete circle of the Lord's testimony here below as long as there should be anything possessed (responsibly if not really) of a church character. The state of things might be ever so ruined; it might be even gross and false (as much was in several); but still there was an ecclesiastical profession if only for His judgment, which we do not find after Rev. 4. No such condition appears afterwards. The Lord no longer dealt so when this kind of footing vanished for the responsibility of man. In short, as long as church responsibility exists here below, these addresses apply, and no longer.

So says he "To the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come." It is not "from the

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The salutation is from God in His own being, the ever-existing One, He who is, and who was, and who is to come. This of course connects His present existence with the future as well as the past. "And from the seven Spirits which are before his throne." Here again we find a description of the Holy Ghost decidedly different from what meets us in the New Testament generally. The allusion is clear to Isaiah 11, where the seven-fold power of the Holy Ghost in government is described as connected with the person and for the kingdom of the Messiah. "And the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest," etc. This seems taken up here, and applied in a far larger way for purposes suitable to the Apocalyptic prophecy. Indeed the same remark will be found true of all the use that is made of Old Testament citations and allusions in the Apocalypse. Constant reference is made to the law, Psalms, and prophets, but it is never a mere repetition, as the literalists suppose, of what was found there. This would be in effect to deprive ourselves of the Apocalypse, instead of understanding and gathering its peculiar profit. If one identifies the Jerusalem of Isaiah with the New Jerusalem of the Revelation, or the Babylon of Jeremiah to explain the Apocalyptic Babylon, it is clear that one simply loses all the special instruction that God has given us. This is one of the main sources of confusion on the subject of the Apocalypse to this day. At the same time, if we do not start with the Old Testament revelations of Babylon or Jerusalem, or the instruction derived from the prophets generally, we are not prepared for appreciating or even understanding the Apocalypse as a whole. Thus, either to dislocate the New absolutely from the Old, or to see no more than a repetition of the Old in the New, is an almost equal

error. There is a divine link in the sense as there was in the Spirit's mind an undistinguished reference; but then the Apocalypse gives it an incomparably larger range, and a more profound character. The Apocalypse looks on things after the Holy Ghost had taken His place in the Christian and in the church on earth — above all, after the Son had appeared, manifested God the Father, and accomplished redemption here below. Hence all the fulness of divine light that had come out in Christ's person and work, as well as by the Spirit in the church of God, is necessary to be taken into account in order to give the Apocalypse its just bearing.

The seven Spirits therefore refer, as I believe, to the Holy Ghost acting in the way of government. It is the fulness of the Holy Ghost's energy as an overruling power. What the application of this may be depends on the context where it is used. We shall find it in relation to Christ dealing with church matters in Rev. 3; we shall find it in His relation to the earth in Rev. 5: but it is always the fulness of the Spirit in governmental power, and not the same Spirit viewed in His unity forming the church into one body. This we have had already in the Pauline epistles, where the proper sphere of the Christian as a member of Christ's body is treated especially, and indeed only there.

God as such is then introduced in Old Testament style and character, but at the same time applied to New Testament subjects; the Holy Ghost also is similarly brought before us. And so too with our Lord Jesus, as we shall see. Indeed, there is nothing more remarkable, especially when we bear in mind who the writer is, than the absence here of His proper relationship to the children of God. The revelation of grace is precisely

what is not found in this book. "Jesus Christ" appears as "the faithful witness." This clearly is what He was on the earth. In a very different form it is the topic of John everywhere: we may trace Him as going up to heaven, where Paul above all contemplated Him glorified; but John's task is ever to point to Christ in connection with what He was here below. If he speaks of Him as the Lamb above, the description is founded on His being the rejected sufferer on earth. "He is the faithful witness, the first-begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth;" — the last displayed when He comes from heaven to earth, as He stands in resurrection the first-begotten of the dead. But what He is in heaven is exactly what is not given here. There is the most careful exclusion of His heavenly position from the relationships of the Lord Jesus that are here brought before us. Even that which connects Him with the Christian, as the One that intercedes for him in the presence of God, is here left out, though I doubt not we may see Him as the angel high priest for others in Rev. 8.

The Lord Jesus, then, is brought before us as man purposely in the last place. God was announced in His own everlasting being; the Holy Ghost in His fulness of governmental power; the Lord Jesus in that which was connected with the earth, even if He were risen from the dead; and this put in the last place, because He is viewed only in an earthly point of view.

But for all that the voice of the Christian is at once heard — and so much the more remarkably, because it is one of the few exceptional ripples which cross the ordinary current of the book at the end as well as at the beginning. Thus it is not without example elsewhere; but it is not what we hear when we have fairly entered on

the course of the visions. Before they begin the Christian is heard, as also the bride after they close. Here the name of Jesus is enough to stir the heart in a sweet and suited doxology. He may not be described in His relationships to us, but He who is described is the one that we love. And so "to him that loveth us" (for this is the true rendering, and not merely that loved us) — "To him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be the glory and the might unto the ages of the ages." And as this is the heart's outpouring of its own delight in Jesus, so the next verse gives a warning testimony suitable to the book, lest there should be any weakening of what Jesus will be to those who stand in no such nearness to Him. "Behold he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." This has nothing to do with His presence for us; but after our own delight and thanksgiving have gone forth towards Jesus, the testimony to others most suitably follows the song of praise that had, I may say, involuntarily burst forth at His name. It is Christ coming in judgment. He shall be seen by every soul — if there be any difference — to the sorest anguish above all of those that pierced Him (i.e. the Jews). "Even so, Amen."

"I am the Alpha and Omega, saith the Lord God, that is, and that was, and that is to come, the Almighty." He who is the first and the last, comprehending all in communicating His mind, which includes everything that can be given to man — He it is who here speaks — the Lord God, the Eternal. He puts His voucher on the book from the beginning.

Then John describes himself in a manner adapted to the testimony he is called to render. "I John, your brother, and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Christ Jesus, was in the isle which is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus." It must be evident to a spiritual mind how remarkably suited all here is to what was afterwards about to come out. The whole book supposes saints in suffering, and this too in the form of tribulation, with their spiritual experience formed into the associations of Christ's kingdom rather than those of His body the church, yet surely suffering on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Particular care is taken here to show it to us. Not that the full church or Christian relationship was lacking to John personally; but he stands here a representative man for others as well as ourselves. While, therefore, he had all that is properly Christian, he also had very special communications of another character for saints who will follow us at the end of this age. Thus he introduces himself here, not as a joint partaker of God's promise in Christ by the gospel, but in His kingdom and patience in Christ. It is true for us all; but it is in harmony with the latter day sufferers, not what specially linked him with the Christians and the church. Thus the place taken here is of course that of a Christian; but that is put forward which belonged to others who would not be in the same corporate standing as ourselves. At the same time there is the most careful guard against the supposition that he was not in the full enjoyment of his own place in Christ.

This seems to be one reason why it pleased God to give the visions of this book on the Lord's day. "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." This is the characteristic day of

the Christian; it is the birthday of his distinctive blessing, and it assuredly ought to be the especial joy of his heart, not the less because it is the first day, the resurrection day of grace and new creation, not the seventh day of creation rest and law.

On that day the inspired writer John was in the power of the Holy Ghost with a view to take in and give out the visions he was to see. "And I heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet." It was significant, I think, that the voice was behind him. The main object of all prophecy tended rather to have thrown him forward. But before the Spirit of God could fitly launch him into the visions of the future, there must be a retrospective glance. In the Spirit he must be, both to shut out every impression from external objects, and to give him an entrance into all that God was about to reveal; but first of all we should recognise the fact that it was on the Lord's day; and next that, before he was shown what was before, he must turn to the voice behind him and learn what the Lord judged of that which bore His name on the earth.

Omit the opening clause and begin, "saying, What thou seest, write in a roll, and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia." The reference of the voice behind is exclusively to the seven churches. When another subject is about to open, the first voice which he heard as of a trumpet talking with him said "Come up hither;" there is no question then of a voice behind. He is forward going to look into the future. But there must first be a retrospective notice, in which the Lord would pronounce His judgment of that which bore the name of Christendom here below. "What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches which are in

Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice which was speaking with me. And having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands." We are told afterwards what those meant.

One like the Son of man is next seen "in the midst of the seven candlesticks," — which, as we are told, were the seven churches, but these viewed according to the Lord's mind about them as a standard of divine righteousness. This is the reason why they were golden. Not only is the same principle general or constant, but it is remarkably characteristic of John's own writings. For instance, the standard for the Christian is not in anywise the law (which was so for the Jew); for us it is Christ Himself, and cannot without loss be anything else. "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk" — how? Like an Israelite? Not at all: the Christian ought to remember that he is a heavenly man, not an earthly one. He "ought himself also so to walk even as he (Christ) walked." He is not under law but under grace. The reason is manifest, because the way in which we are called to walk is always according to the place and relations in which we stand. Nothing can be simpler. If I am a servant, I ought to behave like a servant. If I am a master, the conduct that might be proper in a servant would not become me. The mixture of relations is always wrong; the oversight of them is loss, their denial ruinous. For every position we are set in, no matter where it is or what, there is always the gracious power of God as our resource; but it is to sustain the person walking in consonance with the relationship in which God has been pleased to put him.

We are not now speaking of anything conventional. Life in Christ, where there is spiritual intelligence, takes one out of the vanities of the world in principle. This remark it may be well to add, because a Christian might say "As I am a gentleman, I must walk like one, and still better now that I have Christ." But nay, this will not do for Christ. Did He thus walk? And are you not to walk as He? Do you not in this merely sink to the world's level? Are you not just taking advantage of an earthly position to escape part of what Christ calls you to? One knows how readily the heart can thus escape from what is really the blessedness of the witness which the Lord has placed in our hands. Is this Christ? We speak then of what Christ has put us in, not about nature and its wishes and feelings. If you have nothing but nature, it would be intelligible; but if you have seen the Son of God and believed in Him, if by grace you have the same life which was in Him, so that this thing is true of Him and of you, no possible standard can suit for you as a Christian short of Christ Himself.

Thus then it is with the seven golden lampstands. All must be and was measured according to God's own mind, and the place in which He set the assemblies. Consistency with Him as a revealed God in Christ is their rule. Therefore they appear as golden lampstands.

But John saw "in the midst of the [seven] lampstands one like the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot." There is not now the sign of activity in service — not the robe tucked up, as often remarked. The Son of man is seen clad in the flowing robe reaching to the feet, and He is "girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet

like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength."

Here we have to remark that Christ is seen in a judicial point of view. He is spoken of as Son of man; and, as we know, this is the quality in which it is given Him to execute every kind of judgment. It is expressly so taught in John's own gospel. (John 5) Yet with all this another feature betrays John, and suits him as the writer most strikingly. He that is seen as Son of man is really described with those marks which belong distinctively to the "Ancient of days." Daniel sees the "Ancient of days" in one way, and the Son of man in quite another. John sees the Son of man with the qualities of the Ancient of days. He is man; but the man seen then and thus is a divine person, the eternal God Himself. Now I ask any fair mind, whose style does this identification of nature suit but the writer that we are now reading? No doubt, morally speaking, He must needs execute judgment; but John could not lose sight of His divine glory, even where the subject is judgment, and the kingdom everywhere prominent.

Another thing is observable, when one looks into what is said here. A threefold glory of Christ appears: what is personal; what is relative; and finally, what is official. But there is more also. John says, "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last." Such terms alone become one who is divine. He who is first is necessarily God; and He who is first, being God, must certainly be last. Jesus declares Himself to be

all this; yea, more than this — "the living one, and I became dead." The phrase is the strongest possible way of putting the matter. It is not merely that He died — this is not what He says here, though it is said elsewhere, and very truly. But He says that He became dead. This seems to imply His own willingness to die, as indeed He became what did not belong to Him personally, and what in short seemed extraordinarily incongruous with the glorious person that had been already described. This seems conveyed in the peculiarity of the words: so careful is the Holy Ghost to watch over the glory of Christ even in that which told out the depths of His humiliation. "I became dead (records John), and, behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages." We must leave out the word "Amen" — it is spurious, and only mars the sense.

Let it suffice once for all to hope you will understand me always to speak of the text on the basis of the ancient and best authorities. There is positive evidence of the most convincing and satisfactory kind for the insertions, omissions, or changes, which may be mentioned from time to time. Do not imagine that there is anything like arbitrary innovation in this. The real innovators were those who departed by slip or by will from the very words of the Spirit; and the arbitrariness now would be in maintaining what has not sufficient authority, against that which is as certain as can be. The error then is not in seeking the best supported text, but in allowing tradition to tie us to comparatively modern and certainly to corrupted readings. We are bound in everything to yield to the best authorities. So in the next words our Lord really says, "And I have the keys of death and of hades." Not the common text, but this is the true order.

No one goes to hades before he dies — death being in relation to the body, hades to the separate spirit.

"Write therefore [which is undoubtedly genuine] the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and what shall be hereafter." This gives us, as is obvious and familiar to almost every reader, the threefold division of the book of Revelation. The things that he saw were the glory of Christ in relation to this book, as described in the first chapter, on which we have already touched. "The things which are" present the prolonged condition set forth in the addresses to the seven churches. The expression is very striking, because it not unnaturally implies that the churches were somehow to exist continuously. We can see now why it was. It is very possible, when the epistles were sent out in the days of John, that no particular emphasis would be laid on "the things that are;" but inasmuch as these things have been going on from that day to the present, we can see the immense force such a phrase thereby acquires.

At the same time another way of looking at the book is by taking "the things that are" as already past and gone. I do not doubt that God intended this, and that we are thus given a double aspect of the book. I have no intention to enter at any length on this way of looking at the churches as quite by-gone, and the prophecy as at once flowing on; but I mention it because it seems due to truth to name this as well as the other, according to which "what shall be after these" is when the church condition is no longer applicable at all.

"What shall be after these" must be owned as the true translation of the words. "Hereafter" gives vagueness: "after these" makes it precise, and is the plain literal

meaning. "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest on my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands. The seven stars are angels of the seven churches: and the seven lampstands are seven churches."

In each letter the Lord addresses "the angel." Who and what is he? We never hear of angel as an official title in the ordinary arrangements of the New Testament. But it is not at all wonderful as occurring here, where we do find what is extraordinary. The angel is a term that suits such a prophetic book as the Revelation. Does it mean what we commonly call an angelic being? Not so, I apprehend, where angels of the churches are spoken of. If we hear of the Apocalyptic angel of fire, we readily understand this; and if we hear of the angel of Jesus Christ as of Jehovah elsewhere, we find no insuperable difficulty. But it is another thing when we hear of the angel of this or that assembly. Again, we can understand an angel employed — a real angelic being — as the means of communication between the Lord and His servant John; but it would be harsh to suppose that His servant John writes a letter from Christ to a literal angelic being. This is the difficulty in which those are involved who suppose that angelic beings are here meant. I do not believe it. The meaning appears to be that, as "angel" is used in the sense of representative, whether an angelic being or not, so in reference to the assemblies the Lord here avails Himself of this general truth. An angel setting forth representation (human or not), an ideal representative of each assembly is meant. In certain cases we know that it might be a literal representative; for instance, when John the Baptist sends some of his disciples, there was a representation

of his mind by men. The disciples go and give the message of him that they followed. But it assumes a somewhat different shape when it becomes a question of assemblies which had not been, so far as we know, sending messengers at all.

If therefore we look at the abstract nature of the angel of the church, what is implied by the term? I take it to be this: that the Lord had in view not necessarily an elder, nor a teacher, but one who might be either or both, and before His mind truly represented, and was in a special way bound up with the responsibility of the state of the assembly. Whoever that might be (one, or perhaps more,) was meant by the angel.

Revelation 2. "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right land, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden lampstands." Here we are evidently on broad ground. The characteristics are general. The first epistle, the message to the angel of the church in Ephesus, looks at the state of the Christian testimony on the earth in its most comprehensive form, and, as I suppose, from the days of the apostle John himself. The Lord accordingly presents Himself with similar latitude. "He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand." It is His position both ministerial and ecclesiastical — His relationship to the angels, or those that morally represented the assemblies to His eye, as well as to the churches themselves. The star is that which acted on the assembly; it professedly was the vessel of light from the Lord for bearing on the condition of the saints of God. If that light was ineffectual, if there was evil mixed with it, the state of the assembly would partake of it. If it was bright, the assembly would be elevated morally thereby.

This, I think, is meant. Then, in Him that held them all in His right hand, and walked in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, we have Christ not merely as holding fast those ideal representatives, but as also taking interest in the assemblies themselves. In short, it is Christ in His fullest but most general ministerial and ecclesiastical aspect, viewed, of course, according to the tenor of the book.

The state of the church in Ephesus has the same generality. "I know thy works, and thy labour, and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil [men]; and thou didst try them which say they are apostles and are not, and didst find them liars." There was faithfulness, and this very particularly in dealing with the wickedness which Satan sought to bring in at that time. The apostles were disappearing, and perhaps had all disappeared save John. I do not of course affirm this; but naturally as the apostles were departing to be with the Lord, Satan would endeavour to furnish instruments nothing loth to claim succession. The church in Ephesus tried these pretended apostles, specially the angel, as one that helped them much by grace from the Lord. The star, as we are told here, so far acted upon the church for good. When thus tried, they tried and found wanting those who set up to be apostles.

But there is much more here. Persistent faithfulness and devotedness still characterised them at Ephesus. "Thou hast patience, and didst bear for my name, and hast not wearied. But I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first love." This is the Lord's complaint against them. It is plain that it is here as ever the first departure — the most general symptom of declension. What injures, and finally ruins, is invariably from within, not from without.

In vain does Satan seek to cast down those who resting on Christ's love have Him as the loved object of their life and soul. Was it not thus when the epistle to the Ephesians was written by Paul? Had they not left their first love? It was not as once. There was failure in this respect. They had here relaxed, but not in their works. These went on diligently, as we learn here. There were works, and labour, and endurance. But where was the work of faith? Where was the labour of love? Where was the endurance of hope? That which had produced the mighty results was no longer active, nor could be. The effect went on; the spring was gone. They had abated in their first love. It was all over with them, unless they judged themselves, and in the power of the Holy Ghost Christ regained His place. "Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I am coming to thee quickly, and will remove thy lampstand out of its place, except thou shalt repent." Whether it be Christ that is represented or the description of the state of the church, whether it be the fault that is charged home, or the remedy that is proposed, whether it be the judgment that is threatened or the promise that is held out, — all is of the most general description. So thoroughly does the Lord adhere to topics of the largest and most common import in the letter to the angel of the assembly in Ephesus. "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of [my] God." Here again it is all comprehensive. What can be wider than to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God?

In the writing to the angel of the church in Smyrna, a totally different state of things meets us. It is essentially a special case instead of the general one we have seen. The Lord was pleased to afflict after the declension from apostolic purity, and above all from first love. He allowed all sorts of trial to befall His people by letting loose the power of Satan, working by Gentile persecutors. And this is seen to be the occasion of the letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna. "And these things saith the First and the Last, who became dead and lived; I know [thy works, and] thy tribulation, and thy poverty, (but thou art rich!) and the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but a synagogue of Satan." Here observe it is not now a trial by false apostles. A new evil appears. As long as true apostles were on earth, Satan was never able to have Judaism recognized in the church of God. The council in Jerusalem expressly exempted the Gentiles from being put under the yoke of law. And the apostle Paul showed that it was really to annul Christ — to fall from grace — if the law, introduced either for justification or for a rule of life, were imposed on the Christian. For justification this is manifest; for a rule of life it is not so apparent, but it is just as real a denial of the gospel. if Christ be the rule of life for the Christian, and the law be the rule of death for a Jew, it is evident that for a Christian to abandon that for this tends to apostacy. The early fathers thus Judaized; and the leaven has gone on working ever since. To take the position of a Jew thus is to be one of those that say they are such and are not, but are alas! Satan's synagogue.

The Lord here contemplates these evil workers (which is what the criers of works come to) forming a distinct

party. It is not merely Satan struggling to get in Judaism, but, as He says here, "the blasphemy" (railing, calumny) "from them which say they are Jews, and are not, but a synagogue of Satan." They have now a compact character, and can be spoken of as a synagogue. It was not merely the tendency of individuals. Individuals there were before, but this is much more. It is a formed and known party of the highest possible pretensions. They set up to be more righteous and holy than the rest, whom they denounced as Antinomian because they stood in the true grace of God. They were themselves corrupters and destroyers of true Christianity without knowing it. Deceived by Satan, they were his zealous instruments, so much the more actively deceiving others, because earnest and honest after the flesh.

The patristic party — those commonly called "the Fathers" — seem to be the leaders of the party here referred to. They have the awful ignominy of Judaizing the church of God. They have exercised this influence in all ages, and this is where, as I judge, their formation as a system is stigmatized by the Lord Jesus Christ. Offensive against Himself, they were wholly opposed in principle to grace. Their character is plain. They dragged down the Christian from his own heavenly associations to that of a spurious Jew. What is still more in John the significant point, they lost all the truth of a real life given to us in Christ. Thus whether it be the depraving of souls or the forming sects after an earthly mould among those who were heavenly according to Paul, or whether it be the taking them away from the life of Christ, and from walking as He walked and simply putting them under Jewish ordinances, the Fathers, I

fear, as a class, fully earned the awful distinction here assigned by the Lord.

When man thus regulated after the Jewish pattern, the whole beauty and aim of the church of God was ruined in principle. But the point of interest here is, that succession and ordinances became defined as a system about this very time. It is the great fact, in contrast with the inspired epistle, that you find even among the ante-Nicene Fathers. Here the Lord seems to me to notice its working at the same time that God was in a measure using for good those that were faithful in the heathen persecutions. Even then Satan was not idle in forming his synagogue "of those that said they were Jews, and are not." On the other hand Christ said in view of the sufferer, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days." The trial was not unlimited: the Lord defined the term of their endurance. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." They might be hurt by the first, they would not be by that which follows and is final. It is a question of faith in God. Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom.

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos" comes a very different message. This too is special. "These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest." It is a serious thing where and how we dwell. "Thou dwellest even where Satan's throne is." How came this? One can understand their passing through the scene of his power, but to be dwelling there is significant. Did they

like to be near a throne, although it were the throne of Satan — to dwell there? Did they love the shadow or the glitter of human power?

Yet the Lord owns whatever is good. "Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith." It is remarkable that after the greatest persecutions, when Christendom and even Christians had been seduced into accepting the patronage of the world, up to that point there remained real faithfulness in refusing all efforts to deny the deity of Christ Under the same Constantine, who was the instrument of thus casting the world's shield over Christianity, was the battle fought and won against the Arian foe. It was under his authority, and indeed by his call, that the famous council sat at Nicea, and the faith of the Trinity was publicly established. I do not mean of course for Christians, who needed no such bulwark as this, but for Christendom. Thus the creed commonly called Nicene, which had for its object the assertion of Christ's consubstantial deity, was published at this same time. I cannot but think that this state of things is referred to here: "Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." What a solemn conjunction, that there should be this close proximity between Satan's throne without, but withal the mercy of God still maintaining that fundamental faith of Christ's own personal glory!

"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam." Clericalism came in rapidly after this. The world's authority brought in worldly objects, and now the ministry became a clergy, a more or less profitable

profession. The framers of this were those that held the doctrine of Balaam. Simultaneously with this of course there was the introduction of all kinds of compromise with the world. The clergy encouraged by a misuse of scripture every sort of commerce with the world's evil ways; as it is said here, "who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication." I do not doubt that all this is symbolically expressed. But the drift is plain enough where the conscience is not blunted. Where the same evils exist, and all that which would keep the church as a chaste virgin espoused to Christ is gone, no wonder that these warnings are misunderstood. The world had got in, as it still remains, and alas! palliated most by those who owe their professional status to this frightfully corrupt and corrupting influence. And the same spirit of unbelief which let in the mischief keeps it in, decrying the true application of the two-edged sword now as then. The Christians were dazzled by the world's power and glory, which was put forth doubtless in protecting, not themselves only, but the public faith of Christendom in that day. At the same time they fatally compromised Christ by alliance with the world, and there followed the practical return to the world out of which grace had taken the church in order to union with Christ in glory.

"So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate." The first of these epistles to the angel of the church in Ephesus denounced "the deeds of the Nicolaitans;" but now the iniquity in question (Antinomianism it would seem) had become a doctrine. "Repent; or else I am coming to thee quickly, and will war against them with the sword of my

mouth." Thus the Lord was no longer fighting in defence of His own people, nor was He employing the enemy's hatred and persecution to nip in the bud or prune evil excrescences. We have seen this just before. A greater trial appears now. Yet, alas! the state of those that bore His own name was such that He was obliged to deal thus sternly with them.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna." When the church was seeking the place of public glory, the encouragement to faith was the hidden manna. Let there be at least individual even if unvalued faithfulness to the Lord Jesus. There were, I doubt not, some saints true to His name, though it was not the time when they were led or forced into the position of a remnant. It was not yet a question of coming out from the public body. There might not be energy of faith for this, but at any rate fidelity to Christ was not lacking, and where this was — "To him that overcometh," says the Lord, "I will give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which none knoweth save he that receiveth it." To the true heart His approval is enough, and sweeter than triumph before the universe.

Then follows the last of these four churches. "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write." I cannot doubt that this letter contains an apt adumbration, as far as could be there in present facts, of what was found in mediaeval times. "These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet like fine brass." Christ is revealed now, not only in the all-discerning power of moral judgment, but also judicially prepared to act against evil — "His feet like fine brass."

"I know thy works, and thy love, and faith, and service, and patience, and thy last works (to be) more than the first." There was considerable devotedness in the middle ages, spite of the darkness and ignorance that prevailed in point of doctrine. But those who loved the Lord showed their love then not so much by intelligence in His ways, as by unsparing and habitual self-denial. I am not now speaking of what was done out of superstition, either to Mary or the church, when each was made a sort of bona Dea, but of the fruit of looking to Christ however simply.

"Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman (perhaps 'thy wife') Jezebel." This was a new kind of evil altogether. It is not simply clericalism now, nor persons holding the doctrine of Balaam; but a formal state of things, as the symbol of a woman regularly represents. Examine the use of woman symbolically, and you will find, I believe, that this is true. The man is the agent that goes forward; the woman is the state of things that is produced. Jezebel therefore is the appropriate symbol now, as Balaam was just before. The activity was in the clergy, who brought in the basest compromise with the world, and sold the honour of Christ for silver and gold, for ease and dignity. Here we find Jezebel later. This was the public state of things produced in the middle ages, and tolerated where the Lord was named.

As it is said here, "Because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess." It is precisely the claim of the so-called church, — the assumption of permanent infallibility — the setting up to be a sort of inspired authority to enunciate doctrine, and to direct everything in the name of God. Is not this

exactly what Romanism does? Does it not then stand in the place of Jezebel? — "Who calleth herself a prophetess, and teachest and seducest my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols." All was the fruit, doubtless, of what had been works before, but in far greater maturity now. "And I gave her space that she should repent; and she will not repent of her fornication. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and those that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death." Jezebel was a mother indeed — a holy mother, said the deceivers and deceived. What said the Lord? what said those who preferred "great tribulation," rather than commit adultery with her? This flagrant church-world corruption was now a settled institution. It is no mere transient cloud of error; it is a body in the highest worldly position — a queen, but also pretending to the highest spiritual power — a prophetess so-called, that was now permanently settled in Christendom, giving birth to a distinct progeny of iniquity — "her children." But says He who has eyes like a flame of fire, "I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give to each according to your works."

"But to you I say, the rest (or remnant) in Thyatira." The remnant is here plain. Thus we must read the text and translate it. We must leave out "and unto." The common text which gives rise to the current versions spoils the sense completely. It is to the rest, or the remnant in Thyatira, "as many as have not this doctrine," that the Lord turns.

Let us weigh a little more these remarkable words. Here we have for the first time the formal recognition of saints not included in the public state of the assembly, yet not so openly separate as was found at a later day. Still they become a witnessing body more or less in spirit, apart from that which set up the highest pretension but in profoundly wicked communion with Jezebel, as the Lord judged and stigmatized what man called "our mother, the holy Catholic, church." "To you I say, the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not known this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come." Thus the Lord speaks with exceeding tenderness of those that were true to His name. He did not expect great things from them. I do not the least doubt that those who are commonly called the Waldenses and Albigenses, and others perhaps of similar character, are referred to here. They were true and ardent, but with no considerable light of knowledge if measured by a fuller and richer testimony which the Lord was afterwards to raise up, as foreshown in the next chapter.

The Lord at the close gives a promise suited to the condition. "He that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations." This wicked Jezebel not only persecuted the true saints of the Lord, but sought universal supremacy — a world-wide dominion over souls. The Lord bids them in effect to have nothing to do with her, and He will give the true power when He takes it Himself. Let them abide in the place of patience, even though there be tribulation, as there must be if they are content to endure for Christ's sake now. 'But he that overcometh,

and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as a vessel of the potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father." The faithful will share Christ's power at His coming, and be associated with Himself in His kingdom. But even this is not enough for grace. "And I will give him the morning star." This is not association with Christ in His public reign, but in that which is proper to Him above the world altogether. The heavenly hope of being with Christ is promised as well as part in the kingdom.

And here, it has been well observed, a notable change takes place. The call to hear begins to follow the promise, instead of being before it. The reason is that a remnant is now formed. This does not go along with the public state of the church now. The Lord thenceforth puts the promise first, and this apparently because there is no use longer to expect the church as a whole to receive it. The address is to the overcomer, who is accordingly put before the call to hear. In the three previous churches it may be noticed, the call to hear is first, because the Lord is still dealing with the general conscience of the church. This is given up now. There is a remnant only that overcome, and the promise is for them. The Lord simply takes notice of these in His call. As for others it is all over with them.

Accordingly the division of the next chapter (Rev. 3) seems to be happy at this point. There is an immense change in turning to the last three churches. The ground of such a thought lies in the fact that the introduction to Sardis indicates the Lord beginning again a new state of things. The ancient ecclesiastical or catholic phase of the church terminates with Thyatira: nevertheless

Thyatira in this has the peculiar trait that it is the close of the public state of the church, and the beginning of those conditions which go on till the Lord's coming. Thyatira, I have no doubt, contains within it the mystic representative of Romanism. This can hardly be denied to Jezebel at least; whilst "the remnant" represents those who, without being Protestants, form a witnessing company apart from popery, yet before the rise of Protestantism. The beginning of the third chapter introduces the protestant state of things.

Thus we have had the general condition falling into decline; we have had the early persecution from the heathen; we have had the power of the world patronizing the church; and we have had finally Romanism, which alone (from the allusion to Christ's coming) is supposed to go on to the end.

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars." There is an evident allusion to the manner in which the Lord presented Himself to the church in Ephesus. Ephesus was the first presentation of the general public state. Sardis gives the rise of the new state of things, not strictly ecclesiastical — the Lord acting in the way of testimony, and not so much in ecclesiastical order. Hence it is not said here that He walks in the midst of the seven lampstands: that was ecclesiastical strictly. But here He has the seven Spirits of God. He is God. All power, all governing might, is in His hands, and the seven stars, that is to say, all the instrumental means by which He acts upon the church. "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." Such is Protestantism.

"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain. that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God." Hence what judges Protestantism is this, that they have the testimony of God's word much more fully than those who had sunk into the mere ecclesiastical formalism of the middle ages. There the word of God had been kept away, because the clergy and the word of God can never go together thoroughly. It is, and always must be, the effect of the clerical principle to substitute the authority of man, more or less, for that of the Lord, and to weaken and hinder the immediate action of the Spirit by the word of God on the conscience. I am speaking not of individual clergymen at all, but of clericalism wherever found, Catholic or denominational, nationalist or dissenting.

But the Protestant principle is a very different one. People may not be true to their principles, and often are not. Still, after all, one of the grand points fought for at the Reformation, and gained for Protestantism, whatever might be its defects, was this; — that man was put fairly, freely, and openly in presence of the Bible. God's word was there to deal with human conscience. I do not speak of justification by faith; for even Luther, as I think, never got thoroughly clear as to the truth of it. And though Catholics are miserably deluded, Protestants do not understand justification to this day. They have the truth in a measure, but not so as to clear souls from bondage, or bring them distinctly into liberty, peace, and the power of the Spirit. Even Luther never had peace in his soul, as the settled state in which he walked. We have most of us heard what conflicts he had, and not merely at the beginning of his career but to the end. I do not mean conflicts about the church, but about

his soul, It is needless here to cite passages from his extant writings, which prove how sorely he was tried by inward conflicts of unbelief, which amply prove how far he was from the calm enjoyment of the peace of the gospel; but it is an error to impute them in themselves to any other cause than a lack of clear knowledge of grace. In such a state, all sorts of things may trouble the man who cannot rest without a question on the Lord, no matter how able and honoured he may be. I am sure Luther is one from whom we may all learn much; whose courage, faithfulness, self-renunciation, and endurance are edifying and instructive. At the same time it is useless to blink the fact: energetic as he was and used of God largely, he was far behind in the understanding both of the church and of the gospel.

Yet, spite of drawbacks, an open Bible was won for God's children in particular, and for man also. This very thing condemned the state of Protestantism that resulted; because, while it was freely read, there was scarce any thought of forming all upon the Bible, and regulating all by it. Nothing is more common among Protestants, than to admit a thing to be perfectly true because it is in the word of God, without the smallest intention or thought of acting upon it. Is not this a very serious fact? The Romanists are in general too ignorant to know what is or is not in the Bible. Except the common-places of controversy with Protestants, they know little of Scripture. Tell them that this or that is to be found in the Bible, and they look amazed. They may not know it as a whole, having never read it save (?) under the eye of the directing priest, their confessor. The Protestant reads the Bible more at liberty, which is a real good and

precious boon; but for this very reason, the Protestant incurs no light responsibility.

"I have not found thy works perfect before my God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief." It is a sweeping intimation of the very same way in which the Lord threatens to come on the world. Now if there be in the state of Protestantism one thing more marked than another, it is that they always fall back on the world to deliver themselves from the power of the priest or the church. This has ever been the chief snare, as it is now. If even what belongs to the world be touched, they are in no small agitation about it. I am far from saying this because I do not feel for them much. Nor is it that I have any doubt that it is a great sin to wipe off all public recognition of God in the world. Impossible to believe that e.g. the unblushing worldliness one sees in the combination of Dissenters with Papists and infidels springs from just, pure, holy, and unselfish motives. It is rather to be imputed to the encroaching spirit of infidelity, where there is not also a truckling to superstition. Doubtless the infidels hope to gain the day, as the superstitious are very confident on their part; but the truth of it is that the devil will get the upper hand to the destruction of them both, and then find that the Lord will appear in His day for His own judgment of all the adversaries.

The Lord then warns the angel at Sardis, that if he should not watch, He Himself will come on him as a thief, and he shall not know what hour Christ will come on him. This is not at all the way in which His coming is spoken of for His own. They are waiting for Him —

expectantly without such an idea as His thief-like surprise. How can it surprise those who are ever awaiting Him? His coming is their joy, and for this they watch more than watchman for the dawn. The figure of the thief can be employed only for the world or the worldly-minded. So solemnly then does this language suppose that the assembly at Sardis have passed out of the practical attitude of waiting for the Lord as a loved object. All intimates that they are in great, and no doubt just, dread of Him as a judge. They have slipped into the world, and share its fears and anxieties. They have lost the sense of Christ's peace left with them They have not the joy of His coming for them in perfect love, to receive to Himself those whom He loves. The unwelcome visitation of a thief would be utterly incongruous if they were enjoying the sweet hope according to His own word, that He is coming for them quickly.

He that overcomes should be clothed in white, for there were a few in Sardis who had not defiled their garments, and who should thus walk with Him in white; because they are worthy. This has been always the case. Precious souls are there, and our happy service is to help these then, if we can, to a better knowledge of His grace, — not, of course, to make light of their being where they are, or of their doing what they do, yet in the fullest love to feel about them as the Lord does. "He that overcometh, — he shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, and will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."

In the next place comes Philadelphia. "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of

David, he that openeth, and no man shall shut; and shutteth, and no man shall open." Every word of Christ's presentation of Himself differs from the view of Him given in Rev. 1. This marks particularly the change in the chapter, and especially in the part before us. The address to Sardis also, although allusive to that of Ephesus, is nevertheless no less clearly meant to stand contrasted with it. It is a recommencement, and so far is analogous with that to Ephesus: still, the manner in which the Lord is presented is quite new. His having the seven Spirits of God was distinct from the Ephesian picture; nor is anything at all similar in the description of the Lord Jesus given before. It is a new state of things; but when we come to Philadelphia there is far more evidence of all things new. "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true." When the Lord is seen in the vision of chapter 1, these are not the ways in which He is described at all — "He that hath the key of David."

In the descriptions of the second chapter what was said about the Lord is a repetition of what was found in the vision John had just seen. The only exception is in Thyatira, where He is described as the Son of God; and, as already remarked, Thyatira is exactly transitional. It is the beginning of the changed condition. It is a church state in responsibility though not in real power, being an ecclesiastical body which presents horrors in the Lord's eyes, but not without a remnant dear to Him. This at the same time goes on down to the end, and brings in the Lord's coming; for, it will be observed, the coming of the Lord is not introduced in any of the first three, but from Thyatira it is, because the condition intended goes on to the coming of the Lord. Ephesus does not, nor Smyrna, nor Pergamos: the only semblance of it is in threats of

present judgment. Thyatira does, and so Sardis, and also Philadelphia.

But Philadelphia also prominently brings out the Lord in person as also in His moral glory. It is now Christ Himself, and this as One that faith discovers in new beauty, not dependent merely on visions of glory which had been seen before, but Christ as He really is in Himself — "He that is holy, he that is true." But more than this, it is Christ seen according to the largeness of His glory. Faith sees that the blessed One, the holy and the true, is the same that has the key of David. Old Testament prophecy — dispensational truth — is introduced now. It is "he that openeth, and no man shall shut." There is perfect liberty now — liberty for service, liberty for every one that belongs to the Lord. "I have set before thee an open door, and none can shut it: for thou hast a little strength." They are supposed to be not marked by such mighty doings, as Sardis was, Sardis did great exploits, Philadelphia nothing of the sort. Are we content to be little, my friends? to be of no esteem in the world? never to be marked by anything that men can wonder at or admire? I am supposing now a scale which attracts the world's attention.

This is exactly what is not true of Philadelphia, which is rather formed after a rejected Christ. We all know of what small account He was on earth; and so it is with Philadelphia. Has it no price in His eyes? "Thou hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." Just as Jesus was marked by valuing the word of God, and loving it — being the only One that could truly say to Satan as true of Himself, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," so here Philadelphia is distinguished by

the same living by faith. To some it might appear a small thing not to deny Christ's name, but nothing is more precious to the Lord. Once it was a question of not denying His faith, as was found in Pergamos; but here it is Himself personally. What He is is the main point. Mere orthodoxy does not suffice, but His person, though absent, and the glory due to Him.

"Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not." Is not this the revival of that dreadful scourge that had afflicted the early church (even Smyrna)? Have we not heard of it? And have we not seen it ourselves? How comes it, that for so many hundreds of years only a part of what the Fathers had laboured at sunk into the minds of men, a certain portion being rejected, as we know, by Protestantism; but now, when God brings out this fresh testimony, there rises a counter-testimony? Satan revives the old Judaizing spirit, at the very time that God re-asserts the true principle of Christian brotherhood, and, above all, makes Christ Himself to be all to His people. And here we have for our instruction the fact, that the synagogue of Satan — of those who say they are Jews, and are not — revives. How stand the facts? How are they even in this country? What is commonly called Puseyism tends to this; and that system is not confined to this country. You must not think it is merely a question of England; it holds equally abroad, as in Germany and elsewhere — in fact, wherever Protestantism is found, and, above all, wherever this is provoked, either by scepticism on the one hand, or on the other by truth that condemns both with the brightness of heavenly light. In order to defend themselves on a religions footing, men fall back on a

system of ordinances and of the law. This is, I think, what is meant by the synagogue of Satan here.

But the Lord will compel the recognition of His own testimony. I do not say when, where, or how; but as surely as He lives, will the Lord vindicate the truth He has given, and the testimony He has raised up for His name. "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."

Nor is this all. Not only will the Lord thus vindicate what is of Himself, but, as we know, there is an awful time coming on this world — an hour, as it is said here, not simply of tribulation, but of temptation or trial. I am inclined to think that the hour of trial embraces the whole Apocalyptic period; that is, not merely the awful time when Satan in a rage is expelled from on high, and when the beast, energised by him, rises to his full head of power, but the previous period of trouble, seduction, and judgment. In short, "the hour of temptation" is, I conceive, a larger term altogether than the "great tribulation" of Rev. 7, and still more than the unparalleled tribulation which is to befall the land of Israel. (Dan. 12, Matt, 24, Mark 13) If so, how rich and full is the promise: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." In vain men try to escape! The hour of temptation must come upon all. I dare say that some of us remember when people used to fly to Canada in order to escape "the great tribulation" which they expected to fall on the empire of the beast. Men's scheme was a mistake, their flight foolish. The hour of temptation will catch them, no matter where they may hide. The hour of temptation shall come upon

all the habitable world, "to try them that dwell upon the earth," be they where they may.

Who then can escape? Those who at Christ's call are caught up to heaven. They will not be in that hour. It is not only, be it observed, that they will not be in the place, but they will be kept out of the hour, of that coming temptation. What a full exemption! Such is the strength of the promise and the blessedness of it, that the Lord promises His own to be kept from the time. The only possible way I can understand of exempting any from the time is by taking them out of the scene. The Irvingites used to talk about the Lord having a little Zoar. It is not at all however a question of a place of shelter, but of complete removal from the period that is filled by the great trouble or trial that will come upon the habitable world. How can this be secured but by removing them out of the scene before the time arrives? Such I believe the promise here to import. The godly remnant of Jews, having to do with a special and most fierce but circumscribed tribulation, have only to flee to the mountains in order to escape till Jesus appears in glory, to the confusion of their foes. It is quite another thing for Christians.

"Behold, I come quickly!" There is not a word about His coming as a thief now, but with joy. The Lord has revived the true hope of His return; there are those who are thus waiting for Christ, and this epistle seems emphatically to apply to such. "Behold, I come quickly!" In principle it is true of all that are really faithful, but there may be Christians, as we know there are, involved in one or other of the various states which have been described, and which apparently go on to the close. It is in vain therefore to look for a formal obliteration of

these co-ordinate conditions, which cannot be till the Lord comes. "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name." He will be as much marked by power in the day of glory, as by contented weakness in the present scene of grace.

We have yet the last epistle to the angel of the church in Laodicea. But of this I would say but a few words, considering the late hour. The Laodicean picture is, in my judgment, the result of dislike and contempt for the testimony that the Lord had previously raised up. If people despise the truth possessed by those who are waiting for the Lord, they are in danger of falling into the awful condition that is here set forth. Christ is no longer the loved and only object of the heart; nor is there the sense of the blessedness of His coming, which leads into waiting for Him; still less is there a glorying in weakness that the power of Christ may rest on them. There is the desire to be great, to be esteemed of men, "rich, and increased in goods, and in need of nothing." You find here a scope, therefore, that leaves ample room for man. Hence it is that the Lord introduces Himself to them as the Amen, — the end of every thing human, — where all the security is in the faithfulness of God. He only is "the faithful and true witness." That is exactly what the church ought to have been and was not; and therefore He has to take that place Himself. It was so before when He was here below in grace, and now He must resume its power and glory and judgment, than

which one can hardly conceive a greater and more solemn rebuke on the condition of those who ought to have been His witnesses. Besides He is "the beginning of the creation of God." It is a setting aside of man altogether; and the reason is that Laodicea is the glorification of man and of man's resources in the church. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that. thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." They are neutral in principle and practice, being half-hearted about Christ. And I am persuaded there is no place which is more likely to generate neutrality than a sound and true position, if there be not self-judgment maintained and godly sincerity. The more you stand in the forefront of the battle, with the responsible testimony of God, the more you have the grace and truth of God brought out before and by you, if the heart and conscience be not governed and animated by the power of the Spirit of God, through that truth and grace that is in Christ, sooner or later, there will be, beyond a question, a lapse back into a position of neutrality, if not of active enmity. There will be indifference to all that is good; and the only kind of zeal, if there be zeal, will be for what is bad.

This is exactly Laodiceanism. "So then because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire." They wanted everything that was precious: — "gold" or divine righteousness in Christ "white raiment," that is to say, the righteousnesses of saints; "that the shame of thy

nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." They had lost the very perception of what was for God. All was dark as to truth, and uncertain as to moral judgment. Holy separateness and savour were gone. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." The Lord presents Himself even there in the most gracious way to meet their need. But the utmost promised in the word that closes the epistle goes not beyond reigning with Him. It is nothing special. For every one that is in the first resurrection is destined to reign with Christ, as even will the Jewish sufferers, earlier or later, under the antichrist. It is all a mistake, therefore, to suppose that this is a singular distinction, It amounts to this — that the Lord will hold, after all, to His own truth, spite of unfaithfulness. There may be individual reality even where the associations are miserably untoward.

Rev. 4 - 11:18.

We have already seen the bearing of the seven churches to which the Lord was pleased to send the letters contained in the second and third chapters. We have found, I trust, substantial reason and ample evidence in their own contents, as well as in the character of the book itself, to look for a meaning far more comprehensive than a literal historical notice of the condition of the Asiatic churches which were then primarily addressed. It is, of course, ground well known to all that John wrote to seven churches; but that no more was meant than the existing assemblies is more

than ought to be assumed. The septenary number is significant, and the division of the seven into two parts. Again, the order of their contents, as well as their nature severally, points to the same conclusion. Further, it is plain that certain phases do not necessarily abide, while at a given point in their course the language implies the state of things meant by them to continue up to Christ's return. That point is Thyatira, and thenceforward the same feature is in Sardis, Philadelphia, and of course Laodicea. Beginning successively, these go on together. But it is equally remarkable that the first three churches do not. What I gather from it is, that the three earlier churches are severed in character from the rest; for though all are alike typical, only the last four are used as fore-shadows of successive states of things about to ensue, and then be concurrent up to the Second Advent. We can easily understand two things: first, the succession of seven different states represented by those seven churches; and, secondly, that of the seven, three passed away, only retaining a moral bearing; whereas the last four have not this only, but a prophetic and successional bearing, and from the epoch of their appearance, run along-side of each other till the coming of the Lord Jesus.

But the remarkable fact which meets us from chapter 4 and onward is, that we no longer find any church condition on the earth. This confirms the same fact. Had these churches not been meant to have an application beyond the literal one, how could it be accounted for? If, on the other hand, besides that historical application, they were meant to be prophetical, we can easily comprehend that the Lord did address assemblies then existing, but meant by them to give views of

successional states that should be found up to the close, when four of these states go on together. Thyatira brings before us the public character of corrupted Christendom — that which is notoriously found in Popery. Then, again, Sardis is that which is well known as Protestantism: there might be orthodoxy, but withal a manifest want of real life and power. This is followed by the revival of the truth of Christian brotherhood, with an open door for the work as well as word of the Lord, and His coming acting powerfully, not merely on the mind as a conviction, but on the affections as attaching to the Lord Jesus. This is found in Philadelphia. Then Laodicea shows us the final state of indifference that would be produced by the rejection of these warnings and encouragements of the Lord.

From the fourth chapter we have the Spirit of God leading the prophet into the understanding of not the church-state, but that which will follow when churches are no longer before the mind of the Lord — when it becomes a question of the world, not without testimonies from God in the midst of gradually swelling troubles; but His witnesses henceforward of Jewish or Gentile character, never more after that of the church on earth. Believers we do see, of course, — some of them of the chosen people, others of the nations; but we hear of no such church condition as was found in the second and third chapters. One of the most striking proofs of the way in which the patent facts of the word of God are habitually passed over is, that this has been so constantly overlooked. There have been hundreds, perhaps thousands, of books written on the Revelation, yet it is only of comparatively recent date that so plain, sure, and grave a feature seems to have been seen. I

speak now from some acquaintance with that which has been written on the book from the Fathers down to our own days. As far as I remember, there does not occur in hundreds of the ablest books about it which have passed through my hands, the slightest reference even to this undeniable and important fact which lies on the surface of the prophecy.

I draw from this nothing complimentary to man's mind, but the contrary. It loudly confirms those who are convinced of the necessity of the teaching of the Holy Ghost, to profit even by what is plain, certain, and obvious. There is no book so remarkable as the Bible in this respect: no learning nor acquirement, no brightness of mind or imagination, will ever, without His power, enable any soul to seize, enjoy, and use aright its communications. They may, no doubt, perceive one fact here and another there; but how to employ even these for good will never be known unless the Spirit of God give us to look straight to Christ. He that has Christ before him is soon sensible of a difference of relationship and its results. Christ has special ways of dealing with the church that are suitable to none else. This closes with the end of the third chapter.

The inference is obvious. New things come before the Lord, as well as the reader. Now, as notoriously the great mass of persons who bear the name of the Lord have assumed, without the smallest proof from scripture, that the church has always been and always will be while the work of converting souls proceeds on earth, it is clear that this assumption erects an impassable barrier against the truth. No wonder people fail to understand the Bible when they enter on its study with a principle which opposes at all points the revealed

truth of God. There is no such notion in the Bible. It is found in no part either of the Old or of the New Testament; as little as anywhere else is it tolerated by the book now before us. Thus we see churches existing when the book begins; but they are found no more, when the introductory portion closes and the proper prophecy is entered on. A church condition is not, strictly speaking, the subject of prophecy, which deals with the world, and shows us divine judgments coming on its evil, when God is about to make room for good according to His own mind. Such is the great theme of the book of Revelation. But inasmuch as there were Christian assemblies then, the Spirit of God is pleased to preface it with a most remarkable panoramic view of the church condition as long as it should subsist before the Lord on the earth. And we have seen this given with the most striking wisdom, so as to suit at the time of John, yet also as long as the church goes on always to apply, and increasingly, not every part at once, but with sufficient light to give children of God full satisfaction as to the mind of the Lord. In fact, it is the same here as in every other part of scripture: none can really profit by the word, whether in Genesis or in the Revelation, without the Spirit, and this can only be to the glory of Christ.

If this be so, we can understand the vast importance of the change that is here observable. The prophet enters by the door into heaven. Of course this was simply a vision. The power of the Holy Ghost gave him thus to enter and behold; it was not a question of sensible facts. He was immediately in the Spirit, it is said; and in heaven he beholds a throne set, and this, from its effects and surroundings, a judicial throne. It is not at all the

same character of the throne of God as we know and approach now. We come boldly to the throne and find grace and mercy to help in time of need. But we find nothing of the sort here, either in the throne or in what issues from it. Even a child might read better the force of the symbols employed for our instruction. What is meant by lightnings and voices and thunderings? Is it too much to say that he who could confound the aspect of the throne in Hebrews 4 with that of Revelation 4 must have a singularly constituted mind? I cannot understand how any attentive reader could fail to see the difference, not to speak of one spiritually taught. Indeed, the amazing thing is, how any person in his sober senses could conclude that the two descriptions characterize the same state of things. They stand really in the strongest possible contrast.

Here we have the throne, not of divine mercy, but invested with what was proper to Sinai: it discerns, denounces, and destroys the evil of the earth. Thus it is the seat and source of judgment on the ungodly. I admit that it is not yet the throne of the Son of man reigning over the world. The time is not come at this point for the church to reign with Christ over the earth. In Rev. 5 the reigning over the earth is spoken of as a future thing ("shall reign over the earth"), and not yet a fact. Clearly, therefore, we see here a transitional state of things after the church condition ends, and before the millennial reign begins. Such is the manifest truth necessary to understand the Revelation. As long as you do not admit this, you will never, in my judgment, understand the Apocalypse as a whole Then we are told that the likeness of Him that sat on the throne is compared to a jasper and a sardine stone. This obviously does not refer

to the divine essence, which no creature can approach to or look upon. It is God's glory so far as He was pleased to allow it to be made visible to the creature. Consequently it is compared to those precious stones of which we hear in the city afterwards.

But there are other notable features of the throne. We are told that round about it "there was a rainbow in sight like an emerald." God marks here His remembrance of creation. The rainbow is the familiar sign of the covenant with creation, and it was presented prominently to the prophet's mind. The various points noticed are as in God's mind, not merely as in man's eyes. Thus the rainbow is not seen in a shower of rain upon the earth. It is a question of the simple truth that was set forth by it, and nothing more. So it is with all the other objects seen in this vision.

Next, "round about the throne were four and twenty elders." The allusion is evident to the four and twenty courses of priesthood. Only it will be observed that it is not the whole number the twenty-four classes of men), but simply the chief priests of these courses. The twenty-four elders, in my opinion, refer to the heads of the priesthood. Therefore this is of some importance to bear in mind, because we find subsequently others that are recognized as priests who were not yet in heaven, who indeed were only called out on the earth after this. Unquestionably these others became priests, but no more elders are recognized. No addition is ever made to the company of elders; they are a fixed number. Priests there are afterwards, but no heads of priesthood save these elders.

These heads of priesthood, I have no doubt then, are the glorified saints above; and in that glorified body, as I apprehend, are the Old Testament saints as well as the New. You will see from this, that I am as far as possible from wishing to undervalue the grace of God to those of old. It seems to me that there are good grounds to infer from the prophecy itself that the twenty-four elders are not merely the church, but all those saints that rise up at the presence of the Lord Jesus (as it is written, they that are Christ's at His coming or His presence). This is unquestionable to my mind. The rising from the dead includes all saints up to that time, and of course, at the same time, the change that is described in the latter part of the same chapter. (1 Cor. 15) All saints deceased or then alive appear to me meant. Thus the Old Testament saints and those of the New are changed; for the "dead in Christ" ought scarcely to be limited merely to the body of Christ. But the phrase "the dead in Christ" means all that have their relationship in Christ, and not merely in Adam; they did not die in the flesh, but died in Christ. It is not a question of Adam the first, but of the Second; but as the one embraces all the Adam family, it seems to me the other should be equally broad. Thus we must leave room in the twenty-four elders for the glorified, whether in the Old Testament times or in the New. This does not in the smallest degree compromise the special character of the church. It will be shown how remarkably this is preserved and manifested in a later point of the visions. At present I merely wish to state briefly what I believe to be the force of the symbol here.

These twenty-four elders, again, are clothed in white raiment, as also they have crowns of gold. They are seated on thrones. It is impossible to apply this to

angelic beings. Angels are never so crowned or enthroned. Nowhere do we hear of an angel called to any such dignity. Power no doubt they might wield, but never do they reign; they have the execution of the will of God in outward things, but never do they administer it after this royal pattern. This is destined for the glorified saints — for the redeemed, and not for angels; and this because Christ has given them the title of grace by His blood. As it was said in a previous chapter, He has made us a kingdom,-priests to His God and Father. In chapter 4 we have symbols which answer rather to the kingly title, as in chapter 5 the same persons appear, discharging functions after a priestly type. In Revelation 4 the elders are crowned and enthroned; in Revelation 5 they have golden vials (or bowls) of odours (i.e., incense), which are the prayers of the saints. In the one, therefore, their kingly place is more involved, — in the other their priestly occupation. This is never applied to ordinary angels as such. The only angel ever seen in priestly action is when the Lord Jesus assumes the character of an angel-priest (Rev. 8); not of course that He becomes a literal angel, but God was pleased, for reasons of sufficient weight, thus to represent Him at the altar under the trumpets.

Next we find that attention was directed both to what characterized the throne judicially, and also to the Holy Ghost as having a symbolic description suitable to the scene — seven lamps or torches of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Thus it is not the Holy Ghost in the gracious power which characterizes His relationship to the church, but in governmental judgment, because it is a question of a

sinful guilty world — of the creature, and not the new creation.

So too we see that the four living creatures are brought before us. "Before the throne," it is written, "there was a sea of glass like unto crystal." Instead of its being a laver of water to purify the unclean, it is a sea, not liquid, but of glass. It is fixed purity now. Hence it is no question of meeting what was contracted in this defiling world. Those that are here in relation to it have passed out of their failure and need; they are in heaven and already glorified. And I may just repeat what has been often said before, that all scripture testifies to glorified bodies, without a word about glorified spirits. The twenty-four elders do not mean those members of Christ who have gone by death into His presence. The numerical symbol in fact is inconsistent with such an idea — for this simple reason, that, interpret the twenty-four as you please, it must mean a complete company. Now the saints cannot be said to be complete in any sense whatsoever till Christ have come, who will translate all the Christians alive then on earth, with all the saints who had previously fallen asleep in Him, to be glorified with Himself above.

There is no time that you can look at the departed spirits, but there are some on earth who require to be added in order to exhibit the number complete. In point of fact, so far is scripture from ever representing the separate condition of the spirits as a complete state, that its testimony is distinctly adverse. The church is viewed as in a certain sense complete at any given moment on the earth, not because of the greater importance of those who are on the earth compared with such as are in heaven, but because the Holy Ghost was sent down from

heaven, and is on earth. This is the reason why, (He being the one bond of the church,) where He is, the church must be. Accordingly there never can be any complete state of the church at any given moment in heaven, but on earth rather till Jesus come. But when we speak of absolute completeness, it is clear that this cannot be till the Lord come and has taken all the heavenly saints out of the world, and they go up into His presence above. Then there is completeness; and this is the state that is represented by the twenty-four elders. So that we have here, therefore, still more confirmation of what has been already pressed, — that the entire description pre-supposes the church condition done with, and a new state entered on. Such is the unforced meaning of this vision of the blessedness and glory of those who had been on earth, but are now glorified in heaven. It is a complete company in the fullest sense; the heads of the heavenly priesthood. They have passed, therefore, out of the need of the washing of water by the word. It is a sea, not of water, but of glass, like crystal. This stamps the fact in a most evident manner.

Further, we have to notice the cherubic symbol. "And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind." Thus there was perfect discernment conferred on them by God. The living creatures I understand to be symbolic of the agency — whatever may be the agents — that God employs in the execution of His judicial power. Consequently the qualities of power are those fitting and necessary for that execution. "The first was like a lion; the second like a calf (a young bull or steer); the third had the face as of a man; and the fourth was like a flying eagle." We have thus majestic power, patient endurance,

intelligence, and rapidity, all which enter into the judicial dealings that follow.

The question arises, and a very interesting one it is, not what, but who, are these living creatures? We have seen the qualities in their agency; but who are the agents? This is a delicate point. At the same time I think that scripture gives adequate light, as to those who wait on God, for everything which it is important for us to know.

It will be observed that in Rev. 4 (and it is a remarkable fact) there are no angels mentioned. You have the throne of God; you have the elders, and also the four living creatures, but not a word about angels. The living creatures celebrate God, not yet as the Most High, but as the "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." And when they do thus "give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth unto the ages of the ages, the twenty-four elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth unto the ages of the ages, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord and our God, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou createst all things, and because of thy will they were and were created." I give it in its exact form. There is this particular stamped on the elders, that they always speak with understanding. It will be true in its measure even of the, Jewish remnant that are to be called after the rapture. They are designated as "the wise that shall understand:" so we know from Daniel and others. But the elders have a higher character, because they invariably enter into the reason of the thing. This is an exceedingly beautiful feature, which I suppose also to be connected with the fact that they are called elders. They are those who have

the mind of Christ. They apprehend the counsels and ways of God.

In Rev. 4 we see that the living creatures and the elders are closely connected, but no more. We shall find in Rev. 5 that they join together. Not merely are they connected there but they positively combine. This is shown us in the case where the Lamb "takes the book, the four living creatures and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sing a new song." The remarkable fact that it is important to heed here is this. Chapter 5 shows us for the first time the Lamb presented distinctly and definitely in the scene. It was not so even in chapter 4 where we have seen the display of the judicial glory of God in His various earthly or dispensational characters, save His millennial one, and of course not His special revelation to us now as Father. In itself we know that Jehovah God embraces equally the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. But here the Holy Ghost is distinctively seen as the seven Spirits of God under a symbolic guise; here the Lord Jesus is not yet discriminated. The glorious vision of Him who sits on the throne may include therefore both the Father and the Son; it is rather God as such, than the revelation of personality — the general or generic idea, not personal distinction formally. But in Rev. 5, a challenge is made which at once displays the worth, victory, and peace of the Lamb, that holy earth-rejected Sufferer, whose blood has bought for God those who were under the ruin of sin and misery. There is to he then the full blessing of man and the creature on God's part, yea, man not only delivered, but even before the deliverance is displayed led into the

understanding of the mind and will of God. Christ is just as necessarily the wisdom of God as He is the power of God. Without Him no creature can apprehend, any more than a sinner knows salvation without Him. We need, and how blessed that we have, Christ for everything! Thus, whatever the glory of the scene before the prophet in chapter 4 that which follows shows us the wondrous person and way in which man is brought into the consciousness of the blessing, and the appreciation of the divine ways and glory.

"And I saw on the right hand of him that sat on the throne a roll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals" (Rev. 5:1). The creature could not open these seals, — none anywhere. But the strong angel proclaims, and the Lord Jesus at length comes forward to answer the proclamation. He takes up the challenge, appearing after a sufficient space had proved the impotence of all others. The comfort assured to John by the elder is thus justified; for the elders always understand. And he sees the Lion of the tribe of Judah to be the Lamb, despised on earth, exalted in heaven, who advances and takes the roll out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne. And then they all — living creatures and elders together — fell down before the Lamb with a new song.

It is striking that after this, as we are told, "I saw, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;" who said with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power." Here we have the angels, who are now distinctly and prominently brought forward. Why is this? How comes it

that no angels appear in chap. 4? And why is it that we have them in chap. 5? There is always the wisest reason in the ways of God of which scripture speaks, and we are encouraged by the Spirit to enquire humbly but trustfully. What is marked by it seems to be this: that the assumption of the book into the hands of the Lamb, and His preparing to open the seals, marks a chance of administration. Up to that point of time, angels have held a sort of executory ministry of power from God. Where judgments were in question, or other extraordinary intervention on His part, angels were the instruments; whereas from this point of time, it appears to me that the Spirit of God marks the fact of a vast change, however they way still be employed during the interval of the last of Daniel's seventy weeks. It is providence yet, not manifested glory.

The title of the glorified saints is thus asserted. We know for certain, as a matter of doctrine in Heb. 2, that the world to come is to be put not under angels but the redeemed. Here it appears to me that the seer is admitted to a prophetic glimpse that falls in with the doctrine of St. Paul. In other words, when the Lamb is brought definitely into the scene, then, and not before, we see the elders and the living creatures united in the new song. As one company, they join in praising the Lamb. They sing, "Thou art worthy, for thou hast redeemed," and so on. Thus we have them combined in a new fashion; and, what is more, the angels are now seen and definitely distinguished. Supposing, for instance, that previously, the administration of judgment was in the hand of angels, it is easily understood that they would not be distinguished from the living creatures in chap. 4 because, in point, of fact, the living creatures set

forth she agencies of God's executory judgment; whereas in chap. 5, if there be a change in administration, and the angels that used to be the executors are no longer so recognised as such in view of the kingdom, but the power is entrusted to the hands of the glorified saints, it is simple enough that the angels fall back, being eclipsed by the heirs, and no longer in the same position. If previously they might be understood to be included under the living creatures, they are henceforward to take their place simply as angels, and are therefore no longer comprehended under that symbol. This, the suggestion of another, appears to commend itself as a true explanation of the matter.

From this, if correct, as I believe it to be, it follows that the four living creatures might be at one time angels, and at another saints. What the symbol sets forth is not so much the persons that are entrusted with these judgments, as the character of the agencies employed. Scripture, however, affords elements to solve the question, first by the marked absence of angels, who, as we know, are the beings that God employed in His providential dealings with the world, and this both in Old Testament times, and still in the days of the New Testament. The church is only in course of formation; but when it shall be complete, when the glorified saints are caught up, and the First-begotten is owned in His title, they too will be owned in theirs. For as the Lord is coming to take visibly the kingdom, we can readily understand that the change of administration is first made manifest in heaven before it is displayed upon earth. If this be correct, then the change is marked in chapter 5. The general fact is in chapter 4 the

approaching change is anticipated in chapter 5. This appears to be the most satisfactory way of accounting for that which is here brought before us.

All the results are celebrated for every creature when once the note is struck (ver. 13).

Next we come to the opening of the seals. Revelation 6 has a character of completeness about it, with this only exception, — that the seventh seal is the introduction to the trumpets in the beginning of Rev. 8. This does not call for many words on the present occasion. "And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, Come." Ought we to have here, and after the other three horses, the words "and see"? It appears that they are wanting in the best text1 in all these passages. In every one of the cases the sentence ought to be "come." The difference comes to this, that "come and see" would be addressed to John; whereas according to the better MSS. the "come" is addressed by the living creature to the rider on the horse. Clearly this makes a considerable difference. One of the living creatures steps forward when the first seal is opened, and says, Come; and at once comes forth a rider on a white horse.

Let us inquire into, the force of each severally. "I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him: and he went (or came) forth conquering and that he might conquer." It is the answer to the call. The first then comes forth, and the character of his action is prosperity and conquest. Everything shows this. It is the earliest state that the Spirit of God notices as brought about in the world.

After the mighty change we have already seen to have taken place in heaven, there is a mighty conqueror that will appear here below. We are all aware that this has been applied to a great variety of things and persons. Sometimes it has been supposed to mean the triumphs of the gospel, sometimes Christ's coming again, and as often antichrist, and I know not what. But what I think we may safely gather from it is this, that God employs a conqueror who will carry everything before him.

It is not necessarily by bloodshed, as in the second seal, which gives us carnage if not civil war. Hence the rider is not on a white horse, the symbol of victory; but remounted on another, a red horse, with a commission to kill, and a great sword. Imperial power which subjugates is meant by the horse in every state; but in the first case imperial power seems to subject men bloodlessly. The measures are so successful — the name itself carries such weight with it — that, in point of fact, it is one onward career of conquest without necessarily involving slaughter. But in the second seal the great point is "that they should slay one another." It was possibly even civil warfare. There the horse was red.

In the third seal it is a black horse, the colour of mourning. Accordingly we read now of a choenix of wheat for a denarius, and three choenixes of barley for a denarius. That is, the price was the rate of scarcity. The ordinary price a little while before we know to have been incomparably less; for notoriously a denarius would have procured as much as fifteen choenixes. Now it is needless to say that fifteen times the ordinary price of wheat would make a serious difference; but however this may have been, certainly the rate current in St. John's day is not a question that is easily settled.

Naturally rates differ. The increase of civilization and other causes tend to make it a little uncertain. That there is a difficulty in ascertaining with nicety the prices at this particular epoch is plain from the fact that men of ability and conscience have supported every possible variety of opinion plenty, scarcity, and a fair supply at a just price; but I do not think it is worth while to spend more time on the point. The colour of the horse, to my mind, decisively proves what the nature of the case is. Mourning would be strange if it were either a time of plenty or one governed by a just price; black suits a time of scarcity. Some will be surprised to hear that each of these views has had defenders. There are only three possible ways of taking it; and each one of these has had staunch support. Every one of these different interpretations has been insisted on by learned men, who are as liable as others to waver sometimes to one side, sometimes to another. There is no certainty about them. The word of God makes the matter plain to a simple mind. The unlettered in this country or any other cannot know much details about the price of barley or wheat at the time of St. John, or later; but he does see at once that the black colour is significant, especially as contrasted with white and red, and not at all indicative of joy or justice, but very naturally of distress; and therefore he feels bound to take this in company with the other points of the third horse and its rider.

The fourth seal was a pale or livid horse, the hue of death. Accordingly the name of its rider is Death, and Hades followed with him. To make the force still plainer, it is said that authority was given to him over the fourth of the earth, to slay with the sword, and with hunger,

and with death (pestilence perhaps), and by the beasts of the earth.

The fifth seal shows us souls under the altar, who had been slain for the word of God, and for their testimony, who cried aloud for vengeance to the Sovereign Ruler. They are vindicated before God, but must wait: others, both their fellow-servants and their brethren, must be killed as they were ere that day comes.

The sixth seal marks a vast convulsion, a partial answer to the cry as I suppose. Many a person thinks that those in question are Christians. But if we look more clearly into the passage, we may learn that this again confirms the removal of the church to heaven before this. "How long, O Sovereign, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" Is this a prayer, or desire according to the grace of the gospel? Reasoning is hardly needful on a point so manifest. I think that any one who understands the general drift of the New Testament, and the special prayers there recorded by the Holy Ghost for our instruction, would be satisfied but for a false bias otherwise. Take Stephen's prayer, and our blessed Lord, the pattern of all that is perfect. On the other hand we have similar language elsewhere: but where? In the Psalms. Thus we have all the evidence that can be required. The evidence of the New Testament shows that these are not the sanctioned prayers of the Christian; the evidence of the Old Testament, that just such were the prayers of persons whose feelings and experience and desires were founded on Israelitish hopes.

Does not this exactly fall in with what we have already proved — that the heavenly glorified saints will have passed out of the scene, and that God will be at work in the formation of a new testimony, which will of course have its own peculiarities, — not of course obliterating the facts of the New Testament, but at the same time leading the souls of the saints more particularly into what was revealed of old, because God is going to accomplish what was predicted then? The time is approaching for God to take the earth. The great subject of the Old Testament is the earth blessed under the rule of the heavens, and Christ the head of both. The earth, and the earthly people Israel, and the nations, will then enjoy the days of heaven here below. Accordingly these souls show us their condition and hopes. They pray for earthly judgments. They desire not that their enemies should be converted, but that God should avenge their blood on them. Nothing can be simpler, or more sure than the inference. "And it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until both their fellow-servants and their brethren, that were to be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."

This is an important intimation, as we shall see from what follows in the Apocalypse. They are told that they are not the only band of the faithful who are given up to a violent end: others must follow later. Till then, God is not going to appear for the accomplishment of that judgment for which they cried. They must wait therefore for that further, and, as we know, more furious outburst of persecution. After that, God will deal with the earth. Thus we have here the latest persecution, as well as the earlier one, of the Apocalyptic period distinctly given. The apostle Paul had spoken of himself as ready to be

offered up: so these were and are seen therefore under the altar in the vision. They were renewed indeed, and understood what Israel ought to do; but they were clearly not on the ground of Christian faith and intelligence as we are. Of course it is a vision, but still a vision with weighty and plain intimations to us. They had the spirit of prophecy to form the testimony of Jesus. Judgment yet lingers till there was the predicted final outpouring of man's apostate rage, and then the Lord will appear and put down all enemies.

At the same time, as we have already seen passingly, the next seal shows that God was not indifferent meanwhile. The sixth seal may be regarded as a kind of immediate consequence of the foregoing cry. When opened, a vast shaking ensues, — a thorough concussion of everything above and below, set forth mystically, as in the previous seals. "The sun became black as sack-cloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell on the earth, even as a fig tree, shaken by a mighty wind, casteth its untimely figs. And the heaven was removed as a scroll rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." This is merely the appearance before the seer in the vision. We are not to suppose that heaven and earth will be physically confounded when the prediction is fulfilled. He saw all this before his eyes as signs, of which we have to consider the meaning. We have to find out by their symbolic use elsewhere what is intended here by the changes that passed over sun, moon, stars, and the earth in the vision. And the result of course depends on our just application of scripture by the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

Then we are told in plain language, not in figures, that "the kings of the earth, and the great and the rich, and the chiliarchs, and the mighty, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains." This it is well to heed, because it would be evident that if it meant that the heaven literally was removed as a scroll, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place, there could be no place to hide in. Thus to take it as other than symbolic representation would be to contradict the end by the beginning. This, then, is not the true force. Supposing heaven really to disappear, and the earth to be moved according to the import of these terms in a pseudo-literal way, how could the various classes of terrified men be saying to the mountains, "Fall on us and hide us?" It is plain, therefore, that the vision, like its predecessor, is symbolical; that the prophet indeed beheld these objects heavenly and earthly thus darkened and in confusion; but that the meaning must be sought out on the ordinary principles of interpretation. To my mind, it represents a complete dislocation of all authority, high and low — an unexampled convulsion of all classes of mankind within its own sphere, the effect of which is to overturn all the foundations of power and authority in the world, and to fill men's minds with the apprehension that the day of judgment is come.

It is not the first time indeed that people have so dreaded, but it will be again worse than it has ever been. Such is the effect of the sixth seal when its judgment is accomplished, after the church is taken away to heaven, and indeed subsequent to a murderous persecution of the saints who follow us on earth. The persecuting powers and those subject to them will be

visited judicially, and there will ensue a complete disruption of authority on the earth. The rulers will have misused their power, and now a revolution on a vast scale takes place. Such seems to rue the meaning of the vision. The effect on men when they see the total overturning of all that is established in authority here below will be that they will think the day of the Lord is come. They will say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who is able to stand?" It is an error to confound their saying so with God's declaration. It is not He but they who cry that the great day of the wrath is come. There is no excuse for so mistaken an interpretation. It is what these frightened multitudes exclaim; but the fact is that the great day does not arrive for a considerable space afterwards, as the Revelation itself clearly proves. The whole matter here is that men are so alarmed by all this visitation, that they think it must be His coming day, and they say so. It is very evident that the great day of His wrath is not yet come, because a considerable time after this epoch our prophecy describes the day of His coming. It is described in Rev. 14, Rev. 17, and especially Rev. 19. When it really arrives, so infatuated are the men of the world that they will fight against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them. Satan will have destroyed their dread when there is most ground for it.

After this, so far is the great day of His wrath from being come, that we find in the parenthesis of Rev. 7 God accomplishing mighty works of saving mercy. The first is the sealing of 144,000 out of the tribes of Israel by an angel that comes from the sun-rising. Next there is

vouchsafed to the prophet the sight of a crowd of Gentiles that none could number, "out of every nation, and tribes, and peoples, and Tongues, standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and they cry with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Here it is not simply "salvation," but "salvation to God," in the quality of sitting upon the throne (we have seen in this book, His judicial throne). In other words, the ascription could not have been made before Rev. 4. Its tenor supposes a vast change to have taken place. It is not the fruit of a testimony during all or many ages. All this is merely men's imagination, without the smallest foundation in scripture. So far from its being a picture of the redeemed of all times, it is expressly said to be a countless throng out of Gentiles contrasted with Israel, and this in relation to God governing judicially. It is not universal therefore. These Gentiles stand in manifest contrast with the sealed out of Israel. One of the elders talked about them, and explained to the prophet, who evidently without this would have been at fault. If the elders mean the glorified saints, these Gentiles are not. Most assuredly they cannot be all saints, because the hundred and forty-four thousand of Israel we have seen expressly distinguished from them. Who are they and what? They are a multitude of Gentiles to be preserved by gracious power in these last days. They are not said to be glorified; nor is there reason to doubt that they are still in their natural bodies. When they are said to be before the throne, it proves nothing inconsistent with this; because the woman, for instance, in Rev. 12, is also described as seen in heaven; but, you must remember,

this is only where the prophet saw them in the vision. We are not necessarily to gather that they were to be in heaven; John saw them there, but whether it might mean that they were, or were not to be, in heaven, is another question. This depends on other considerations that have to be taken into account, and it is for want of due waiting on God, and of adequately weighing the surrounding circumstances, that such serious mistakes are made in these matters.

In this case it is perfectly plain to my mind that they are not heavenly as such. There are weighty objections. First of all, we find them definitely contra-distinguished from Israel, who clearly are on earth, and thus naturally this company would be on earth too,-the one Jewish, and the other Gentile. Next they come out of the great tribulation. Far from its being a general body in respect to all time, this proves that it is a very peculiar though countless group, — that it is only persons who can be preserved and blessed of God during the epoch of the great tribulation.

In the millennial time there will be a great ingathering of the Gentiles; but these are not millennial saints. They are saints from among the Gentiles, who will be called to the knowledge of God by the preaching of the "everlasting gospel," or the "gospel of the kingdom," of which we hear both in the gospels and in the Revelation. We all know that the Lord Himself tells the disciples that this "gospel of the kingdom" shall be "preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations" (or all the Gentiles); "and then shall the end come." Now this is just the very time spoken of here. It is clearly not a general summary of what is going on now, but a description of what is yet to be, specially just before the end when the great

tribulation bursts out. And there is the fruit of divine grace even then in this vast crowd from the Gentiles, the details of whose description fall in with and confirm what has been remarked already.

I have already drawn attention to the fact that they are distinguished from the elders. If these mean the church, those do not; and as all admit that the elders represent the glorified saints, the inference seems to me quite plain and certain. Undoubtedly we might have the same body represented at different times by a different symbol, but hardly by two symbols at the same time. We may have, for instance, Christians set forth by a train of virgins at one time, and by the bride at another; but in the same parable there is a careful avoidance of confusion; and no such incongruous mixture occurs in scripture. It is not even found amongst sensible men, not to speak of the word of God. So here the prophet tells us that one of the elders answers his own enquiry) "What are these arrayed in white robes? and whence come they?" "These are they who come out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Clearly therefore they are believers or saints. "Therefore are they before the throne of God," which I take to be not a description of their local place but of their character, — that it is in view of, and in connection with, the throne. This, we have seen, makes it to be limited to the particular time, and not vague or general; because the throne here differs from what it is now, and the millennial throne will be different from both. It is that very aspect of the throne which may be called its Apocalyptic character, to distinguish it from what was before or will be afterwards.

Again, not merely are they there themselves, but it is said, "He that sitteth on the throne shall" — not exactly "dwell among them," but — "tabernacle over them." It is the gracious shelter of the Lord's care and goodness that is set forth by it. This is of importance: because, though God now dwells by the Holy Ghost in the church as His habitation through the Spirit, it will not be so when these Gentiles will be called to the knowledge of Himself. There will be — what is more suited to their character — His protection. Of old God had His pillar of cloud, which was a defence and a canopy over the camp of Israel (though He also dwelt in their midst); here, too, He graciously shows it is not alone the sealed of Israel that enjoy His care, but these poor Gentiles. It is added that "they shall not hunger any more, neither thirst any more; nor in any wise shall the sun fall on them, nor any heat." I confess to you that I think such a promise is much more exactly adapted to a people about to be on the earth, than to men in a glorified state above. Where would be the propriety of a promise to glorified people not to hunger or thirst any more? If to a people on earth, we can all understand the comfort of its assurance. "For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall tend them, and shall lead them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Then comes at length the seventh seal. This is important, because it guards us effectually against the idea that the sixth seal goes down to the end, as many excellent men have imagined in ancient and modern times. It is clearly incorrect. The seventh seal is necessarily after the sixth. If there is an order in the others, we must allow that the seventh seal introduces

seven trumpets which follow each other in succession like the seals. These are described from Rev. 8 and onward. "I saw the seven angels who stand before God; and to them were given seven trumpets." Then we see a remarkable fact, already alluded to — an angel of peculiarly august character found before the altar. "And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given him much incense, that he might give [efficacy] to the prayers of all the saints at the golden altar which was before the throne." Hence it follows that, while there are glorified saints above, saints are not wanting on earth who are sustained by the great High Priest, however little their light, or great their trial. Thus we have here the clear intimation that while the glorified are above, there will be others in their natural bodies yet accredited as saints here below.

But there is another trait which demands our attention. Under the trumpets the Lord Jesus assumes the angelic character. Everything is angelic under the trumpets. We no longer hear of Him as the Lamb. As such He had opened the seals; but here as the trumpets were blown by angels, so the angel of the covenant (who is the second person in the Trinity, as He is commonly called) falls back on that which was so familiar in the Old Testament presentation of Himself. Not of course that He divests Himself of His humanity: this could not be; or if it could be imagined, it would be contrary to all truth. The Son of God since the incarnation always abides the man Christ Jesus. From the time that He took manhood into union with His glorious person, never will He cut it off. But this evidently does not prevent His assuming whatever appearance is suited to the prophetic

necessity of the case — and this I conceive is just what we find here under the trumpets. We may observe that an increasingly figurative style of language is employed. All other objects become more distant in this series of visions than before; and even Christ Himself is seen more vaguely, i.e., not in His distinct human reality, but in an angelic appearance.

Here then it is written that "the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it unto the earth." The effect was "voices, and thunders, and lightnings, and an earthquake." Further, in this new septenary we must prepare ourselves for even greater visitations of God's judgments. There were lightnings and voices and thunders in Rev. 4 but there is more now. We find, besides these, an earthquake added. The effect among men becomes more intense.

"And the first sounded his trumpet, and there was hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth." This I take as a violent down-pouring of displeasure from God. Hail implies this. Fire, we know, is the constant symbol of God's consuming judgment, and it is mingled with blood. It is destruction to life in the point of view that is intended here. We have to consider whether it is simple physical decease or dissolution in some special respect.

It will be noticed in these divine visitations that the third part is particularly introduced. What is the prophetic meaning of "the third"? It appears to answer to what we have given us in Rev. 12 (i.e., the properly Roman or western empire). I believe that it would thus convey the consumption of the Roman empire in the west. Of course one cannot be expected in a general sketch to enter on a

discussion of the grounds for this view. It is enough now to state what one believes to be the fact. If this be so, at least the earlier trumpets (though not these only) are a specific visitation of judgment on the western empire of Rome. Not only was this visited, but "the third of the trees were burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up." This is a contrast. The dignitaries within that sphere were visited, but there was also a universal interference with the prosperity of men here below, "And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third of the sea became blood; and the third of the creatures which were in the sea, which had life, died; and the third of the ships were destroyed." It was in this case a great earthly power, which as a divine judgment dealt with the masses in a revolutionary state to their destruction. Thus not merely the world under stable government, but that which is or when it is in a state of agitation and disorder; and we find the same deadly effects here also, putting an end, it would seem, to their trade and commerce.

"The third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third of the rivers, and upon the fountains of the waters." Here the fall of a great dignitary or ruler, whose influence was judicially turned to embitter all the springs and channels of popular influence, is before us. The sources and means of intercourse among men are here visited by God's judgment.

The fourth angel sounded, and the third of the sun and moon and stars was smitten; that is to say, the governing powers — supreme, derivative, and subordinate — all come under God's judgment — all within the west.

"And I saw, and I heard an eagle flying in mid-heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to those that dwell on the earth, by reason of the remaining voices of the trumpet of the three angels that are about to sound." It is a vivid image of rapidly approaching judgments, "angel" being substituted for the better reading "eagle" by scribes who did not appreciate the symbolic style of the prophecy here.

In Rev. 9 the two next, or fifth and sixth trumpets, are described with minute care, as indeed these are two of the woe trumpets. There remains the third woe trumpet, the last of the seven, which is set forth at the end of Rev. 11, where we close.

The first of the woe trumpets consists of the symbolic locusts. For that they are not to be understood in a merely literal way is clear, if only for this reason, that they are expressly said not to feed on that which is the natural food of locusts. This creature is simply the descriptive sign of these marauders.

To another remark I would call your attention: that the first woe trumpet answers in the way of contrast to the hundred and forty-four thousand that were sealed of Israel; as the second woe trumpet, namely, that of the Euphratean horsemen, answers by a similar contrast to the countless multitude of the Gentiles. As some perhaps may think that this contrast must be vague and indefinite, I shall therefore endeavour to make my meaning plainer. It is expressly said that the locusts of the vision were to carry on their devastations, except on those that were sealed. Here then is an allusion clearly to those whom God set apart from Israel in Rev. 7.

On the other hand, in the Euphratean horsemen we see far more of aggressive power, though there is also torment. But torment is the main characteristic of the locust woe; the horsemen woe is more distinctively the onward progress of imperial power, described in most energetic colours. They fall on men and destroy them; but here "the third" re-appears. According to the force given already, this would imply that the woe falls on the Gentiles indeed, and more particularly on the western Roman empire.

It seems also plain that these two woes represent what will be verified in the early doings of the antichrist in Judea. The first or the locust raid consists of a tormenting infliction. Here accordingly we have Abaddon, the destroyer, who is set forth in a very peculiar fashion as the prince of the bottomless pit, their leader. It is not of course the beast yet fairly formed; but we can quite comprehend that there will be an early manifestation of evil, just as grace will effect the beginning of that which is good in the remnant. Here then we have these initiatory woes. First of all a tormenting woe that falls on the land of Israel, but not upon those that were sealed out of the twelve tribes of Israel. On the other hand, we find the Euphratean horsemen let loose on the Roman empire, overwhelming the Gentiles, and in particular that empire, as the object of the judgment of God.

Such is the general scope of Rev. 9. As to entering into particulars, it would be quite out of the question tonight. Other opportunities do not fail for learning more minute details, and their application.

Rev. 10 in the trumpets answers to Rev. 7 in the seals. It forms an important parenthesis, that comes in between the sixth and seventh trumpets, just as the sealing chapter (7) came in between the sixth and seventh seals: so orderly is the Apocalypse. Accordingly we have here again the Lord, as it seems to me, in angelic garb. As before in high-priestly function, He is the angel with royal claim here. A mighty angel comes down from heaven, clothed with a cloud — the special sign of Jehovah's majesty: none but He has a title to come thus clothed. And, further, the rainbow is on His head; it is not now a question of round the throne: here there is a step in advance. He is approaching the earth; He is about to lay speedy claim to that which is His right. "The rainbow was on his head, and his face was as the sun" — supreme authority; "and his feet as pillars of fire" — with firmness of divine judgment. "And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot on the sea, and his left on the earth, and cried with a loud voice, as a lion roareth."

John was going to write, but is forbidden. The disclosures were to be scaled for the present. "And the angel whom I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his right hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for the ages of the ages, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things that are therein, that there should be no longer delay." There was no more to be any lapse of time allowed; but God would terminate the mystery of His present seeming inaction as to government. He is now allowing the world, with slight check, to go on its own way. Men may sin, and, as far as direct intervention is

concerned, God appears not, though there may be interferences exceptionally. But the time is coming when God will surely visit sin, and this immediately, when there will be no toleration for a moment of anything which is contrary to Himself. This is the blessed age to which all the prophets look onward; and the angel here swears that the time is approaching. There is going to be no more delay; 'but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God also shall be finished." The mystery here is, not Christ and the church, but God's allowing evil to go on in its present course with apparent impunity.

And then John is told at the end of the chapter that he must "prophesy again before peoples, and nations, and tongues, and many kings." The meaning of this more clearly appears soon. There is a kind of appendix of prophecy where he renews his course for especial reasons.

Meanwhile, I would just call your attention to the contrast between the little book which the prophet here takes and cats, and the great book we have seen already sealed with seven seals. Why a little book? and why open? A little book, because it treats of a comparatively contracted sphere; and open, because things are no longer to be described in the mysterious guise in which the seals and yet more the trumpets. set them out. All is going to be made perfectly plain in what falls under it here. This is the case accordingly in Rev. 11.

The angel proceeds to say, "Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given to the Gentiles."

Jerusalem appears in the foreground. This is the centre now, though the beast may ravage there. "And I will give2 to my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth." Their task is for a time comparatively short — for three years and a half. "These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the Lord of the earth." The witnesses are two, not because in point of fact they are historically to be limited to only two individuals, but as meaning the least adequate testimony according to the law. To make it two literally seems to me a mistaken way of interpreting prophecy, and the Apocalypse in particular, as being eminently symbolical, which Daniel also is in measure. To forget this practically is to involve oneself in clouds of error and inconsistency.

Thus, for instance, one hears occasionally, for the purpose of illustrating the Revelation, a reference to Isaiah, Jeremiah, or the like; but we must remember that these prophecies are not in their structure symbolical, and therefore the reasoning that is founded on the books and style of Jeremiah or Isaiah (Ezekiel being partly symbolical, partly figurative) cannot decide for Daniel or the Apocalypse. Here then are symbols which have a language of their own. Thus the regular meaning of two," symbolically, is competent testimony — enough and not more than enough. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." According to Jewish law a case could not be decided by one witness; there must be at least two for valid proof and judgment.

The Lord shows us that He will raise up an adequate testimony in these days. Of how many the testimony will consist is another matter, on which I have little or

nothing to say. One can no more reason on this than on the twenty-four glorified elders. Who would thence infer that there will be only so many glorified ones? and why should one think that there will be only two to testify? However this may be, those who are raised to witness are to prophesy for a limited time. "And if any man desire to hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man desire to hurt them, he must in this manner be killed."

Is this then, I ask, the testimony of the gospel? Is it thus the Lord protects those that are the preachers of the gospel of His own grace? Did fire ever proceed out of the mouths of evangelists? Did a teacher ever devour his enemies? Was it on this principle Ananias and Sapphira fell dead? Are these the ways of the gospel? It is evident then that we are here in a new atmosphere — that an altogether different state of things is before us from that which reigned during the church condition, though even then sin might be unto death in peculiar cases. I refer to no more proofs now, thinking that enough has been given. "These have authority to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy." That is, they are something like Elijah; and they have "authority over the waters to turn them to blood." In this respect they resemble Moses also. This does not mean that they are Moses and Elias personally; but that the character of their testimony is similar, and the sanctions of it are such as God gave in the days of those two honoured servants of old. "And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them." They are preserved in spite of the beast, till their work is done; but directly

their testimony is concluded, the beast is allowed to overcome them. It is just as it was with the Lord. The utmost pressure was brought against Him in His service. So their hour, we may say, has not yet come, just as He said of Himself before them. There was all possible willingness to destroy them long before, but somehow it could not be done; for the Lord protected them till they had done their mission. We see this in the character of grace which filled the Lord Jesus — which essentially belonged to Him. Here we meet with the earthly retributive dealing of the Old Testament. The Spirit will form them thus; and no wonder, because in fact God is recurring to that which He promised then, but has never yet performed. He is going to perform it now. He does not merely purpose to gather people for heavenly glory; He will govern on earth the Jews and the Gentiles in their Several places — Israel nearest to Himself. He must have an earthly people as well as a family on high. When the heavenly saints are changed, then He begins with the earthly. He will never mix them all up together. This would make nothing but the greatest confusion.

"And their corpse shall lie on the broadway of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified." It was Jerusalem, but spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, because of the wickedness of the people and their prince. It had no less abominations than Sodom; it had all the darkness and the moral bondage of Egypt, but it was really the place where their Lord had been crucified, i.e., Jerusalem. So the witnesses fell, and men in various measures showed their satisfaction. "And [some] from among the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations see their corpse three days and a half, and do not suffer their corpses to

be put into a tomb. And they that dwell on the earth rejoice over them, or make merry, and shall send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those that dwell on the earth." But after the three days and a half God's power raises up these slain witnesses, and they ascend to heaven in the cloud, and their enemies behold them. "And in that hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain seven thousand names of men: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe is past; behold, the third woe cometh quickly."

Lastly we have the seventh trumpet. This is important for understanding the structure of the book. The seventh trumpet brings us down to the close in a general way. This is quite plain, though often overlooked. "And the seventh angel, sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world of our Lord and of his Christ is come." You must translate it a little more exactly, and with a better text too. The true meaning is this: "The kingdom of the world" (or the world-kingdom," if our tongue would admit of such a phrase) "of our Lord and of his Christ is come." It is not merely power in general conferred in heaven, but "the world-kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ is come, and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, that sit before God on their thrones, fell on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God the Almighty, that art, and that wast; because thou hast taken thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come."

Here, it will be observed, the end of the age is supposed to be now arrived. It is not merely frightened kings and peoples who say so, but now it is the voice of those who know in heaven. Further, it is "the time of the dead that they should be judged." It is not a question here of the saints caught up to heaven, but a later hour, "that thou shouldest give reward to thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to those that fear thy name." Not a word is said here about taking them to heaven, but of recompensing them. There will be no such thing as the conferring of reward till the public manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The taking of those changed out of the scene is another association of truth. The reward will fail to none that fear the Lord's name, small and great. He will also "destroy those that destroy the earth."

This is the true conclusion of Revelation 11. The next verse (19), beyond a question to my mind, though arranged in our Bibles as the end of this chapter, is properly the beginning of a new series. I shall therefore not treat of it tonight.

Rev. 11:19-16.

We begin now what may be called the second volume of the Revelation. The prophetic part of the book divides into two portions at this point. This is another land-mark that cannot be despised, if we would acquaint ourselves with its structure and the bearing of its contents. And it is absolutely requisite to have, at any rate, a generally correct understanding of its outline; else we are in imminent risk of making confusion, the moment we venture to put the parts together, or to form anything like a connected view of that which it conveys to us. The

meaning will be made plainer, if I repeat that the seventh trumpet, which was the closing scene before us, brings us down to the end in a general way.

This is constantly the habit of prophecy: take, for instance, our Lord's prophecy in Matthew 24, where, first of all, we are given the broad outline as far as verse 14 — the "gospel of the kingdom" preached in all the world for a testimony to all nations; and then the end comes. Having thus brought us down to the close in a comprehensive manner, the Lord turns back, and specifies a particular part of that history in a confined sphere, namely, from the time that the abomination of desolation is set up in the holy place. This clearly is some time before the end. It does not indeed go back absolutely to the beginning, but it returns a certain way, in order to set forth a far closer and more precise view of the appalling state of things that will be found in Jerusalem before the end comes.

Just so is it in the Revelation. The seals and the. trumpets which follow one another conduct us from the time that the church is seen in heaven glorified till judgment closes, i.e. "the time of the dead, even that they should be judged," and the day of wrath upon the earth. Evidently this is the end. Then, in the portion which begins with the last verse of Rev. 11, we return for a special prophecy. The prophet had been told that he must prophesy again before many people and kings; and I suppose that this is the prophesying again.

So the temple of God is now seen to be open. It is not a door opened in heaven to give us the general view of what was to take place on the earth as regarded in the mind of God. This John did see, the general view being

now closed; and we enter on a narrower line of things. The temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His covenant. It is the resumption therefore of the old links with His ancient people Israel. At the same time it is not yet the day of blessedness for the Jew. Nor is heaven itself opened for Jesus, attended by risen saints, to appear for the judgment of the beast and the false prophet with their train. It is a transition state of things. When God deigns to look upon and gives us to see the ark of His covenant, He is going to assert His fidelity to the people. Of old He gave promises, and will shortly accomplish all which had been assured to their fathers. The ark of His covenant is the sign of the unfailing certainty of that to which He bound Himself.

"And there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings," and besides not "an earthquake" only, but "great hail." In the first scene in the fourth chapter, when the door was seen open in heaven, there were "lightnings, and voices, and thunderings," but there was not even an earthquake. In Rev. 8 this addition appears. Now besides there is hail. Clearly, therefore, we are coming to far greater detail in the way of judgments from heaven on the earth.

Then the first sign was beheld above. "There appeared a great sign in heaven." We are not to suppose that when the prophecy is fulfilled, any woman will be seen either in heaven or elsewhere as its accomplishment. This is a fertile source of mistake in the interpretation of these visions. Her being seen in heaven shows that it is not a mere history of what is taking place on earth, but that it is all viewed in God's mind. Consequently it is seen above. In point of fact, what the woman represents will

be Israel on the earth. The woman is a symbol of the chosen people viewed as a whole, for a future state of things that God means to establish here below. She was "clothed with the sun." Supreme authority is to be seen now connected with Israel, instead of her being in a state of desolation, down-trodden by the Gentiles. "And the moon under her feet" is an allusion, I suppose, to her old condition of legal ordinances, which, instead of governing her, are now subject to her — under her feet. How aptly the moon sets forth the reflected light of the Mosaic system is evident to any thoughtful mind. In the millennium this will not be wholly out of sight as now under Christianity, but reappear only it will be in manifest subordination, as we may see in Ezekiel's prophecy. "And upon her head a crown of twelve stars." There is the evidence of human authority in the way of administration here below. In short, whether it be supreme, derivative, or subordinate authority, she is seen with all attached to her. Israel is therefore the manifest vessel of the mighty purposes of God for the earth; and God so looks at her and presents her to us. Thus it is as complete a chance as can be conceived for Israel. But this is not all. "She was with child, and crieth, travailing in birth, in pain to be delivered." It is not yet the day for joyous and triumphant accomplishment of the divine purpose, when before Zion travails she is to bring forth, and before her pain come she is to be delivered of a man-child. There is weakness and suffering yet, but all is secured, and the end is pledged.

Then there is another sign; namely, "a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads." It is Satan, but here invested with the form of the most determined and successful enemy that

Israel ever had; for bad as was the tyranny of Nebuchadnezzar, it is evident that the Roman power trod down Jerusalem with a far more tremendous and permanent tyranny. This therefore makes the unfolding of this double sign so much the more striking. It is not that she is delivered yet; but she is seen by the prophet according to the mind of God. This is to be her place, — a mighty encouragement, considering what she must pass through before it is all realized. Before this is effected, the enemy is shown in his character of rebellious apostate power. The dragon has seven heads — i.e., the completeness of ruling authority; and ten horns, — not exactly completeness, but at any rate a very large distribution approaching it, in the instruments of the power wielded in the west. Man is never thus complete. What God gave the woman we saw — twelve stars. The dragon has only ten horns. There was a full succession of all the various forms of government, which I suppose to be referred to in the seven heads; but God would not give it that completeness of administrative power even in form which belonged to the woman. All will be in due order when the Lord Jesus takes the government of the earth into His hands in the age to come. "Verily I say unto you, That ye who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The twelve apostles of the Lamb are destined to this special place of honourable trust.

"His tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven." Here is what seems to show that the third part has a distinct connection with the Roman empire. We saw the third part for the first time in the trumpets, both in the

four earlier trumpets and also in the sixth. I have no doubt the Roman empire is particularly in view; and, by the Roman empire we are to understand what was properly Roman — the western portion, not what the Romans actually possessed, because they conquered a great deal that belonged to Greece for instance, and Babylon, and Medo-Persia. This was far east; but the properly Roman part was western Europe. There the dragon's power was particularly felt. It "drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them unto the earth; and the dragon stands before the woman that was about to bring forth, that he might devour her child as soon as she should bring forth. And she brought forth a male son, who is about to shepherd all the nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and unto his throne."

There are some things that require explanation here. First of all, a notion prevails that the woman is the church. There may be some Christians now present who have been so taught. A few words, I think, are quite sufficient to dispel the illusion. The church is never represented as a mother in scripture: still less could it be the mother of Christ. Viewed as a woman, the church is the bride of Christ, not His mother; whereas the Jewish body may be truly represented as His mother in symbol. Christ, as man, came of the Jews after the flesh. Accordingly, it is very plain that He is the one here described as the male. The same truth is most evident from the scriptures, whether we take the psalms or the prophets. "Unto us," Isaiah says, "a child is born, a son is given." Again, in the second psalm, we find that the one who is not merely the child of Israel, but acknowledged and honoured by God Himself as the Son, was to rule

the nations with a rod of iron. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the Lord Jesus is the one here prominent as the male child.

This, then, furnishes an unquestionable and important key to the meaning of the scene we are now entering upon. The woman represents Israel in the mind of God, — Israel in its full corporate character.

Another remark seems to me just. Although Christ, I have no doubt, is referred to as the man-child born of Israel, it may be no small difficulty at first sight to, some minds how to bring in the birth of Christ in this chapter. Indeed, it is a very fair question, and ought to be met. Let it then be observed, that here the Spirit of God is not proceeding with the course of the prophecy. I have already explained that He goes back. Consequently, so far all is perfectly open as to the point of time to which He returns. And another thing should be taken into account — that in this portion there is no date serving to fix the time when the birth of the man-child takes place. But then it may be asked, why should the birth of the man-child be introduced here, seeing that it was a patent fact that the Lord had been born, had lived, and died, and gone to heaven long before? There was nothing new to tell. All this was long and well known through the gospel, as well as in oral teaching to the Christians; why then should it be set forth so strangely in this prophecy? The reason I believe to be, that God desired in this very striking manner to rehearse it mystically, and not at all in full open statement, so as to combine it with His translation to heaven and to His own throne. There was a further link — with the re-opening of God's dealings with the Jews, and the eventual

restoration of the nation. All are introduced here together.

Thus it is plain that God is not at all disposing these matters now as a question of time, but of connection with Christ their centre. John is going to enter into the final scenes after this; but before this is done, we have God's counsel shown about Israel. This brings forward the devil in his evil opposition to that counsel; for it was surely what the adversary most of all feared. Satan invariably opposes Christ with greater tenacity of purpose and hatred and pride than any other. Recognizing in Him the bruiser of himself and the deliverer of man and creation, there is a constant antagonism between Satan and the Son of God that is familiar to us all. But there is more than this: Satan sets himself against His connection with the poor and despised people of Israel. Nevertheless, before God openly espouses the part of Israel, there is the remarkable fact that Christ is caught up to Him and to His throne. Not a word is said of His life; not a word even about His death and resurrection. As far as this passage goes, one might suppose the Lord caught up on high as soon as He was born. This shows us how remarkably mystical the statement is. It is history neither anticipated nor in fact. Had it been an historical summary, we must have had His life noticed with those mighty events on which all hopes for the universe depend. All this is entirely passed over. The reason, I think, is just this, that it intimates to us, as in Old Testament prophecy, how the Lord and His people are wrapped up, as it were, in the very same symbol; even as, in a yet more intimate way, what is said about Christ applies to the Christian.

On this principle then I cannot but consider that the rapture of the man-child to God and His throne involves the rapture of the church in itself. The explanation why it is thus introduced here depends on the truth that Christ and the church are one, and have a common destiny. Inasmuch as He went up to heaven, so also the church is to be caught up. "So also is Christ," says the apostle Paul, when speaking of the church; for we must naturally suppose the allusion is to the body rather than to the head. He does not say, so also is the church, but "so also is Christ." In a similar spirit St. John, in this prophecy, shows us first of all the male child taken to a place in heaven entirely outside the reach of Satan's malice. If this be so, and granted it has a remarkable bearing on what has been already asserted as to the book: we here begin over again, with a particular point of view as the object of the Holy Ghost in this latter portion. Before doing so, John gives us first the general purpose of God about the Jews.

This is strictly in order. We might have thought that the more natural way would be first of all to state the rapture of the man-child; but not so, God always does and describes things in the wisest and best method. The fact is that Christ being born of Israel, there is and ought to be first set forth the tracing of His connection with Israel. The next fact is the devil's opposition to the counsels of God, and hindrance for the time being, which gives occasion to the Lord Himself taking His place in heaven, and eventually to the church following Him into heaven, After this comes back on the scene the Lord's intention to make way for the effectuating of His counsels as to Israel and the earth. In short, therefore, the first portion of the chapter is distinctly a mystical

representation of the Lord's relationship with Israel and of His removal out of the scene — the effect of the antagonism of Satan; but it also gives room for God's binding up, as it were, with Christ's disappearance in heaven the church's following Him there in due time. For the church is united to Christ. In this way the rapture of the man-child is not a mere historical fact. Christ's ascension to heaven is brought in here because it contains as a consequence the church's subsequent removal to be with Him where He is, His body forming one and the same mystic man before God, "the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

If this then be borne in mind, the whole subject is considerably cleared. "She brought forth a male son, to rule all nations with a rod of iron." There is not the slightest difficulty in applying this to the man-child, viewed not personally and alone but mystically; and the less, because this very promise is made to the church in Thyatira, or rather to the faithful there. It will be remembered that at the end of Rev. 2 it was expressly said that the Lord would give to him that overcame power over the nations, and he should rule them with a rod of iron, just as He Himself received of His Father. Does not this most strongly confirm the same view? "And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should nourish her there a thousand two hundred [and] threescore days."

In verse 7 we have a new scene; and here we come much more to facts, — not to counsels of God or to principles viewed in His mind, but to positive facts; and first of all from above, as later on we shall find effects and chancres on the earth. "And there was war in

heaven: Michael and his angels to war with the dragon; and the dragon warred and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast [down], the ancient serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, who deceiveth the whole world, was cast unto the earth, and his angels were cast with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast [down], who accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by reason of the blood of the Lamb, and by reason of the word of their testimony, and loved not their life unto death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them." It is evident that at this time persons are spoken of as dwelling in heaven who sympathise deeply with their suffering brethren on earth. Such is the incontestable fact; and soon after Satan will have lost that access to the presence of God in the quality of accuser of the brethren that he had previously possessed; nor will he ever regain the highest seat of his power which is then lost. He is no longer able to fill heaven with his bitter taunts and accusations of the saints of God.

"Woe", however, it is added at this time, "to the earth and to the sea, for the devil has, come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath a short season." This clearly connects the dispossession of Satan from his heavenly seat with the last crisis of Jews and Gentiles at the end of the present age. We find here the hidden reason. Why should there be such an unwonted storm of persecution? why such tremendous doings of Satan here below for a short time, for three years and a

half, before the close? The reason is here explained. Satan cannot longer accuse above; accordingly he does his worst below. He is cast down to earth, and never regains the heavens. Again, he will be banished from the earth, as we shall find, into the bottomless pit by and by; and then, although let loose thence for a short time, it is only for his irremediable ruin; for he is cast then (not merely into the pit or abyss, but) into the lake of fire, whence none ever comes back.

Such is the revealed course of the dealings of God with the great enemy of men from first to last.

From verse 13 the history is pursued not from the heavens, but on the earth. "And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the male [child]. And to the woman were given two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished there a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent." Thus power is given to escape, rapid means of flight from Satan's persecution. It is not power to withstand Satan, and fight the battle out with him, but the facility given to flee from his violence. This seems to be what is meant by the two wings of the great eagle — a figure of vigorous means of escape. That which is in nature the most energetic image of flight is vividly applied to the case before us.

Then we find the enemy, baffled by God's provision, using other efforts. "And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood." That is, he here endeavours to stir up the nations (such as are, I suppose, in a state of disorganisation) to overwhelm the

Jews. In vain; for "the earth" — what was under settled government at this time — "helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, that keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus." By these are meant such of the Jews as will be remarkable for their power of testimony. The woman represents the more general idea of that people. The remnant of her seed are the witnessing portion. You must bear in mind that all the Jews of that day will by no means have the same spiritual power. There will be differences. Some will be much more energetic and intelligent than others. Satan hastens therefore, and endeavours to put down those that seem most useful as the vessels of the testimony of Jesus.

This accordingly leads to the plans that Satan sets up for the purpose of accomplishing his long-cherished design of supplanting not only gospel and law, but the testimony to the kingdom of God in the world. And there are two especial methods which Satan will adopt, suited to catch a twofold class of men who are never wanting in this world — natural men, some of Whom like power, as others like religion. I am not now speaking of any who are born of God; but it is clear that man's heart runs either after intellect and power, or into religious formality. The devil will therefore put forward two main instruments as leaders of systems that express human nature on either side, exactly suiting what the heart of man seeks and will have. Thus Satan has designed from the beginning to set up himself in man as God. For he too will work by man, as God Himself is pleased to

develop all His wondrous ways and counsels in man. As the Lord Jesus is not only a divine person but the expression of the divine glory no less than of His grace; and as the church is the object of His love in heavenly blessedness, and Israel for the earth; so the enemy (who cannot originate but only corrupt the truth, and lie by a sort of profane imitation of the counsels of God) will have his beasts no less certainly than God has His Lamb. In Rev. 13 this is made plain. There are these two beasts; the first civil power, the second religion, and both apostate.

"And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns." The beast that emerges from the revolutionary Roman world is just adapted for the dragon to fill with opposition to the purposes of God. In Rev. 12 the dragon was seen similarly characterized as the beast. Both have the forms of power peculiar to the Roman empire. But there is a difference also: "And upon his horns ten diadems, and upon his beads names of blasphemy." The dragon has the diadems on his heads; the beast shows us more the actual facts — the horns crowned. The dragon represents the enemy of Christ in his political employment of the Roman empire, and this from first to last; so that the heads or successive forms of power are said to be crowned, not the horns, which were only as a fact to be developed before the close of its history — at the earliest not before the Gothic barbarians broke up the empire of the west. On the other hand, in the beast of Rev. 13 we see, not merely the hidden spirit of evil making use of the power of Rome in its various changes, but the empire in its final state when the deadly wound done to the imperial head was healed, and Satan shall

have given to it thus revived his power, his throne, and great authority. Now this is the very time when the ten horns receive authority as kings; it is simultaneously and continuously with the beast, as Rev. 17 informs us; and hence the horns of the beast are seen crowned (not merely the heads, as in the dragon's case previously).

Further, the beast is described afterwards in remarkable terms, which allude to the beasts so well known in Daniel 7. "And the beast which I saw was like a leopardess, and its feet were as of a bear, and its mouth as a lion's." Here we have certain qualities that resemble the three first-named beasts of the prophet Daniel. Though Satan does not originate, he adopts whatever will suit of that which has been, and endeavours by this most singular combination to bring out the beast or fourth empire (for there is none to succeed) so as to surpass for the last days everything known of old.

What is meant by a beast? An imperial system or empire, but withal refusing to recognize God above. Man was made to own Him, and alone does, as taught of God. Man alone of all beings in the earth was made to look up to One above, and is responsible to do the will of God. The beast does not look up but down; it has no sense of an unseen superior. "The fool hath said in his heart that there is no God." In principle this is true of every unrenewed man; but here it is the more tremendous, because an empire ought to be the reflection of the authority that God in His providence has conferred on it. No empire has avoided the moral sentence implied in the symbols, but this beast will go beyond all that have ever arisen. At the time that the prophecy was given the fourth beast was in existence; but the prophet was given

to see that out of a state of political convulsion, just before the last three years and a half, and connected with Satan's expulsion from heaven by the power of God, this beast rises up out of the sea. That is, there will be a state of total confusion in the west, and an imperial power will rise up. This is the one here described: "And I saw one of its heads as it were wounded to death; and its deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast." It is not hard to see sufficient grounds for gathering that the wounded head was the imperial form of power. The empire of the west will have been long extinct, when, strange to say, it reappears in the latter day. But there is a great deal more than simply the revival of imperialism, which draws out the astonishment of the world. They had thought it all over with the Roman empire. They could easily understand a new empire; they could readily conceive a Teutonic kingdom, or a Muscovite dominion, or any other of large space and population; but the revival of the Roman empire will take the world by surprise. This is a part of what is here referred to. The grounds of this assertion, however, depend on Rev. 17, so that I cannot now enter into minute evidence, nor do I wish to anticipate what will come before us in the next lecture. Let it suffice to give what I believe to be the truth revealed about it as we pass onward.

But then it is not simply that this empire had qualities of power that belonged to more than one of the previous empires, and that it had its own peculiarity in that it was marked by the revival of imperialism at the close. We are told that "they worshipped the dragon, because he gave authority to the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast? and who is able to

make war with him?" It is evident, therefore, that we have here an apostate and idolatrous state of the world. The dragon is worshipped, as is the beast; and 2 Thess. 2 is plain that worship is paid to another personage connected with, but distinct from, these both, called "the man of sin," which is much more a religious power. The first beast is a political body; the religious chief will not be in the west at all, but in Jerusalem, and a very special object of worship in the temple of God there at the close.

This is a difficulty to some, because it is distinctly said that this man of sin will not tolerate any other object of worship. But then you must remember that they are all the same firm. Therefore to worship the one is pretty much to worship the other; just as in regard to the true God, there is no worship of one person in the Godhead without the same homage to the others. It is in vain for any to pretend to worship the Father without worshipping the Son, and he that worships the Father and the Son can only worship in the power of the Holy Ghost. When we worship God as such, — when we say "God," we do not mean Father only, but Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. So precisely in this awful counterpart, the fruit of the energy of satanic craft and power at the close. The worshipping of the dragon and of the beast seems therefore quite consistent with divine worship paid to the man of sin. The fact is, they are, as often remarked with justice, the great counter-trinity — the trinity of evil as opposed to the Trinity of the Godhead. The devil is clearly the source of it all; but then the public leader of his power politically is the beast; and the grand religious agent, who works out all plans and even miracles in its support, is the second beast or man of sin.

This appears to be the true and mutual bearing of all, if we bow to all these scriptures. I am aware that differences of thought exist here as in almost everything else. But this objection has no force at all. The only question is, what best satisfies the word of God, — what most faithfully answers not merely to the letter of it, but to its grand principles? I am persuaded, therefore, that far from any real obstacle in the fact of these three different objects being combined in worship, on the contrary the force and nature of the case cannot well be understood unless this is seen.

Let us pursue the other points which the scriptures set before us. "And there was given him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given him to continue [or act] forty-two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that tabernacle in heaven." Here again it seems evident that there is a people in heaven removed from exposure to the power either of Satan or of the public instruments of his malice in the world. There are also saints here below. The tabernacle above may be blasphemed, and those that dwell there Satan may revile, but he cannot touch — cannot even accuse longer before God. He turns therefore all his power to deal with man on the earth.

"And it was given him to make war with the saints" (clearly those that are not in heaven), "and to overcome them: and authority was liven him over every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him." It will be seen that there is an invariable distinction between the crowd of the Gentiles scattered over the world, and "those that dwell on the earth." The difference is that the former

class is a larger term, embracing the world at large; whereas by the latter is meant a considerably narrower sphere, whose character of earthliness is the more decided, because it had known the heavenly testimony of Christ and the church. The name might be still held; but apostate hearts deliberately preferred earth to heaven, and would surely have their portion in neither, but in the lake of fire.

It is solemn to see that this is what Christendom hastens to become: infidelity and superstition are rapidly forming it now. All that is at work is bringing about this earthly and godless state of things. Never since the gospel was preached were men more thoroughly settling down in the endeavour to improve the earth, and consequently to forget heaven day by day, only thinking of it as a dismal necessity when they die, and cannot avoid leaving the world. But as to turning to heaven, both as a hope full of joy and as a home for the affections, whenever was it more thoroughly kept out of the minds of men? All this then prepares us for the designation given to the people that did hear of heaven but deliberately gave up all the hopes connected with it to settle down on the earth. They were dwellers on the earth. The others are "every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation," that have heard comparatively little about the gospel. But he will endeavour to deal with both; and more particularly "all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose name is not written in the book of life of the slain Lamb from the foundation of the world."

Carefully bear in mind that "from the foundation of the world" belongs not to "slain," but to the writing of the name. John does not mean that the Lamb was slain from

the foundation of the world, but that the name was not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain. Compare Rev. 17:8.

"If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity." The importance of this statement was to guard the saints themselves from taking power peremptorily into their own hands. They might cry to God, they might ask Him to arise and judge the earth, but they were not to fight themselves. As the beast would take power, so should he suffer the consequence. He might lead into captivity, but into captivity he must go. He might kill with the sword, but he must be killed himself: indeed, his would be a still more awful doom. At the same time patience, with this retributive sanction annexed, is put in as a general principle, and stated in such a form as to apply to any one. It was surely and particularly meant to guard the saints from mistake and wrong. I do not think the direct application is to the beast, but rather warning to the saints of God. "Here is the patience and faith of the saints." This gives the application.

In the latter part of the chapter we have a second beast. This calls for more attention, because there has been and there is a danger of some confusion and difficulty on this subject. Let it be observed that the second beast it is which more particularly resembles in wickedness what the Lord Jesus was in goodness. It is indeed a "beast;" that is, it has a kind of imperial power, though very likely on a far smaller scale than the first beast. Still it has the character of empire attached to it. It is a beast, and not merely a horn. Then the horns that it has have a peculiar character. "He had two horns like a lamb." There was the pretence of resembling the

Messiah. But "he spake as a dragon." It was really the expression of Satan. "And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence." It is, therefore, plain that the second beast is really the more energetic of the two, and the active instrument of evil.

And this is always the case in every form of wickedness that has ever been forged for this world. The promoters of it — the persons that exercise the influence, sometimes unseen, sometimes publicly — are as a rule those that put religion forward. The religion of the earth is the prolific source of all the worst evil that is done under the sun. The devil could not accomplish his plans if there was not such a thing as earthly religion. Is not this an awful thing to think of, and a solemn thing, too, for those that have the smallest connection with it?

Accordingly in this case, observe, the second beast which resembles Christ, and takes that place, does not come out of the sea, or the turbulent state of the nations, but out of the earth. It is a more settled state of things when this beast appears, who exercises all the authority of the first beast before him (that is, in his presence, with his full sanction: it is not usurpation; it is not in any sense something done without him; but it is done in his presence, as is here said); "and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast" (there is an understanding between them), "whose deadly wound was healed." It is remarkable that in 2 Thess. 2 we do not hear of his causing the world to worship the first beast; but that he compels or at any rate claims worship, and is himself worshipped as God. For he arrogates divine worship to himself.

It makes the whole matter plain, if we remember that the first beast means the Roman empire, and, consequently, its seat is the west. The second beast, on the contrary, is in the land of Palestine, and has a Jewish form. Any one who looks at 2 Thess. 2 can see that we are in view of what will be in the land of Judea, and not in Rome. It is the temple of God that is particularly seen, where the man of sin sets himself up as an object of worship. Only we must remember that we must read scripture with scripture. Supposing I treat the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians as giving me all that the Bible tells about the man of sin, I foreclose scripture, and must have an imperfect account. On the other hand, if we take only what we have in Revelation 13, we shall want certain elements necessary for completing the sketch. I believe that all this is arranged with consummate wisdom by God, because He does not want us to read only one part of His word; He wishes us thoroughly to search into all His word. He will not give a proper understanding of holy writ, unless there be a real confidence in and value for all that He has given us. Consequently it is only by putting together these scriptures, as to which there is ample light to show what is referred to, that we can really understand the subject.

Now it is quite plain in the first part of the chapter that we have before us a mighty political power. It is equally certain that 2 Thessalonians 2 describes not a vast imperial system so much as a religious power. An utterly lawless personage is the man of sin, but still essentially a religious power. It claims to itself what belongs to God; and this is precisely what we find connected with the second beast.

We may remark another feature in the symbol here. It had two horns. The reason, as I suppose, is connected with the whole testimony of John. Any one who has looked into it will see that even as to our blessed Lord Himself, the general bent is to show what He was on earth — not what He is in heaven. I admit there are exceptional passages in John; but while Paul's object is to direct us to Christ in heaven, as the characteristic point of his witness, John on the contrary draws particular attention to what He was on earth.

This seems to me of importance for the meaning of these two horns. The Lord Jesus, as all are aware, was a prophet on earth; and assuredly, as we know, He will reign as king over the earth. But what lies between? He is priest; but He is priest in heaven. Accordingly it is not the place of John but of Paul to bring out the heavenly priesthood of Christ. John never, as far as I know, develops the offices of Christ above. Not but that he points out what connects itself with them, as for instance, in John 13, and again in John 14, as well as in John 17 and John 20. But these are quite exceptions. The general strain of John is to dwell on Christ manifesting God here below. Paul's doctrine is man glorified in heaven.

Accordingly this I believe to be the key to the two horns of the beast. When the Antichrist appears, he will not take the place of being a priest; far higher will be his assumption. He will set up to be a prophet, and a king, yea, a king imitating what Christ will be to Israel. We have two horns, not seven; — it is an imitation, but not of the full power of Christ. In the Lord we see perfection of power, just as could be said of the Holy Ghost in His fulness of power for government. In the Antichrist there

is the pretension to what belonged to Christ connected with the earth, and with the most marked absence of what pertains to Him in heaven.

This is no mean evidence by the way, that the idea of applying all this to the papacy as its full meaning is a mistake; for the essential feature of the papacy lies in its assumption to be a living earthly representative of Christ's priesthood. It is precisely the corruption of what is heavenly and not Messianic. Popery is much more antichurch than antichrist. Such is the difference.

But when Rev. 13 is fulfilled, there is no question of the church any longer. The Christian body will be no more seen on earth. the saints of the high places are on high. Accordingly it is not a mere sham clothing with the priestly power of Christ which the antichrist makes, but a false assumption of His prophetical place which was on the earth, and of His kingly sphere which will be on the earth. This personage claims both powers. He has two horns like a lamb, and is active in the performance of great signs and wonders. He has a double activity. First of all, he borrows the controlling influence of the Roman empire, — he exercises all the authority of the first beast. Besides this, he does a vast deal on his own account which the Roman emperor could not do. "And he worketh great signs, that he should even make fire to come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men." That is, he imitates the power not only of Christ but of God. He claims to be the Jehovah God of Israel. Just as Jesus is Jehovah as well as Messiah, so this vessel of Satan's power in Jerusalem will emulate what God did by Elijah to disprove the claims of Baal. Fire, we know, came down and consumed the sacrifice of old, and God demonstrated as clearly that Baal was not God, as that

Jehovah was. So the second beast will do wonders, not really, but in appearance. "He worketh great signs that he should even make fire to come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by reason of those signs which it was given him to work in the sight of the beast."

All shows that this is the antichrist. The first beast does not work any miracles whatever. He astonishes the world by reviving imperialism; but this is a very different thing and cannot properly be called a sign. It may and will amaze men, but is not a miracle. But the beast out of the earth or land, which is incomparably more active and energetic than the first, does work great signs (no doubt by Satan's energy, but still he works them); and the consequence is that he "deceiveth them that dwell on the earth," saying to them especially "to make an image to the beast, which had the stroke of the sword, and lived." I am not prepared to say whether this is or is not the abomination of desolation set up in the holy place. It seems to resemble that idol, and may probably be the same thing.

"And it was given him to give life to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark on their right hand, or on their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast. for it is a man's number; and his number [is] six hundred threescore [and] six."

The various guesses that have been made respecting this number are most inadequate. It may be that it is one of those secrets that cannot be unravelled until the person appears, when we may be sure that at least the wise will understand it. That we are to understand it now is, I think, more than we ought to assume. To what moral profit could it possibly serve? Assuredly everything that can edify and refresh the soul, and that can be used by the Holy Ghost for real blessing in separating us from the world and attaching us to heaven, and, above all, to Christ, we may gather from the Revelation rightly understood now. Indeed, I believe we can gather a great deal more than those who are to be in the circumstances will be able to reap in their day. But there may be points of minute application kept back by the wise reserve of God, who does not indulge mere curiosity, as this would be. Such knowledge will be of practical importance only when the time comes; and therefore I do not doubt that this is just one of those points in which the Lord does not gratify men's minds now. I have heard no explanation that carries any force along with it. Many of those which have been offered entirely and obviously fail — for instance, "apostacy" and such like explanations. "Apostacy" is not the number of a man; nor for similar reasons can "apostate" stand, nor, perhaps, "the Latin man" or kingdom, though certainly entitled to attention. Further, it does not seem, as generally thought, to be the number of antichrist, the second beast, but of the Roman empire, or rather Emperor, in final antagonism to Jehovah and His anointed.

Next we come to Revelation 14, where we have neither the counsels of God as opposed by Satan, first in heaven

and then in earth; nor the plan and instruments by which Satan gives battle to those counsels. All this we have had in chapters 12 and 13. But now we enter on another line of things. What is God doing with His own? Nothing? Impossible! All must be active and good. God, therefore, is pleased to reveal to us a variety of ways in which He will put forth His power, and send both testimony and warning suited to the crisis; and this is given with remarkable completeness throughout the seven divisions into which this chapter naturally divides itself.

The first is a certain numbered multitude separated to the Lamb on mount Zion. The Lord Jesus is about to insist on His rights in the midst of Israel; and Zion is the known centre of royal grace. Royal, I say, because it is Christ asserting His title as Son of David; but it is also royal grace., because it supposes the total ruin of Israel, and that the Lord in pure favour begins there to gather round Himself once more. This accordingly is the first form in which God displays His action for the last days. The devil may have his beasts and horns; God has His Lamb; and the Lamb now is not seen on the throne in heaven, or taking a book. He stands on mount Zion. It is a notable point of progress toward the kingdom that is clearly brought before us before the close.

"And I looked, and, lo, the Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred and forty-four thousand, having his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads." They are not spoken of as conscious of any such relationship, as it is not a question of their Father, not of His Father and their Father. Nothing of the kind is ever found in the Apocalypse but "his Father's name on their foreheads." "And I heard a voice from heaven, as a

voice of many waters, and as a voice of great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sing [as it were] a new song in presence of the throne, and in presence of the four living creatures and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty-four thousand, which were bought from the earth. These are they who were not defiled with women; for they are virgins."

These saints had not corrupted themselves; and the name of the Lamb is coupled with them. With Babylonish wickedness here below they had nothing to do; they were pure, and are associated with the holy Sufferer. "These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were bought from among men, first-fruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault" ["before the throne of God" is spurious]. Such is the first action of God. It is a complete remnant, not said to be from the twelve tribes of Israel, such as we saw in Rev. 7; but this is particularly of the Jews. They were gathered out from those guilty of rejecting the Lamb. And now. God answers all that and other wickedness by this merciful and honourable separation to the Lamb, who is now about to be installed in His royal seat on mount Zion.

The next scene gives us an angel flying. "And I saw," it is said, "another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having [the] everlasting gospel to preach unto those that sit on the earth, and unto every nation, and tribe, and tongue, and people." Why is it called "everlasting"? We must remember that the gospel which is being preached now is a very special gospel, and in no way an everlasting gospel. Nobody ever heard the gospel that is preached now till Jesus died and rose and even went to heaven.

That is to say, the gospel as it should be preached in and out of Christendom depends on the most stupendous facts ever accomplished here below, for which God waited more than four thousand years even of man's dwelling on the earth before He would or could righteously send it forth. Consequently the gospel of the grace of God, as we know, is not properly (never in scripture) called the "everlasting gospel." I suspect that most use these terms without thinking what is really meant. When they call the gospel now the "everlasting gospel," they have probably some vague notion that it connects us with eternity. They think it a fine-sounding epithet, conveying I really do not know what; but at any rate it is to be supposed that there is some idea in the mind of those that so characterize "the gospel of God." It is certainly a mistake, if scripture is to decide.

"Everlasting gospel" means what it says. It means those glad tidings that always have been and always will be true: whatever else God has made known to man, this has always abode unchanging. What is it then? The glad tidings of God always were that He purposes to bless man by the promised seed Christ Jesus, to set him up over the rest of creation, to have dominion as His image and glory. At the very beginning the first chapter of Genesis proves that this is God's mind for man here below. The end of all things will proclaim the selfsame thing. The millennium will be a grand demonstrative testimony to it. In the new heavens and the new earth man will be thoroughly and for ever blest.

The declaration of this I believe to be the everlasting gospel. In the latter day it will act as the setting aside of the lie of Satan, who puts and would fain keep man in a position of estrangement from God, who is morally

forced to be the judge of man instead of being the blesser of all upon the earth, and consequently to cast him into hell. All this, it is plain, is the fruit of Satan's wiles; but the everlasting gospel presents God as the blesser of man and creation, as it always was in His mind, and as He will certainly bring it to pass; not, of course, for every individual man, because those who despise His mercy in Christ, and those especially who having heard despise the gospel of His grace, must be lost for ever. I am speaking now of what always was before Him, and always kept before man in His word.

The way in which the subject is spoken of here confirms this. "Fear God," is the message, "and give glory to him" (there is thus the evident contradiction of idolatry); "for the hour of his judgment is come." Then will be the downfall of all those that oppose God, not only of all the vanities of the nations, but of all those that heed or sustain them against God. "Worship him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Clearly therefore it is the universal message of God to man, and connected with His creation glory. The solemn threat of His speedy judgments is a ground of pressing on the blinded consciences of man the claim of the honour solely due to Him.

There are no doubt many who think it an extraordinary circumstance that God should send out such a message as this in days rapidly approaching. Let me say why such a difficulty is felt. It is because men conjecture and judge out of their own position and their own relationships. But never earl we understand anything aright as long as we reason and conclude thus. It is not the way to understand any part of the Bible, least of all perhaps prophecy. If it be a question of our conduct or

duty, it is indispensable to stand on our proper relationship; we must abide carefully in the place that God has given us, while bowing to the word of God that applies to us there. How can we act intelligently or rightly as Christians unless we, knowing what it means, believe we are Christians? We only glorify our God and Father just so far as we look up as children to Him as our Father, and as saints own Him as our God. This is surely true. But here no Christians are said to be on earth: we have elect Jews; we have nations, along with "those that sit upon the earth." That is, there are men, apparently apostates, under the latter designation, as well as the general mass of mere nations, tribes, tongues, and peoples. It seems then that God comes down, as it were, to meet them on the lowest possible ground of His own truth. And what is that? They are called to fear God and give glory to Him; and this is on the ground that He is Judge, just about to deal with His own world. He calls upon them to abandon all that idolatry into which they will have fallen, particularly in those days.

And I have not the slightest question myself that at this present moment there is the working of a leaven that will end in idolatry, especially (if there be in this a difference) for the higher orders of this country, who will drag in the lower also. In the humbler classes there is in another way that grossness of love for sensible objects and show that will prepare them for idolatry. But I repeat that there is the active instilling of a spirit, no doubt more subtle and refined in the educated classes, which, in my judgment, will infallibly school them into naturalistic idolatry before many years are over. There is, on the one hand, the material tendency of modern

science and literature; there is, on the other, the condescending patronage of times that are past. On these dangerous tracks all that is now energetically leavening the world tends to bring man back to heathenism again; i.e., the apostacy.

However this may be judged by those who hear it, we must remember that there will be also another cause of a most solemn nature, which is plainly revealed: God is going to pour out a judicial delusion on Christendom. It is certain that He will not only inflict severe blows of judgment, but give men up to believe a lie — the great lie of the devil. Here is the great truth of all times: — that God, the God who has now revealed Himself in Christ and by redemption, alone is the due object of worship. So far then is this message, to my mind, from being a strange thing that it appears exactly suitable to man as then situated, and no less to God's wisdom and goodness.

Another consideration perhaps may help some as connected with this, and confirmatory of it, founded on Matthew 25, where the nations are called up before the Son of man when He sits as King upon the throne. It will be remembered that he tells those whom He designates as the sheep that, inasmuch as they did what they had done to His brethren, it was really to Him; as, on the other hand, the insults fell on Him which were aimed at them. These acts of kindness, or the contrary, will be owned by the Lord here. It is no use for people to call it the general judgment, or the judgment of our works. It is not. The one principle before us in this scripture is His dealing with the living Gentiles, or the nations according to their ways with His brethren; and it will require real power of God to act aright then. The pressure against

His messengers will be enormous. If any receive them well, it will be from faith. I grant that the measure of their faith is small. That to honour His brethren is virtually to honour Himself, they do not themselves know. When they stand in presence of the King, how astonished they are that He should regard what was done to the messengers of His gospel in the last days as if done to His own.

Certainly these Gentiles were wrought in by divine grace, yet very evidently they will not be what you would call "intelligent." But then how often must we beware of making too much of this! What a constant snare it is to slip into an unconscious criticism! Men are apt to give themselves an exaggerated importance on the score of their knowledge. God, I am sure, always attaches a far higher value to the heed paid to the Lord Himself, and this too in those that He sends out. It is always a crucial test. It will be so then most of all, because these messages will go forth to the nations on the earth when, growingly lifted up and self-satisfied, they are summoned by messengers, poor and contemptible in their eyes, who will solemnly proclaim the kingdom just coming — the King who is coming in person to judge the quick apart from and before the judgment of the dead. But some souls here and there will receive them, not only treating them kindly, but this because they receive the message. The power of the Spirit of God alone will give them this faith. None less than God Himself will incline their heart. Accordingly the Lord will refer to this reception, or the kindness that accompanied it, as an evidence of their heeding Himself in the persons of His messengers.

This I consider to be similar, if not the same, as the everlasting gospel; indeed it is called by Matthew the "gospel of the kingdom." I am inclined to infer that the "gospel of the kingdom" and the "everlasting gospel" are substantially identical; and that it was thus described because it was always in the purpose of God to establish this kingdom over the world, and to bless man himself here below. This Matthew, in accordance with his design, calls rather the "gospel of the kingdom," because Christ is going to be King. John, it would seem, calls it the "everlasting gospel," because it is in contrast with special messages from time to time, as well as with all that bad to do with man as he is here below. At this most corrupt time, then, the message will be sent forth, and certain souls will receive it by God's grace.

Thus the second scene in the chapter is the proclamation of the everlasting gospel unto those settled down on the earth, and to the nations, etc., as the first section was the separation of a remnant of Jews to the Lamb on mount Zion.

The third section, which may be passed over with comparatively few words, is a warning respecting the fall of Babylon. An angel comes forth, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, the great city, which made all the nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

The fourth is a warning about the beast. "And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark on his forehead, or on his hand, he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mingled without mixture in the cup of his anger; and he shall be

tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up unto ages of ages: and they. have no rest day and night, who worship the beast and his image, and if any one receiveth the mark of his name." So far these divine dealings all go in pairs: as the work among the Jews, and then a final testimony to the Gentiles; then the warning about Babylon, and another about the beast. "Here is the endurance of the saints, that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."

Then we come to the fifth, which is rather different. It is a declaration, that "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth." From this time nobody that belongs to the Lord is going to die, and those that die in the Lord (i.e. in fact all who have thus died) are just on the point of blessedness, not by personal exemption but by the first resurrection and the reign with the Lord, which will terminate all further persecution and death for His name. The wicked must pay the wages of sin, and be destroyed by the judgments of God; but there shall be no more dying in the Lord after this. As a class these are to be blessed (not to die) henceforth. "And I heard a voice out of heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed [are] the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they shall rest from their labours; for their works do follow with them." There is an end of such sorrow and labour: the Lord is going to take the world and all things in hand.

Accordingly in the next scene "I saw, and, behold, a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sitting like unto [the] Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came

out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Send thy sickle, and reap; for the hour is come to reap; for the harvest of the earth is dried. And he that sat on the cloud thrust his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped." It is not here a question of gathering in. The Son of man is seen with the crown of gold, King of righteousness, not yet manifested as King of peace.

And then the close of all the scenes comes. "And another angel came out of the temple that is in heaven, having himself also a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, that had authority over the fire; and called with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Send thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripened." This goes farther. For the harvest the call was out of the temple; here it is out of the temple that is in heaven. It is not only wrath on earth but from heaven. And another angel comes out from the altar (i.e., the place of human responsibility, where God manifests Himself to sinners in the sacrifice of Christ, judging sins but in grace). So much the more tremendous His vengeance on the earthly religionists who despise Christ and the cross in deed if not in word. This angel has authority over the fire, the sign of detective and consuming judgment. In short, we have here the harvest and the vintage, — the two great forms of the judgment at the close; the harvest being that judgment that discerns between the just and the unjust, and the vintage being the infliction of unmingled wrath on apostate religion, "the vine of the earth," which is the object of God's special abhorrence.

It is plain, therefore, that here we have seven distinct acts in which God will interfere in the way of forming a

testimony, of warnings to the world and comfort to His people, and finally of judging the results as far as the quick are concerned.

But a very peculiar scene is described in Rev. 15, and Rev. 16. On this one need not now bestow more than a few words. "I saw another sign in heaven." It is clearly connected with what we have had in Rev. 12. "And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having seven plagues, the last; for in them is filled up the wrath of God." You will observe that it is not yet the coming of Christ. This is of importance to show the structure of this portion of the book. We must carefully beware of supposing that the seven bowls are after the Son of man is come for the harvest and the vintage of the earth. We shall find, so far from this being the case, that the vision must go back, — I do not say to the beginning of Rev. 14, but before the end of it. The very last of the bowls, the seventh, is the fall of Babylon. Now that act of judgment would correspond to the third dealing of God in chapter 14. The first was the separation of the Jews; the second the everlasting gospel to the Gentiles; and the third the fall of Babylon. Thus the last bowl only brings us up to the same point. Hence the bowls must not in any way be supposed to follow after chapter 14, but only after its earlier part at the utmost. This is important, because it may help some to gather a juster idea how to place chronologically the various portions of the book. The last bowl is also the last outpouring of God's wrath before the Lord Jesus Christ comes. Consequently it must precede the latter part of that chapter. It synchronizes, we have seen, with the third out of its seven consecutive sections. The end of chapter 16 does not in point of time fall lower than

the third step in those of chapter 14. The fourth probably, but certainly the fifth, sixth, and seventh are events necessarily subsequent to all the bowls.

Let us look then a little into the subject. "I saw as it were a sea of glass." but here it is distinguished in its accompaniments from the description in Rev. 4. There the elders were seen on thrones, with the sea of glass bearing its silent but strong testimony that these saints had done with earthly need and danger, — that those who required the washing of water by the word are not contemplated in this scene. This is all intelligible and even plain. When the glorified saints are caught up to heaven, they no longer require what was set forth by the laver and its water to purify; for the sea of glass attests that the purity was fixed. The fact is, that they were beyond the scene where water was needed to cleanse their daily defilements.

Here it is not merely a sea of glass, but mingled with fire. What does this teach? It declares, in my opinion, that these saints passed through a time of fearful fiery tribulation, as did not the elders. The absence of the fire in connection with the elders is just as significant as the presence of fire in connection with the saints in collision with the beast and the false prophet, of whom we are now speaking. If people ask you, "Are the saints to pass through the time of tribulation? The right answer is, What saints do you mean? If you mean those that are presented by the elders caught up at Christ's coming, clearly they will not. Scripture is positive. If you only mean that some saints are to pass through that tremendous time, it is unquestionable. In short, we have only to distinguish, and all becomes perfectly plain: by

confounding the two classes all is made a mass of obscurity. But scripture cannot be broken.

Here then we find a sea of glass mingled with fire. "And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and those that have gained the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God." The victory over the beast is never predicated of the elders in any sort; nor is there any connection with the elders here. It is a closing scene of fearful trial. This is important. The victories here are confined to the time when Satan's last plans become consummated. These were delivered from them probably before the beast falls. At any rate, the time does not seem of prime importance, but the fact is undeniable that these conquerors belong exclusively to the time of the last efforts of the devil through the beast and the false prophet. They are strictly speaking therefore Apocalyptic saints, and the final company of them. It will be recollected that in our last lecture we saw the first sufferers. Although these may have fallen under the hand of the Roman Empire, they really got the victory over it, and are here seen standing on the sea of glass having harps of God. Their melody in praise of the Lord was none the worse for the sea of tribulation through which they had passed into His presence.

"And they sing the song of Moses, servant of God, and the song of the Lamb." Thus it is plain that they are not Christians in the strict sense of the word. Assuredly they are saints in the most real sense, but not standing in the relations which now subsist; they are not to have that sort of bond which is made good by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in those who are now in association with

Christ. So exclusive is it that those who may have been under Moses are under him no more; they own no master or head save Christ, Whereas the souls of whom we read here still retain their link with Jewish things, though beyond a doubt they serve God and the Lamb. Hence we hear of them "saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, O King" — not "of saints," but "of nations." There is no such thing in scripture as "King of saints." This is one of the worst readings of the vicious received text of the Revelation. I do not hesitate to say, both that it is against the best witnesses, and that it conveys a heterodox meaning, and is consequently mischievous. For what can go more practically to destroy the proper relationship of the saints of the Lord? Elsewhere we never hear of such a thing as "King of saints," nor has it any just sense. To the saints the Lord Jesus stands undoubtedly as their Lord and master; but king is a relationship with a nation living on the earth. It is not at all a connection that pertains to the new man. Besides, these if martyred belong actually to heaven, where such a relationship would be strange indeed. Thus it is strange doctrine as well as a fictitious reading. The allusion is to Jeremiah 10:7. There you will find "king of nations," with other words which are cited here. If these saints were not exclusively Gentiles, at least they comprehended such; and this has to be borne in mind in reading the passage. The true title then is "king of Gentiles" or of "nations." No doubt King of the Jews He is; but those in particular who were Gentiles themselves would and ought to rejoice in being able to praise Him as the King of nations.

"Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee" (here again it is not Israel, but all nations shall come); "for thy judgments are made manifest." They are anticipating the triumph that is reserved for God in the day of the glory of Christ's coming.

"And after that I saw, and there was opened the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven: and the seven angels came out of the temple, that had the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles. And one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who liveth unto the ages of the ages. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no one was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled." It is not now the ark of God's covenant seen in the opened temple. It is characterised as the tabernacle of the testimony, and judgments follow on apostate Gentiles, not the revelation of the divine counsels touching Israel.

Then (Rev. 16) we have these seven bowls poured out. It is not now "the third" as under the trumpets, with which the analogy is close; there is no restriction to the western empire of Rome. The whole apostate sphere is smitten, and with yet more severity. The first, as we know, was on the earth; the second on the sea; the third on the rivers and fountains of waters; and the fourth on the sun. Thus all the different departments of nature, whatever may be symbolized by them (and their meaning seems to me neither indeterminate 'nor obscure), were visited by the bowls of God's wrath.

The three later bowls, like the three woe — trumpets, come to closer quarters with men.

The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast. It is clear therefore that we have here a Gentile sphere before us, which fits in with the prefatory scene. "The fifth angel poured out his bowl upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds. And the sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings that are from the sun-rising might be prepared." The Euphrates was the boundary that separated the empire on its oriental frontiers from the vast hordes of uncivilized north-eastern nations destined to come into conflict with the powers of the west in the latter day. Thus the way is made plain for them to come forward and enter into the final struggle. This seems the meaning of the drying up of the great river. "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of demons, working signs, which go forth unto the kings of the whole habitable earth, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God the Almighty." This gives proof of what I have just now referred to. There is about to be a universal uprising and fight to the death between the east and the west. But the Lord has designs which neither side knows nor regards, and He is no indifferent spectator. "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And they" (for I take it so)

"gathered them together unto the place called in the Hebrew tongue Armagedon."

Lastly comes the seventh angel, who deals with the world still more decidedly and universally by pouring on the air. "And the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done. And there were lightnings, and voices, and thunders; and there was a great earthquake" — and not only great but unexampled — "such as was not since men were upon the earth, such an earthquake, so great." Clearly, therefore, judgment from heaven becomes yet more unsparing in its blows on man here below. "And the great city came (ἐγένετο) into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon was remembered before God." This accounts for the warning of the fall of Babylon referred to in the complete series of God's dealings in Rev. 14. To that Rev. 16 now brings us up in point of time.

This must suffice for tonight, though no more than a sketch of the general bearing of this part of the prophecy.

Rev. 17 - 22.

It is necessary that we should all bear in mind, if we have not observed it before, that Rev. 17 does not pursue the chronological course of the prophecy. It is a description, and not one of the visions that carry us onward. The seventh bowl contained under it the fall of Babylon, which "was remembered before God, to give to her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath."

This chapter explains how it was that Babylon was so offensive to God, and wherefore He judged her thus sternly. But, in point of fact, in giving the description of Babylon, the Holy Ghost enters even more into an account of her relations with the beast, the imperial power of which we saw not a little last night. Accordingly these are the two main objects of judgment brought before us in the chapter. It is true, the beast's judgment is only referred to as a defeat under the hand of the Lamb. The particulars are reserved for a later point in this prophecy. We must therefore look a little into the two objects — Babylon and the beast.

The principle is very clear. Man has always sinned in one or other of these two ways, looking now at sin in its broadest forms. The woman — the strange woman — sets forth corruption, human nature indulging itself in its own evil desires, irrespective of God's will. The beast is the expression of the will of man setting itself up in direct antagonism to God. In short, one may be described as corruption, and the other as violence.

There is, however, a great deal more than this on the subject, and given with great precision in scripture, because this is merely the principle of sin in one or other form from the beginning. It will be observed that in this case it is one of the angels that had the seven bowls who comes forward and says to John, "Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore (or harlot) that sitteth upon [the] many waters." There were two particular effects of her evil: the one, illicit commerce with the kings of the earth; the other, intoxicating the inhabitants of the earth with the wine of her fornication.

"So he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness" — a thorough waste as to the knowledge or enjoyment of God. The woman was there seen sitting on a scarlet-coloured beast, i.e., the well-known imperial power of the Roman Empire, — "full of [the] names of blasphemy" in its wicked opposition to God, and clothed with the forms we have already seen — "seven heads and ten horns." The Spirit of God regards it in its final shape and completeness, as far as it was permitted to attain it, "The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearls." Everything that could attract the natural man was there; and all that which to him looks fair enough on the side of religion. But she has a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication.3 Idolatry is the awful stamp that she bears, and this too both in what she gives to man, and in what is written on her forehead before God. "Upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth."

Men have been beguiled here and there, and from an early date, to set aside the true bearing of this chapter. Sometimes they have contended for its application to pagan Rome. Sometimes, again, they have sought to turn it aside toward Jerusalem in her corrupt state. But a grave consideration soon disposes of both views by the relation to the beast, and more particularly by what will be shown a little farther on. The application to old pagan Rome is harsh and purposeless enough; but the attempt to refer it to Jerusalem is of all schemes the most absurd; for, far from being borne up by the imperial power, Jerusalem was trodden down by it. If there was any Gentile power since John's day, which did not

sustain but persecute and suppress Jerusalem, it was Rome, instead of being a gaudy harlot mounted on that vast empire.

At the same time the attempt to apply Babylon to ancient Rome is almost as unhappy; and for a plain reason. As long as Rome was pagan, there was neither the full bearing of the seven heads, nor did so much as one of the ten horns exist. The decem-regal division of the broken empire in the West, as all know, was long after Rome had ceased to be heathen. Nobody can dispute that this remarkable cluster of kingdoms in Europe was the fruit providentially of the destroyed unity of the Roman empire when the barbarians invaded it. With that love of freedom which they carried from their German forests, they would not allow the one iron rule of the ancient empire to subsist longer, but set up each their own kingdom in the different fragments of the dismembered empire. Thus the attempt to apply it during the pagan period is altogether futile on the face of the matter. We shall find that the scripture affords much light to decide the true bearing of the prophecy, and that no application to the past can possibly satisfy the conditions satisfactorily. If ancient times failed fully to meet the requirements of the chapter, it is evident that the middle ages are passed without its fulfilment as a whole. When we come to the full application of the prophecy, we must look onward to the latter day.

This falls in with what we have seen of the book in general; but I do not deny that certain elements which figure in the Apocalypse then existed and still exist. No one can soberly deny that Babylon in some sort had a place then; but that the special, and above all, the full character of Babylon was manifested as here portrayed

is another matter. We may surely say her cup was not yet full. There was not yet fairly out before men what God foresaw as that which must finally provoke His judgment. Again, to my mind it seems demonstrably true that the relation to the beast here brought before us must in all fairness be allowed to look onward to a later stage of Babylon. Thus there is no question that some of the actors in the final scenes of the great drama were already there, as the reigning city, and the Roman empire. Moral elements too were not wanting: the mystery of lawlessness had long been at work, though the enemy had not yet brought in the apostacy, and still less the manifestation of the lawless one. But whatever subsisted then, that which the Spirit here presents as a whole cannot be found realized at any point of time in the past. We must perforce therefore look for a still more complete development before the Lamb judges the beast after the ten horns along with it shall have destroyed Babylon.

There is another remark to make. It is hard to see how Roman city, or anything civil connected with it, could be called "mystery." It is partly because of this that many excellent men have endeavoured to apply the vision to Romanism; and I admit that there is found a measure of analogy. That religious system has an incomparably nearer connection with this mysterious harlot than anything we have yet spoken of. There is no doubt that Rome in some form is the woman described in the chapter: the seven heads or hills clearly point to that city, which of all cities might best and indeed alone be known as ruling over the kings of the earth. There is therefore much to be said for the]Protestant application of the chapter as compared with the Praetorist theory of

pagan Rome. Yet it will be found imperfect, for reasons which, I think, will be clear to any unbiassed mind.

There stands the solemn brand graven, not on the blasphemous beast, but on the forehead of its rider, "Mystery, Babylon the great." The question is, why is she thus designated? If only an imperial city, what has this to do with mystery? The simple fact of conquering far and wide, and of exercising vast political power in the earth, does not constitute any title to such a name. A mystery clearly points to something undiscoverable by the natural mind of man — a secret that requires the distinct and fresh light of God to unravel, but which when revealed thus is plain enough. And so it is with this very Babylon that comes before us here. Justly does she gather her title from the old fountain of idols and of combined power without God: confusion being here the characteristic element, the designation is taken from the renowned city of the Chaldeans, the first spot notorious in both respects.

But the attempt, again, to apply what is said here to a future city of Babylon in Chaldea seems to me no less vain. There is a distinct contrast between the city John describes and the ancient Babylon, in that the latter was built on the plain of Shinar, while the former is expressly said to have seven heads, and these explained to mean seven mountains. I admit that there may be something more in the symbol than the literal hills of Rome, because they are said to be also seven kings. At the same time we are not at liberty to eliminate such a feature out of the description. It is written to be believed, not to be ignored or explained away.

In short, it would seem that God has hedged round His own draft of Babylon so as to make it quite plain that Rome, city and system, figures in the scene; and this too necessarily involving a medieval description, though the full result will not be till the end of the age; for she rides the beast or empire characterized so as naturally to involve the past barbarian irruption and the resulting ten-kingdomed state. Again, that it supposes Rome after it had professed the name of Christ I think is not to be doubted, if only from the expression "mystery" attached to Babylon. It clearly contrasts this mystery with another. We have not to learn what the other mystery means; we know well that it is according to God and godliness. But here is a mystery altogether different: — "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth."

Here were joined good and evil in godless union, for the worse, not for the better, — this alliance, unholy in principle, irremediable therefore in practice, between God and the natural man, who substitutes rites for the grace and word of God, for the blood of Christ, and the power of the Spirit, and employs the name of the Lord as a cover for grosser covetousness and ambition, yet more aspiring than the vulgar world. All these things have their place in Babylon the great. She is, the mother of the harlots, but also (and with still deeper guilt) of the abominations of the earth. This brings in idolatry, real shameless idolatry too, not merely that subtle working of the idolatrous spirit that every Christian has to guard against. Here it is the positive worship of the creature besides the Creator, yea, and notoriously more than He. For who knows not the horrors of Mariolatry? Babylon is the parent of the "abominations of the earth." It is not

therefore a question of virtual idols suitable to ensnare the children of God, but of that which is adapted to the earth itself, — thorough-going palpable idolatry.

Such is God's account of Babylon the great. Take notice of this (which confirms the application just now contended for), that when John saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, he wondered with great wonder. Had it been simply a persecution from pagans, what was there to wonder at in their deadly hatred of the truth and of those who confess it? That an openly heathen metropolis, devoted to the worship of Mars, and Jupiter, and Venus, and other wicked monstrosities of pagan mythology should be irritated with the gospel which exposes it all, and should consequently seek to injure the faithful, was to be expected, and a necessary result, directly that the uncompromising spirit of Christ was known. Had those who preached said nothing about heathen vanities, had they merely presented the gospel as a better thing than anything the pagans could boast, I do not doubt that the pagans themselves would have acknowledged thus much. And it is pretty well ascertained that there was a discussion among them, even to the suggestion by one of the most wicked of their emperors, whether Christ should not be owned and worshipped in the Pantheon, hundreds of years before Constantine, indeed from the earliest epoch of the gospel. But there never was the thought of giving Christ the only place He could take. For Christ has not only a supreme but an exclusive place. Now there was nothing more repulsive and fatal to paganism in every form than the truth revealed in Christ, which exposed every thing that was not itself — not the truth, definite and

exclusive. Consequently Christianity, as being directly aggressive on the falsehood of heathenism, was of all things the most offensive to Rome. That pagan Rome, therefore, should set itself against Christianity was to be expected, and so the fact proved.

But it was no such evil which astounded the prophet. He was filled with astonishment that this mysterious form of evil, this counter-testimony of the enemy (not antichrist, but antichurch), should seem and be largely accepted as the holy catholic church of God, that Christendom, if not Christianity, should at the same time become the bitterest of persecutors, more murderously incensed against the witnesses of Jesus and the saints of God than ever paganism had been in any country or all ages. This very naturally filled him with intense wonder.

"And the angel said unto him, Wherefore didst thou wonder? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman." Had he really penetrated under the surface, and seen that beneath the fair guise of Christendom the woman was, of all things under the sun, the most corrupt and hateful to God, it would not be so much to be surprised at. Therefore says the angel, "I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, that hath4 the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, beholding the beast that he was, and is not, and shall be present." The closing phrase here is the description of the beast in its last state, in which it will come into collision with Babylon. Let us bear this in mind. It will help to show us that, whatever may have

been the past conditions of Babylon, there is a future one; and it is in that future one that Babylon is to perish. For remark, the beast or Roman empire is described here as that which once existed, which then ceased to exist, and which assumes a final shape when it reappears from the bottomless pit. Bad as pagan Rome was, it would be false to affirm that it ever had come out of the bottomless pit. When the apostle Paul wrote to the, saints at Rome, he particularly specified at that very time the duty of absolute subjection on the part of Christians to the powers which then were. Of course the application to the Roman empire would be immediately in the mind of any Christian at Rome. There was no doubt at all of the character of the emperor; there never had been a worse than he; yet God took that very opportunity to lay this on the Christians as their duty to the worldly authority outside and over them. It was ruled in general that the worldly powers were ordained of God. But this is not to emerge from the bottomless pit.

But there is a time coming when power will cease to be ordained of God; and this is the point to which the last condition of the beast refers. God in His providence did sanction the great empires of old; and the principle continues as long as the church is here below. Hence we have to own the divine source of government even when its holders abandon all such thoughts themselves, and maintain their rule in the world as a thing flowing from the people irrespective of God. But the day is coming when Satan will be allowed to have things his own way. For a short time (what a mercy that it must be only for a short time!) Satan will bring forth an empire suited to his purposes, as it springs from Satanic principles which

deny God; and this is part of what appears to be meant by the beast ascending out of the bottomless pit. It "shall go into perdition," it is therefore added, "and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and shall be present." "Yet is" is a most unfortunate expression. It is the fault, however, of the bad Greek text of Erasmus, Stephens, etc. It should be, "and shall be present."5 There is no thought of making such a paradox to perplex the mind. The true reading here is neither hard nor doubtful save to unbelief. There is no paradox in the message whatever. It is all plain and simple — "the beast that was, and is not, and shall be present."

But all this will be a great reversal of man's history and political maxims. There never has been a like experience. What empire has existed, then sunk, and finally reappeared, with higher pretensions and power, only to perish horribly? It is altogether foreign to history. One of the most approved axioms is, that kingdoms are just like men in this respect, that they begin, rise, and fall. As man does not believe in the resurrection of man, it is no wonder that he does not believe in the resurrection of an empire. The chief difference is that in man's case it is God who raises him, whereas in the empire's not God but the devil will raise it again. Beyond controversy, however, it is a most unusual and abnormal reappearance, which is altogether exceptional in the history of the world. Accordingly the resuscitated Roman empire will carry men away by a storm of wonder at its revival. Little do they know, because they believe not what is here written, that it is about to come out of the abyss or bottomless pit. That is, Satan will be

the spring of its final rise and power; he, and not God in any way whatever, will give it its character.

"And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there (or they) are seven kings." I have already touched on the double force of the symbol — mountains. "Five are fallen, one is, the other hath not yet come." That is, the sixth head (reigning then in John's day) was the imperial form of government. Nothing of the sort can be plainer. We have here a note of time of signal value. A seventh should follow; and what is more, the seventh was in one aspect to be an eighth. "And the beast that was, and is not, even he is an eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth unto destruction." In one sense it would be an eighth, and in another sense it would be of the seven; the eighth perhaps because of its extraordinary resurrection character, yet one of the seven because it is outwardly old imperialism again. This explains, it seems to me, the wounded head that was afterwards healed. It is of the seven in that point of view, because it is imperialism; but it is an eighth, because it has a diabolical source when raised up again. In this way there never has been anything of the kind before.

"And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have not yet received a kingdom; but they receive authority as kings (not at but for) one hour with the beast." They are all to reign concurrently with the beast. This also is a no less important element for understanding the chapter. All who have looked back on the history know, that when the ten kings appeared, there was no beast or imperial power. It was the destruction of the imperial unity of Rome that gave

occasion for the well-known ten kingdoms which the barbarians set up afterwards. I am not raising any question about the ten. We know that sometimes there were nine, sometimes eleven or more; but supposing this all perfectly certain, I affirm that, according to history, they did not receive their power as kings for one and the same time with the beast. This is the meaning of "one hour with the beast."

The very reverse is the undeniable fact. They received their power as kings when the beast ceased to exist. Thus the difference is complete between past history (if we look at the extinction of the empire and the rise of the ten kingdoms) and the certain fulfilment of the prophecy in the future, when we look at what God has really told us. I do not acknowledge the language to be either difficult or ambiguous. Man alone is to blame who has misapplied it. Yet one allows freely a partial application already. We can quite understand that God would comfort His people in the dark ages by this book; and a very imperfect glimpse at its real meaning might in His grace serve to cheer them on in their trials as far as it went. From Rome saints had suffered; and it was easy to see that the revealed persecutress is called Babylon, and identified with the governing city of Rome. So far they were right. Nor is there any real reason to wonder at their deriving help from partial light. It was but an imperfect view they got even of justification; a far scantier perception, if they could be said to have had any, about Christ's Headship of the church, His priesthood, or almost anything else. And thus it was but a little glimpse they had of prophecy. But we can understand that the Lord could and did make that little go far, and do no little good.

But is there any reason why we should content ourselves with the measure enjoyed of old? Such is the hard bondage which mere historical tradition imposes on its votaries. Holding on to what others knew before them, or little more, they reduce themselves to a minimum of the truth. When God is so gracious, His word rich, full, and deep, it does seem sad to see His children content with just enough to save their souls, or keep them from positive starvation. In presence of grace I do not think this is for His glory, any more than for their own blessing. The only right principle in everything is to go to the source of divine truth, and to seek there refreshment and strength and fitness for whatever our God calls us to. And unquestionably God has been awakening the attention of His people in a remarkable manner to the value of His word, and not least of all to the portion we are now examining.

It is plain that what the verse contemplates is neither the Roman power when there was one head of the empire, nor the eastern or Byzantine part of it after that partition, nor the western state of division under the kings who succeeded the deposition of Augustulus; for in the medieval state there may have been ten kings (in contrast with the ancient state of the beast without them but no beast or imperial system with its chiefs. This is what drove men to the idea of making the pope to be the beast. But that idea is wholly insufficient to cover or meet the word of God, which gives clear and strong reasons that prove the mistake of applying this to the pope as its complete fulfilment. For that which comes distinctly before us in this one verse is the twofold fact, that the ten horns here contemplated receive their kingly power for the same hour or time as the beast, and

not subsequently, when his rule was extinguished. He gets his power and they get theirs for one and the same time.

This disposes of many a web of comments; for we find at once what is perfectly simple, what any child of God who believes this to be the word of God must own. Bringing in history here embroiled the subject; and those who appeal most to its evidence are the very men who seem in this to ignore its facts. But the most ordinary knowledge suffices; for who does not know from the Bible that there was a Roman empire when Christ was born, one emperor, and no such state as that empire divided into ten kingdoms? We find a decree going forth that all the world shall be enrolled. Of course there must needs be a consultation with the kings, when the kings exist and become an accredited part of that empire, as rulers subordinate to the beast. But no; it was an absolute decree that went forth, and this indisputably, from a single head of the undivided empire. Centuries after came in, not only the division into east and west, but the broken up state of the west, when there ceased to be an imperial chief. But the prophecy shows us the beast revived and the separate kings reigning for the same time, before divine judgment destroys them at the coming of Christ and His saints. Hence this certainly must be future.

How this precisely fits in, let me say, with the state of feeling in these modern times; for "constitutionalism," as men call it, is the fruit of the Teutonic system supervening on that of the broken up Roman empire. It was the barbarians who brought in the prevalent ideas of liberty as well as feudalism, and accordingly it is they that have firmly stood for freedom; so that all the efforts

to reconstitute the empire which have been tried over and over again have hitherto issued in total failure. The reason is manifest there is a hinderer — "one that letteth." It cannot be done till the moment comes. When its own season arrives, as it surely will, the divine hindrance is to be removed, and the devil then is allowed to do his worst. The political side of this is described here with surprising brightness and brevity. The ten horns with the beast are all to receive authority — the beast of course wielding the imperial power, they as kings, all during one and the same time before the end comes. Clearly, therefore, it is future. It is impossible to refer it to the past with any show even of reasonable probability, I will not say of reality or truth. Scripture and facts refute all such theories.

"They have one mind, and give their own power and authority to the beast." Hitherto the reverse of this has been true in history. The horns have constantly opposed each other, and even sometimes the pope. Since then the world has not seen the imperial power to which all bow. Have we not all heard of the balance of power? This is what nations have been constantly occupied with, lest any one power should become the beast. If some few have joined on one side, some are sure to help the other, because they are jealous of any one acquiring such a preponderant authority: and power as to govern the rest. But in the time really contemplated here all this political shuffling will be over. "These have one mind, and give their own power and authority to the beast," or their imperial leader. "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them (for he is Lord of lords and King of kings), and they that are with him, called, and chosen, and faithful."

But still we have not the end of Babylon yet. Her part in the corruption of the high and the intoxication of the low — her idolatrous character — has come before us. We have seen her connection with the beast; but there is a conflict coming. The woman was allowed to ride the beast — to influence and govern the empire first, but at last to be the object of hatred to the ten horns and the beast, who expose, rob, and destroy her. "And he saith to me, The waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." Such was her influence stretching out far beyond the beast.

The Gothic hordes were not yet incorporated with the empire, still less were they horns of the beast, nor did they give their power to it, but destroyed it rather. They broke up the beast yet more than Babylon. Past history therefore in no way suits the prophecy. "And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast." Here I am obliged to say that our authorized version, and not merely it, but our common Greek Testaments, are altogether wrong. This is known so well, and on such decided grounds, that it would be unbecoming to withhold the fact. There is no uncertainty whatever in the case. It is certain that we ought to read (not "upon" but) "and6 the beast." This is of great importance. The horns and the beast join in hating the whore. Not only are they supposed to be coexistent, but united in their change of feeling against Babylon. The friendships of the evil are not lasting. "These shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." It is not the gospel, nor the Holy Spirit, but the lawless revived Latin empire with its vassal kingdoms of the west, that combine and

destroy Babylon. Unhallowed love will end in hatred. They will then treat her with contempt and shameful exposure. Next they will seize her resources. Finally they will destroy her. Can anything be less reasonable (even taking that ground, low as it is) than that the various rulers of the western powers, Catholic kings, join the Pope in destroying his own city, or his own church, whichever Babylon may be made? Some evade the difficulty by referring the desolation to the Gothic powers; and these Protestants, as if they were mere Praeterists! What confusion! Is not this reason enough for saying that not even the shadow of solid ground appears for the system?

Hence the effort of some to prop up a manifestly false reading. It is due to the exigency of a notion which fears and is irreconcilable with the truth in this place. "The ten horns which thou sawest AND the beast" would give unquestionably the right form of the verse.

Thus everything implies their simultaneous presence for the same time and common action with the beast, in plundering and then destroying Babylon. God uses them for this object,-the setting aside of her, the great religious corruptress, whose centre is found at Rome. We can easily understand that the overthrow of the ecclesiastical power is necessary to leave a full field unimpeded for the imperial power to develop itself in its final form of violence and rebellion and apostacy against the Lord. Yet religion, be it ever so corrupt, acts as a restraint on human will, as a government does, however evil. Even the worst of governments is better than none. That a corrupt religion is better than none I will not say: at any rate it troubles men; it is a thorn in the side of those who want no religion at all. Hence the horns and

the beast join together and desolate the harlot. That kings had dallied with her, that the beast had once borne her up, will only turn to gall the more bitter to her, who, faithless to God, had staked the usurped and abused name of Christ to win what was now lost for ever. "For God put [it] into their hearts to do his mind, and to do one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled." It is a time of strong delusion, be it remembered.

"And the woman whom thou sawest is the great city, that hath kingship over the kings of the earth." None but Rome corresponds. "The woman" is the more general symbol designating her as the great imperial city; "the harlot" is her corrupt religious character, embracing papal Rome, but not ending with Popery as it is.

Revelation 18 need not delay us long. It is a description, not of Babylon's relation to the beast, but of the city's fall, with certain dirges put into the mouth of the different classes that groan because of her extinction here below. But along with that God warns of her ruin, and calls on His people (verse 4) to come out of her. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sin., have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities." Then the word is, "Award her even as she awarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she mixed, mix to her double. In as many things as she glorified herself, and lived luxuriously, so much torment and sorrow give to her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am not a widow, and I shall in no wise see sorrow."

That is, Babylon is viewed in this chapter not so much in her mysterious and religious form, giving currency to every kind of confusion of truth and error, of good and evil, intoxicating, corrupting, and seducing, as all can see, through her wickedly religious influence; but she is viewed here as the most conspicuous aider and abettor of the world in its luxuries and delights and the pride of life, — of what men call "civilization." This is accordingly traced in our chapter with considerable detail, and with the sorrow and vexation of all the different classes who on the fall of Babylon groaned over her destruction, and the loss of their wealth and enjoyment.

But the graphic account does not end until the Spirit of God shows us another view of Babylon altogether. A mighty angel takes a stone and says, when he cast it into the sea, "Thus with violence shall be thrown down Babylon the great city, and shall be found no more at all." The reason is given at the close; not only "by thy sorcery were all the nations deceived," but above all "in her was found [the] blood of prophets and saints, and of all the slain upon the earth."

What a solemn and weighty fact in the government of God! How can it be said that this vile, corrupt, idolatrous system of the last days was guilty of the blood of all martyrs? She followed and had inherited the spirit of all, from the days of Cain, who had lifted up their hands against their righteous brethren. Instead of taking warning from the wickedness of those before her, who had seduced on the one hand, and persecuted. on the other, she had, when she could, gone on increasing in both, until at last the blow of divine judgment came. It is thus that God is wont to deal as a rule in His judgments, — not necessarily on the one that first introduces an

evil, but on those that inherit the guilt, and perhaps aggravate it, instead of taking warning by it. And when God does judge, it is not merely for the evil of those then judged, but of all from the first budding of it till that day. This is not unrighteous, but, on the contrary, the highest justice from a divine point of view.

We may illustrate it by the members of a family. Supposing, for instance, a drunken father: if the sons had one spark of right feeling, not only must they feel the utmost shame and pain on account of their parent, but they would endeavour (like the sons of Noah who had a due sense of what was proper to their father) to cast some mantle of love over that which they could not deny, yet would not look at, but surely above all things they would watch against that shameful sin. But alas! there is a son in the family, who, instead of being admonished by his father's wickedness, takes license from it to indulge the same. On him the blow comes, not on the wretched parent. The son is doubly guilty, because he saw his father's nakedness and felt it enough to hide. But he ought to have withstood it — I do not mean in vengeance (for that belongs to the Lord), but as holily hating the sin itself, yet withal in the deepest compassion for his parent. But far from that he has, on the contrary, persevered in the same evil course, as badly or worse than his father. Then and thus is aggravated guilt in the case of this wicked son.

It is a precisely similar case here. Babylon had once heard the varied testimony of God; for what had she not heard of truth? The gospel had been preached there, as she of Chaldea was not without law and prophet. Babylon must hear, I do not doubt, the final testimony of God — the gospel of the kingdom that is to go forth in

the last days; but she loves her pleasure and power, and refuses truth. She will despise everything really divine; she will only use whatever of God's word she can pervert for increasing her own importance, and gaining a greater ascendancy over the consciences of men, and enjoying herself more luxuriously in this world; for she will go far to obliterate all remembrance of heaven, and to make this world a kind of paradise which she embellishes, not with pure and undefiled religion, but with the arts of men and the idolatries of the world.

This it is precisely which will bring out the indignant judgment of God upon the last phase of Babylon, so that the guilt of all the blood shed on the earth shall be imputed to her, and she may be judged accordingly. It does not hinder, of course, that in the judgment of the dead each man is judged for his own sin. This remains true. The day of the Lord on the world in no way sets aside His dealing with individual souls. The judgment of the dead is strictly individual, judgments in this world are not. His blows on this world come more nationally as on Israel; incomparably more severe, as in possession of greater privileges, is the judgment of corrupt Christendom, or Babylon as it is called here. But according to His principle of government it is not merely personal guilt, but that which, from despising the testimony of God, is thus morally accumulating from age to age in the ratio of the testimony of God and the wickedness that has been indulged by men in spite of it. This may suffice for Rev. 18.

"After these things I heard as it were a great voice of a great crowd in heaven, saying, Alleluia, the salvation, and the glory, and the power of our God: for true and righteous [are] his judgments: because he judged the

great harlot, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And they said Alleluia a second time; and her smoke goeth up unto the ages of the ages." The Spirit of God contrasts with the fall of Babylon the marriage. of the bride, the Lamb's wife. Babylon was the spurious church as long as it was a question of the church, and the final corrupter when it could be no question of this longer, and there went forth the closing testimony of God. I do not doubt that there was a corrupt form in connection with Israel in times past. That is, there was first the literal Babylon, of course; but here it is symbolical. A mysterious lawlessness inherits the well-known name of Babylon when Rome is brought forward; and it does not merely embrace Christian times, but the end of the age after the church has gone, when the course of divine judgment comes. Bear this in mind: to leave the last part out is fatal to any accurate understanding of the Revelation.

We find, accordingly, the four and twenty elders and four living creatures here brought before us for the last time. That is to say, the heavenly saints are viewed still as the heads of the glorified priesthood, and also the executive in the administration of God's judgments. But a voice issues from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were a voice of a great multitude, and as a voice of many waters, and as a voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God the Almighty reigneth.7 Let us be glad and exult, and give the glory to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." Now we find the symbol of the

bride brought before us, and the elders and the living creatures disappear. The bride is in view.

Are we then to understand that the elders and the living creatures are together taken absolutely as the bride now? that those who were meant under the figures of the elders and of the living creatures assume the name and figure of the bride? In my opinion it is not absolutely so. The elders do show us the heavenly heads of priesthood (embracing, as I believe, the Old Testament saints and those of the New); i.e., they are not limited to the church, Christ's body. Then, when the Lamb and His purchase by blood are celebrated in heaven, the four living creatures join the elders, though each is distinct. The glorified saints are to administer power in a way far beyond angels. The living creatures are, from Rev. 5 coupled with the elders, as we find them in the beginning of Revelation 19.

But now, when those symbols disappear, because of a new action of God (namely, the consummation of the church's joy), the elders and the living creatures disappear, and we have not the bride alone, but another class of saints, who at once come forward. "And to the bride was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of saints." I say "righteousnesses," not "righteousness." It is not what Christ puts on them, but a recognition even at this time of whatever has been of God — the working I do not deny of the Spirit of Christ. But it is what each saint has, though the blessed thought here is that the church has it not merely in the way of each person possessing his own; the bride has the whole of it (that is, the church in glory). The individual has his own fruit too. This remains true also in its own place, as

we shall find; and when it is a question of reward, this is precisely the grand point; but when it is a question of the bride above, that is the way in which it is presented here, as we may see clearly from verse 8. The Spirit of God implies that it is decidedly not the righteousness here which is by another, and we thereby imputed righteous, but righteousnesses personal and actual. Of course the other is true. Before God we have that which is found only by and in Christ, which is another and a higher character altogether as compared with the righteousnesses of the saints.

Besides the bride thus arrayed, "He saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage-supper of the Lamb." Here you may see the reason for saying that the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures are not absolutely the church, because when that symbol applies, and the one of the bride comes forward, we have got others too. What I judge, then, is that the guests, or those that were called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb, refer clearly to the Old Testament saints. If so, they are there in the quality not of the bride, but of those invited to the marriage of the Lamb; but I do not think them the Apocalyptic saints for the simple reason that, as shown in the next chapter, the Apocalyptic saints are not raised from the dead yet. These remain as yet in the condition of separate spirits. That is not at all the way in which the guests are spoken of. I think, therefore, that the elders and the living creatures comprehend both the Old Testament saints and the church, the bride of Christ, — that consequently, when the bride is mentioned, there were these others who had been included in the elders and the living creatures, but who are now seen as a separate body. No

doubt all this may seem to some a little difficult, but it is no use evading what is hard. We must face difficulties; we must bow to the word; we must seek to learn through all. We do not mend matters by hasty conclusions, we only complicate the truth. And it appears to me that here we are bound to account for the presence of these others that are at the marriage-supper of the Lamb, but appear as guests, and not at all in the quality of the bride. In general this has been either passed over in the chapter, or some unsatisfactory inference has been flung out, which can only embroil the prophecy. I do not, of course, complain of particular persons, but of the general vagueness in which the passage has been taken — unless, indeed, the more common course be not to ignore it.

Then the prophet falls down to pay homage to the angel; and this gives rise to a weighty admonition. It is not only that the angel corrects the act by asserting that he is a fellow-servant of him and of his brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. On that account it was altogether out of place to pay homage to him instead of to the God who had sent him to serve. But he tells us further that the Spirit of prophecy, who prophesies in this book, is the testimony of Jesus. Thus the divine testimony is not confined to the gospel or the church, but the prophetic Spirit which characterizes the Revelation as a whole, after the church is translated, is equally a testimony of Jesus. This is most important, because it might be (as it has been) forgotten by some who make the gospel and the corresponding presence of the Spirit to be the same at all times; as others have thought, because Rev. 4 and sequel treat of Jew and Gentile, and the state of the world under God's judgments, that this cannot be a

testimony of Jesus at all. But it really is. "The Spirit of prophecy" — and such it is all through the Revelation after the seven churches are done with — "is the testimony of Jesus." We know the Holy Spirit rather as a spirit of communion with Christ. By and by, after our translation to heaven, He will work, and as vitally in those who bow to God, when it will be the reception of the prophetic testimony which is here owned to be none the less the testimony of Jesus.

Then heaven is opened, and for a sight most solemn. It is not now the temple opened there, and the ark of the covenant seen when Israel's security is seen, as the object of God's counsels; nor is it a door opened above, as we saw it when the prophet was giving his introduction to the prophecy of God's dealings with the world as a whole, though in both cases all manifestly clusters round the Lord Jesus. But now heaven is opened for yet graver facts, and of incalculable moment for man and the universe and the enemy. It is Christ Himself about to be displayed in His rights as King of kings, and Lord of lords; and this in the face of the world. "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse." Victorious power put forth to subdue is the meaning of the white horse. "And he that sat upon him called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war." It is no longer a question of sustaining His saints in grace, but of sovereign power for judging the earth. "His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many diadems." There was judicial discernment with the distinct possession of all titles to sovereignty.

"And he had a name written, that no man knew but he himself." He is coming forth in indisputable human glory,

but the greatest care is taken to let us know that He had that which was above man — above the creature; for "no man knoweth the Son but the Father." Here it would seem we have just what answers to that: this name none knew but He Himself. He was a divine person, whatever new position He assumes for the world. "And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood." He comes to execute vengeance, and with a sign of death for rebels. "And his name is called The Word of God." He was the word of God in the revelation of grace; when known, by and by, it will be as the executor of God's judgments. He equally expresses what God is. The gospel of John and the Revelation perfectly disclose both, whether in grace or in judgment. "And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white, pure."

Here we learn at once of what His train consists. They are glorified saints, and not angels. And this is entirely confirmed by Rev. 17, where it was told us that they are with Him when He comes. When the beast dares to fight with the Lamb He shall overcome the beast; and they that are with Him, "called and chosen and faithful" — terms, as a whole, entirely inapplicable to the angels. The angels are never "called," although they may be "chosen;" and though termed holy, I do not recollect that they are ever spoken of as "faithful." "Faithful" is what belongs to a man. It supposes the effect and the exercise of faith. "Called" is most evidently inapplicable, because calling supposes that the person is brought out of one condition and raised into another and a better one. This is never the case with an angel. The fallen angels are not called, and the holy angels never need to be — they are kept. Calling is the, fruit of active grace on God's

part towards man, and only towards him when fallen. Even man himself when he was innocent in Eden was not called. Directly he had sinned, the word of God came, and he was called. It is very evident, therefore, that the saints in a glorified state are here represented as following the Lord out of heaven. They are not seen here as the bride. This would have been altogether inappropriate for such a progress: when the King comes forth riding to victory in the judgment of wicked men — of the world, it is not in the quality of bride, but of armies or hosts, that the saints follow Him; and these include no doubt the guests as well, i.e., all the glorified take their place in His train.

At the same time you will mark that these are not said to be executors of judgment as Christ is.8 It is to Him that God has given all judgment — not necessarily to us. We may have a special task in it, but this is not the work for us, as it seems to me. Hence. there is no sword proceeding out of our mouth; nor are the saints or heavenly hosts said to be arrayed in such a sort as the Lord. It is simply said that the glorified are to follow the Lord in victorious power, and nothing more, "clothed in fine linen, white, pure." Angels we know from other scriptures will be there, but of this we hear nothing here. But "out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron." What makes it the more notable is this, that the rod of iron is promised to us — not the sword. Then there is the reigning power, but not the execution of judgment in this awful fashion which is attributed to the Lord Himself. But He "treadeth the winepress of the fury of the wrath of the Almighty God" — another character of judgment never attributed to the

saints, that I know of. "And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords."

Then follows the proclamation of the angel, and the invitation to the supper of the great God, to eat the flesh of all the great ones of the earth. "And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, Come, gather yourselves together unto the great supper of God; that ye may eat flesh of kings, and flesh of chiliarchs, and flesh of strong [men], and flesh of horses, and of those that sit on them, and flesh of all, both free and bond, both small and great." And then comes the gathering and the battle. "And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken" (taken alive), "and with him the false prophet that wrought signs in his presence, with which he deceived those that received the mark of the beast, and those that worshipped his image." Thus the second beast is no longer seen as an earthly power, but as a prophet-of course a false prophet. All the energy to mislead men in the presence of the first beast was long in his hands, and now nothing more is spoken of. The spiritual power is wholly in the hands of the false prophet. It will be understood when one says "spiritual" that none is meant save of a wicked kind.

"Alive the two were cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone." Thus eternal judgment was executed at once. They were caught in flagrant treason and rebellion: what further need of any process of judgment whatsoever?

"And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which [sword] proceedeth out of his mouth: and all the birds were filled with their flesh." Their doom was awful, but by no means after the same sort as their two leaders.

Then another and immensely important act is described — the binding of Satan. He is no longer to be allowed to prowl about the world ensnaring and destroying. "And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years." It is not therefore his final judgment. The angel least him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal over him, that he should no more deceive the nations, till the thousand years should be completed: after these things he must be loosed a little time."

And then we come to a most cheering disclosure: "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and [I saw] the souls of those beheaded on account of the witness of Jesus, and on account of the word of God: and those who had not worshipped the beast, nor his image, and had not received his mark upon their forehead, and on their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." I do not suppose that many words are required by the present audience to show that we are not to understand the scene as a mere figure of Christianity. There are probably but few, if any, here who do not understand it as the fore-shadow of a real resurrection. In short, it is not tropical language, as when it is said of the prodigal son — "This my son was dead, and is alive again;" or of the restoration of Israel, which is compared

to a resurrection from the dead for the rest of the world. Here the vision was of thrones with sitters, and others caused to join them; and the inspired explanation is that it is the first resurrection — the rising of the just from the dead. Let us look at the different groups that are seen to have part in the first resurrection.

First, "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them." The thrones were already filled. Instead of judgment being executed on them, it was given to them. They themselves were to judge. Who were they? Who are the persons thus invested with judicial authority of so glorious a nature and to reign, as we see later, with Christ? Clearly the same saints whom we have seen first set forth by the elders in heaven, subsequently by the elders and the living creatures, next, by the bride and the living creatures at the marriage-supper, and finally by the armies that followed the Lord out of heaven.

It is no longer a question either of celebrating the ways and counsels of God, or of the war with the beast and king. Accordingly it is another figure. It is reigning. There are thrones filled with certain persons, who reign along with Him. Thus the language of symbol is as definite as any other. There is no lack of precision, but the very reverse. Peculiar energy indeed attaches to symbolic language. But what is also of consequence to observe is, that John saw souls — the souls of those beheaded on account of the witness of Jesus, and on account of the word of God. These are the martyrs of Rev. 6, those long since seen under the altar, poured out like burnt-offerings to God. It will be remembered that it was said to them that they must wait. They had cried to the Sovereign ruler to avenge their blood on their foes, but they were told they must wait a little for some

others, their fellow-servants and their brethren, to die as they had. Here accordingly we have them all. For there follows another company of martyrs who suffered when the beast set up his worst and final pretensions. When the second beast appeared, he even strove to put to death those who would not worship the beast, nor pay homage to his image, nor receive his mark. These compose the third class here spoken of.

The first were such as came out of heaven after Christ, being already raised from the dead and glorified. Consequently they sat upon the thrones at once; while the two latter classes, described in the rest of the verse, were still in the separate state — "and the souls." Take this quite simply and literally. It does not mean persons merely, but the souls of beheaded persons. He saw their condition: it was part of the vision.

Here were thrones, and people sat upon them, changed 'before this into the image of Christ's glory. Then come others in the condition of separate spirits or souls, whom the prophet saw — two different classes of them — those beheaded for the witness of Jesus and the word of God, and those who refused the beast in every form, The proof of the third class should have been given a little more distinctly than in our version. It should not be "and which had not," but rather, "and those who had not worshipped the beast, nor his image, neither had received his mark upon their forehead, and on their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." Thus such as were in the separate state were reunited to their bodies, and lived and reigned like those who were already on the thrones. They "lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

Thus nothing can be simpler or more beautiful than the way in which this verse sums up the Revelation as a whole. The visions of this prophetic book open, not with the rapture of saints to heaven, but the sight of saints already raptured, often before the seer in the visions, but seen always in a complete condition without addition to their number. Accordingly the rapture of the church with the Old Testament saints must have already taken place, all (as I have no doubt) being caught up at the self-same time to be with the Lord above.

We have seen that these follow the Lord out of heaven, and are next seen enthroned. When the Lord takes His own throne, they take theirs by grace. But, further, we find that the saints who had suffered for Christ, during the time that the others were in heaven, are now reunited to their bodies and live, the Lord waiting for the last martyr that He might not leave out one of those who had died for His name. All the sufferers, either in the early persecutions of Rev. 6, or in the later persecutions (see Rev. 15) up to Babylon's extinction, were now raised from the dead. They lived, and were put therefore into a place and condition suitable for reigning with Christ, no less than the Old Testament saints and the church itself. Such is the meaning of the verse — "The rest of the dead lived not again till the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection."

Let it be carefully observed here that the first resurrection does not mean all rising exactly at the same moment. This is a mistake. We know that the change of all those caught up takes place in the twinkling of an eye. but it does not follow that various bodies are not raised at different times. For certain there are two great

acts of resurrection, — one when the Old Testament saints and the church are caught up to heaven, the other when Satan was bound after the beast and false prophet were thrown into the lake of fire, as well as Babylon judged. Thus (without speaking of the resurrection of the wicked at the close) there were certainly more acts than one, not to speak of the two witnesses put to death and caused to rise after three days and a half, when the spirit of life entered them, and they not only arose, but went up to heaven, as we know. I speak not of anything that might be deemed exceptional or peculiar, but of two acts of raising saints. From the manner in which resurrection is referred to in scripture, does not God leave room for this? "I will raise him up at the last day." "At the last day" does not mean merely an instant of time. Whether it were the Old Testament saints and the church, or the Apocalyptic saints, if I may so distinguish them, it was in an instant that each were raised, but there was some space between them. What is there to hinder it? There is no expression in the word of God which binds all to rise at the same instant. Those that do rise at the same time rise, no doubt, in a moment; but that there are to be various acts of resurrection is not only not contrary to scripture, but required by its own descriptions. This verse declares it, and there is no other interpretation that can stand even a moment's fair discussion.

This being so, it adds immense clearness in the understanding of the book. And what shall we say of the wonderful wisdom of the Lord? It is called "the first resurrection." This does not intimate we have seen that there is only one act of raising, but that all who share that resurrection, whenever raised, are raised before the

millennium begins; so that when the reign of Christ takes place, all such have part in the first resurrection, including Christ Himself, raised at least 1800 years before the church; then the church, with the Old Testament saints; then these Apocalyptic saints at any rate some years after. All this gives us a true and just view of the various parties that have a share in the resurrection. "This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

It has been remarked by another, and justly, that the expression "they shall be priests of God and of Christ" summarily puts out of court the interpretation that supposes a figurative resurrection. For it is clear that, though principles might reign, to be priests is quite inconsistent with a mere figure. It is also clearly a personal reward to those who had suffered.

When the thousand years expire, Satan reappears on the scene to the sorrow and ruin of the Gentiles who were not born of God. But it is for the last time, not of the age only but of the various dispensations of God. "And when the thousand years are completed, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to war." This is clearly of moral importance. The glory of the kingdom does not preserve when men in their natural state are exposed to the adversary. The millennial nations, "the number of whom is as the sand of the sea," fall a prey to Satan.

"And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and encompassed the camp of the saints, and the beloved city." The beloved city is Jerusalem; the camp of the saints, I presume, is a larger circle and embraces all of Israel and the Gentiles who, being converted, refuse Satan's deceit. It is an evident contrast with the state supposed in the wheat-and-tare field of Christendom which is found at the end of the age. Wheat and tares grow together till the process of judgment separates. At the end of the millennium the righteous and the wicked form two distinct arrays, though even then there would appear to be a line drawn between the surrounding camp, and the beloved city Jerusalem on earth, where the Jews were. The unrenewed of the nations are now compassing them with their countless hosts, as if to eat them up like grasshoppers. "And fire came down out of heaven from God, and devoured them. And the devil that deceiveth them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where both the beast and the false prophet [are], and they shall be tormented day and night unto the ages of the ages."

Then follows another scene still more solemn — the most awe-inspiring of all we can contemplate, at the same time full of blessing for the Christian to look onward to as that which will for ever put aside every trace of evil, and vindicate good where man must altogether fail. Here accordingly is seen but one throne. It is the divine judgment of man — eternal judgment. Even when God was judging providentially in the beginning of the Apocalyptic visions (Rev. 4), associated thrones were seen. When Christ came personally to judge and govern the quick (Rev. 20:4), there were thrones; for the risen saints reign with Him. But now

there is but one throne: Christ judges the dead. "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away." This is of immense moment doctrinally, because it decisively proves that it is altogether unfounded to assume, as is popularly done, that the Lord only returns at this juncture. In the coming of the Lord all include His coming to the habitable earth. Now manifestly, if the Lord does not come before this, there is no world to come to; for the earth and heavens are fled. The common notion, therefore, that the coming of the Lord is at this point is an evident fallacy upon the face of this scripture that describes it, not to speak of others elsewhere. It is not a syllogism that is wanted or that can satisfy here: only require, only believe, the word of God. A single verse dispels clouds of arguments. "I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled; and place was not found for them." I admit that afterwards no doubt the new heaven and the new earth are seen; but who contends that this is the sphere to which the Lord comes? To this earth He is coming, and not merely to the new earth in the eternal state. To the same world in which He suffered, according to the scriptures, He will come back. But for the eternal judgment heaven and earth are fled away; and then we see the new and eternal universe. Hence He must have come back previously to both. With this agrees His coming out of heaven in judgment of the earth, described in Rev. 19. He came to the world, and avenged His people on the beast and the false prophet with the kings and their armies; and after that the risen saints reign with Him over it a thousand years. I say not on but over the earth. He with the glorified saints will have their home on high,

but none the less shall they reign over this very world for the allotted time.

Then, as we have seen, comes the final test of the nations of the earth after that kingdom has run its course, and the devil let loose once more deceives flesh and blood after the analogy of all other dispensations. That age of visible glory is inefficacious to change the heart of man, though in the absence of the enemy and the controlling presence of the great King, they render feigned obedience for a long while. It can govern and bless but not convert man. Even the proclamation of the grace of God is powerless save it be brought home by the quickening energy of His own Spirit. In short, no testimony can avail, no work, power, or glory without the word of God applied by the Spirit of God. But in this is shown — what it is of importance to see — the true nature of the kingdom or millennial reign. "That day" does not mean a time when everybody will be converted, but when the Lord Jesus will govern righteously — when overt evil will be judged, and good be sustained perfectly for a thousand years. When any wrong is done, it will be dealt with. As far as the display of government goes, it is according to God morally, and for His glory, though I deny not for a moment that there are elements of evil which are never allowed, but kept under if not expelled. But that the heart of man even so is not renewed becomes manifest, when Satan at the close deceives all that are not converted; and these, as we are told, are countless "as the sand of the sea."

Do not wonder at the vast numbers, or at their defection. The thousand years of peace and plenty will have given occasion for an ever-growing population, spite of a world thinned by divine judgments which open

that era. It is to be supposed that it will far exceed anything yet seen on the face of the earth. At the beginning there will have been carnage, as we know, among both the western powers and the eastern powers. In fact, we may say, all nations will be desolated by judgments of one kind or another; but for all this the world proceeding for a thousand years with every outward blessing, and the most admirable government administered by the blessed Lord Himself, will issue in the teeming and prosperous races of mankind. It will be a state of nature unexampled for the fruits of the earth and the enjoyment of all that God has made here below. Consequently there will be an increase in population such as never has been approached since the world was made, yet it afterwards appears, that Satan will not fail to turn the masses of the nations into one vast rebellion against the objects of God's special favour on the earth — the saints — wherever they may be, and the beloved city of Israel, as we have seen.

Then comes not the destruction only of these rebels by divine judgment, but the dissolution of heaven and earth. And Jesus sits on the great white throne. It is the judgment of the dead as such, who now rise and give account of their deeds. All the dead are there who had not part in the first resurrection. The, nature of the case exempts of course the saints of the millennium;9 and this very simply, because they are never said to die at all. There is no scriptural reason to infer that any saint dies during the thousand years, but rather the contrary. Scripture is positive in Isaiah 65 that death during the millennium only comes as a specific judgment because of open rebellion. When a person dies, it will be a positive curse from God; if he die even a hundred years

old, it will be like a baby dying now. Man converted will then not merely reach the natural term — if I may so say — of a thousand years, but pass that bound. If alive before the thousand years, he will live after the thousand years; in fact, literally he will never die, though I do not doubt, on general principles, that the saints of the millennial earth will be changed at the very time when the heavens and earth disappear. Of course they will be preserved through that crisis in some sort of way suitable to divine wisdom. God has not told us how, nor is it our business. He has reserved the matter, though not without enough to guide our thoughts, as we have seen. It is one of those cases which every now and then appear where God checks and reproves our foolish curiosity, as He alone knows how to do perfectly. "Flesh and blood," we know, "cannot inherit the kingdom of God." According to the general scope of scripture, then, we may be quite sure that these saints, kept during this universal dissolution of the atmospheric heaven and the earth, will be translated to "the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness," in a condition new and meet for the eternal state into which they are ushered. Let others speculate, if they will: I am persuaded that he who essays to conceive the details is merely striving to draw a bow beyond the power of man. For I am not aware that any scripture treats of the subject, beyond laying down principles such as we have sought to apply to the case.

"And the dead were judged," but not out of the book of life, which has nothing to do with judgment. "The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." Why then is the book of life mentioned? Not because any of their names

were written therein, but in proof that they were not. The book of life will confirm what is gathered from the books. If the books proclaim the evil works of the dead that stand before the throne, the book of life offers no defence on the score of God's grace. Scripture records no name whatever among those judged written there. There was the sad register of undeniable sin on the one side; there was no writing of the name on the other side. Thus, whether the books or the book be examined, all conspire to declare the justice, the solemn but most affecting righteousness, of God's final irrevocable sentence. They were judged every man according to their works. "And if any one was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire." Thus the only use that seems made of the book is negative and exclusive. Not that any of those judged (and the scene described is solely a resurrection of judgment) are said to be written there: we are shown rather that they were not found in that book.

Again, death and hades are said to come to their end, personified as enemies. "And death and hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." Thus was concluded all dealing on the Lord's part with both soul and body, and all that pertains to either. The race was now in the resurrection state either for good or for evil; and thus it must be for ever. Death and hades, which had so long been executioners in a world where sin reigned, and were still doing their occasional office where righteousness is to reign, themselves disappear where all traces of sin are consigned for ever.

In the first eight verses of Revelation 21 we have the new heaven and the new earth, but besides, awful to say, the lake of fire. Indeed it must be so, because, as we

read in the end of the last chapter, there the lost were cast. But still it is a very solemn fact to read, and that which we are bound to preach — that even in the perfect state of eternity, while there is the brightness of the heaven and of the earth into which no evil can enter, you have all the evil that ever has been — all the wicked of every clime and of every age cast into the fixed condition of eternal judgment in the lake of fire.

Observe another very important fact. All the dispensational names of God disappear. It is only God and man now. There is nothing more to hear of nations; nothing more to do with separate countries, kindreds, or tongues. It is the eternal state; and also, in fact, the fullest description of that state which is furnished in the Bible. But a very different point of interest is to be observed.

Although there is such a levelling of human distinctions, and men have to do directly with God — that is men raised from the dead or in their changed condition — we still see the holy Jerusalem — "the holy city, new Jerusalem," separate from the rest of those that fill the new heaven and earth. This is of great importance, because if the new Jerusalem be, as I have no doubt it is, the bride the Lamb's wife, then we have her separate condition asserted in eternity. "I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God" (alluding to this very city) "[is] with men." That is, the tabernacle of God is regarded as a separate object, no doubt associated with men, but not confounded with them. Men are not regarded as composing this tabernacle; they co-exist. "The tabernacle of God [is] with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their

God. And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more, nor sorrow, nor crying nor shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

All things are thus made new; and, further, "these words are faithful." Nothing more is to be done. "And he said unto me, It is done. I am the, Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be to him God, and he shall be son to me. But to the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part [is] in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

Here occurs a remarkable change in the sequence of the visions, though easily understood; for it must be evident that there is nothing to follow this in point of time. We have just seen that it is the eternal state. Consequently, here we must most unquestionably go back to be shown an important object in the prophecy which could not, without interrupting its course, have been described before. In short, it is as we saw in Rev. 17, after Babylon had been brought before us in the course of the prophecy. We had seen Babylon twice: first, in the circle of God's warnings and testimonies; and then as the object of God's judgment under the seven bowls. Then we have a description of Babylon given. It would have been incongruous to bring in that long description before, because this must have interrupted the flow of the prophetic stream.

Exactly the same thing is repeated here, and what makes it more apparent is the similarity of the introduction on each occasion. "And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." Who does not see that this is precisely analogous to the verse which opened the description of Babylon? I take it, therefore, that God intended this analogy to be noted by us; that it is not a pursuance of the prophecy, but a description of the holy city previously named, just as the other was a description of the corrupt city, whose judgment had been announced. We had Babylon with a spuriously ecclesiastical but a really murderous character, and at the same time guilty of corruption with the kings of the earth. Here is seen the holy city coming down out of heaven from God, which is declared to be the bride, the Lamb's wife, in the plainest contrast with the great harlot. Yet to this heavenly city, after Christ comes, the kings of the earth bring their offerings and their homage; but there is no excitement of the nations, no filthiness of fornication, no abominations, no blood-guiltiness. In short, Babylon, the disgusting counterpart of the holy city, in earthly ambition seeks the kings and the masses for her own present objects, while the other suffers now and will reign then. The one therefore throws much light upon the other.

But what I particularly call your attention to is the exceeding importance of heeding the retrospect at the bride, or new Jerusalem here, and the consequent removal of the difficulty caused by taking the last vision of this book as part of the prophetic series which begins in Rev. 19. Not so. It is an added digression for the

purpose of describing an object already named passingly in the foregoing series, which closes at Rev. 21:8. As Rev. 17 was a descriptive digression, so is the portion from Rev. 21:9. The account given of Babylon in Rev. 17 does not follow Rev. 14 or Rev. 16 in point of prophetic time, but differs from them in structure. It gives a retrogressive account of Babylon's character, and shows how it morally compelled the divine judgment. So here a description is given of the bride, the Lamb's wife, and we learn how it is that God will use her for unmeasured goodness and blessing and glory in the millennium, as the devil during this age has used Babylon to accomplish his wicked plans here below. Just as the city of man's confusion was seen in her vile, degraded, and degrading relations with the beast, this city is seen in her pure and glorious relations with the Lamb.

"And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in [the] spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." It is not into a wilderness the prophet is carried, but he is set on "a mountain great and high," and shown — not the great, but. the holy city Jerusalem. The great city was either guilty Jerusalem or Babylon. This city is seen now as the holy vessel of divine power for governing the earth during the millennium, "having the glory of God: and her brightness was like a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal."

Then follows a description of the wall, gates, foundations, and general position. "Having a wall great and high, having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve

angels, and names inscribed, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel." It was important, just because it is the bride, the Lamb's wife, to show that angels are there, and further, that Israel is not forgotten. The very name indeed shows something similar; not of course that the church can ever be earthly. Still God does not forget His ways with His people; and the angels here are only in the quality of porters, if we may so speak; they are at the gates. And as for the twelve tribes of Israel, they are merely written there, nothing more. No hint whatever is given that they constitute the city, but there is the inscription of their names outside. That city will be a constant remembrancer of those who went before restored Israel here below, as undoubtedly it will be used for their blessing during the millennium, but not for theirs only. We shall find, on the contrary, its aspect is toward the universe, yet is there the special place of Israel; and quite right it is that it should be so. "On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." These would appear to be (save Judas Iscariot, of course) the twelve apostles that were peculiarly associated with Christ in His suffering path on the earth. God is sovereign. It is not meant that he who was more honoured in service than any of the twelve, he whom the Lord used for bringing out the church of the heavenly places, will not have his own most singular dignity in this glorious scene. Still God acts in a wisdom far above man, and holds to His principles even there. The twelve apostles of the Lamb will accordingly have their own special place. We can fairly trust God that He will not give a worse place to Paul; yet I do not think that this is his place.

"And he that spoke with me had a golden reed as a measure, that he might measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and its length is as much as the breadth." Thus there is a completeness and perfection about it suited to its present character.

Afterwards we come to the description of itself, — of its wall, its building, its foundations, and its gates. Here it is the city described in itself, on which we need not now enlarge.

Further, a negative point of great importance is presented by the seer, "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty is the temple of it, and the Lamb. This, was no lack. On the contrary, it proved the immediateness of communion. The temple would suppose a medium. The absence of a temple is therefore no loss but a gain for this city. It furnishes material for a contrast between the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly city, because if there be one thing more remarkable than another in Ezekiel's description, it is the temple. But here there is none; a temple is for the earth. The heavenly city, which is the full expression of blessedness on high, has no temple because it is all a temple. "The Lord God is the temple of it, and the Lamb as far as we can speak of any. "And the city has no need of the sun, nor of the moon, that they should shine for it." This too must not be viewed as if it were a loss. As for the earthly land and city, the moon will have her light increased to that of the sun, and the sun shall be sevenfold. But here there is neither; and this again is an evidence of gain, not of loss. "For the glory of God enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof." Creature lights are gone.

After "the nations" in verse 24 omit the words "of them which are saved." You must with the best authorities leave out this addition, if you would have the true force of the verse. It is a wholly unwarranted interpolation. "The nations shall walk in the light of it," Any one of spiritual judgment can see that it should not be "nations of them which are saved." What would be the meaning, if so read? We can understand a remnant saved out of one or more nations; but who ever heard of "nations of them which are saved"? It is altogether unfeasible, and it shows how carelessly we read the Bible that people are not stopped by such an expression. The fact is, in the very best authorities it does not exist at all. The "saved" is a term which, so far from belonging to the nations, is expressly applied to the Jewish remnant when it is a technical term. But "nations of them which are saved," is a most anomalous expression, and betrays man as the author of it.

"And the nations shall walk in the light of it." It is plain that they are not in this city. "The kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour unto it" — not into but unto. That is, it is simply an expression of the homage that they pay. "And the nations shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour unto it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for night shall not be there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations unto it. And there shall in nowise enter into it anything that defileth, nor making abomination and a lie: but only those written in the book of life of the Lamb." Moral unfitness has its just censure; but sovereign grace must be asserted also.

Then we have another glorious description. "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, bright as

crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." It is not now lightnings and thunders and voices. These were simply the characters of provisional judgment that filled the interval after the church was gone, and before the reign with Christ. But when Christ and the church peacefully reign, such is the imagery that suits — "a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the broadway of it, and of the river, on this side and on that, [the] tree of life," — bearing not merely as the original one did, but now according to the fulness of the provision of God's grace for man, for man in glory first, but for man on the earth also, but for man in glory — "producing twelve fruits, in each month yielding its fruit: and the leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations." Man on the earth has his portion in the goodness of a God who is manifesting His kingdom. "And no curse shall be any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him." All this description closes in verse 5.

After that we have the admonitions to the end of this book. On these I may say but a very few words.

Verse 6 commends these sayings afresh. And the coming of the Lord is urged in connection with it. "Behold I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book." Then again the character of it, as derived from Christianity having already taken its place, is asserted. "Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book." In Daniel's time, and even to Daniel himself, the book was sealed. The old oracles were sealed then: not so John's. "And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is near." In Daniel's time it was not at hand. To the

church the end is always near. In her own course, and in the matters of her portion, the church does not know time at all. Everything that belongs to the body of Christ is unearthly and unworldly. The church is heavenly; and in heaven there are no times nor seasons. There may be lights of the heaven to mark times and seasons for the earth, and again on the earth. But the church consists of souls called out from the earth, and is not of the world: consequently to the church the time is always at hand. When Christ at God's right hand was announced, even from the very beginning, He was ready to judge the quick and the dead. He remains in that condition of readiness from the time when He sat at God's right hand till the present. The church goes on according to the will of the Lord, who might according to His own purpose lengthen or abridge the space. It is entirely in His hand, and in none other's. — Whereas for the Jew, there are necessary dates and momentous changes that must take place; and hence, as Daniel represents the Jew, we have the difference kept up. To the Christian this book is not sealed. All is opened, and this because we have the Holy Ghost dwelling in us; "for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." Therefore we find in connection with the book a most solemn warning. "Let him that is unrighteous be unrighteous still: and let the filthy be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." When the hour comes that is spoken of here, it is not for us, but for those who will be found after we are gone. All is then fixed. There will be no time for seeking mercy, as it were: whatever the state in which the Lord at His coming will find us, all is closed up and fixed. Accordingly, "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me." We. see that it is in connection with the

foregoing — not merely His coming for us who will keep the sayings of it, but for those whom He will find here below — "to give to each as his work is."

Further, after this Jesus introduces Himself, as well as sends His angel. "I Jesus sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright the morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come: and let him that heareth say, Come: and let him that is athirst come: let him that will take the water of life freely." Thus the name of Christ, not merely as the root and the offspring of David, but as the bright morning star, calls out responsively the heart of the church, and this too under the guiding activity of the Holy Ghost. The church cannot hear of Him as the bright morning star without at once desiring that He should come. She does not, it is true, say, "Come quickly." This would not be fitting for the church nor the Christian. Patience or endurance of hope is what becomes us. But it is blessed that He says, "I come quickly;" and it is only Christ who in scripture ever says so. But we as properly say, "Come." We desire that He should come quickly, but we leave this to Him, because we know His love, and can trust Him. We know that if He tarries, it is not that He is "slack concerning His promise," but that "His long-suffering brings salvation to many." And who would defraud either the soul of salvation, or the Lord of showing it? "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come." It is to Jesus. To whom else could they say it? The bride breathes out this word to the bridegroom; and the Holy Ghost it is that gives strength to her desire that He should come. But there is a message also for others. There. is a word to him that hears. "Let him that heareth say, Come." He is urged to

take up the same cry. If you are a believer, do not be afraid, even if you know but little; for the Lord neither forgets nor slights those who may be comparatively unintelligent. He has, I think, exactly that class in view when He sanctions the calling him who hears to say "Come." The bride represents those that are spoken of in the normal possession and enjoyment of their privileges. There are many who are not so; but the Lord does not forget them. "Let him that heareth," then, "say, Come." If they have only heard His voice, this after all is the incalculable boon; yea, it is the turning-point of all blessing. It is not the enjoyment of all, but it is the hinge on which all depends. It is the way to all, if it be not the actual entrance into and enjoyment of it. "Let him that heareth," then, be encouraged to "say, Come." There is nothing in Jesus to harm him; there is every thing to bless there is Himself to be enjoyed, even if they have failed in the full knowledge of it here below.

But then while there is such a call to Christ, while the believer is not to be afraid, but to call on the Lord to come, the church does not forget those that are poor sinners, let them be deeply conscious of it, or let them be those that are only made willing by the grace of God (which is the feeblest expression of the sinner's need, just as you have the feeblest expression of the saint in the previous call). So we find the Lord has room for all that is the fruit of His own grace only, — for the appeal of grace, even when there is not the answer to it. Yet grace despised necessarily ends in judgment. "And let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Then the book concludes after a solemn warning against either adding to or taking from its contents. "He that

testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." "Surely I come quickly." After so long a tarrying how blessed! After so many sorrows, trials, difficulties, dangers, how sweet to have such a word, and to know that He who speaks is the holy and the true, and surely about to come in the faithfulness of His love! He will not fail to take up the gage He has given our hearts. He is coming, and coming soon for us.

May our hearts answer freely to His word of love and truth with our "Amen." His grace be with all!

1 Yet in every instance the Sinai MS. supports the inferior copies against the Alexandrian, and the Rescript of Paris with the better cursives, etc.

2 Probably here, as in Rev. 8:3, the word implies "efficacy" or "power," as the translators saw in one text if not in the other.

3 Most copies, it would seem, read τῆς γῆς, "of the earth;" the Alex. and others give αὐτῆς, "of her." The Sinai MS. has both.

4 The description here is simply character, not dates. If a person drew from this, for instance, that the boast was to carry the woman, Babylon, when it had as a fact all that is meant by the seven heads and the ten horns, it would be an error. The angel implies nothing of the sort. It is a question here of distinctive character, apart from that of time, for which we must search other scriptures.

5 Even the Complutensian editors give the right text here; and it would seem that Erasmus failed to use his MS. aright. For according to unquestionable testimony the Reuchlinian copy has καὶ πάρεστι like some half-

dozen cursives, which was probably a mistake for πάρεσται.

6 It now appears that the Cod. Reuchlin. Capnionis, which was used by Erasmus, and lately discovered after a long obscurity by Dr. Delitzsch, reads καὶ (not ἐπὶ) τὸ θ. as the Complut. Polyglot, and all editions of the least critical value. Scholz's note ("rec. cum cdd. pl.") is a myth. I am not aware of any MS. in its favour, though some versions represent it.

7 It is the aorist in Greek, which in such a case as this it is difficult correctly to represent in English; for neither "reigned" nor "hath reigned" could convey that God had entered on His kingdom, but rather that it was past.

8 It is the more strikingly characteristic, because of such language as Ps. 149:6-9, which speaks of all the saints contemplated on earth for the day of Jehovah.

9 None, however, can be exempt from being manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ, or from giving an account of all done in the body. But no believer comes into judgment. (John 5:24 compared with Rom. 14 and 2 Cor. 5.)

Philadelphia and Laodicea - Rev. 3:7-22

(BT Vol. 16, from p. 268:4 episodes)

My task now is to show that the Lord Jesus had something much more definite in His mind than the ordinary profit that one may and ought to derive from the word of God, which is written for every believer. For instance, what was written in the Epistle of James, or in those of Peter, or in the Epistle to the Hebrews, or in any other of the Epistles of the New Testament, is all of God. I need not say that the Christian believes that every part of them is divine; that every word of them is profitable, and so intrinsically for all days, if we have not all the elements that men possessed by the church at the time they were written. At that time there were outward powers manifested; there were persons in the highest position of authority for rule as well as in revelation of the truth; which thing we do not possess at the present time. And one presumes that all persons of sobriety would acknowledge this. There may be shades of difference, and some may claim more as perpetuated at the present time; but, among sober Christians who may differ as to other things except that which is fundamental, there is no question that the apostolic church did possess not a little that does not exist at present. But all that is needful for the edifying of Christ’s body — for God’s service and worship — we have assured here in scripture itself, with the certainty that it abides till we all come to the unity of the faith.

Now, I claim for the scripture which has been read something more precise; for the Lord was here

contemplating such a scene as is unrolled before the eye at the present time. There is no doubt that the Churches existed when the Lord told John to write to the angel of each; there is no doubt that instructions were given at that time for each church, as well as the whole book which connected them with a great deal that followed the Epistles. But the contents of these Epistles in themselves, and very particularly the character of the book, show that the Lord had a larger view than any ordinary thing that was realised in the day of the apostle John; for it is entirely unusual to present Epistles as here in prophecy. If the Lord was pleased to give certain Epistles as a preface to the great prophetic book of the New Testament, there was clearly a distinct object in it, and I believe that object was twofold: first, to meet existing wants in John's day (and no doubt, in that point of view, Epistles were sent to each of them, according to the instructions given to the apostle); and, secondly, to make those Epistles to be a vehicle of the widest instruction for days that had yet to come to pass. But now they are come. And the Lord has brought out the light of them, when we read the closing scene of these seven churches. They were all there when He originally gave them messages; but now they have come into being in the prophetic point of view. There is, however, a division to be made among them, which is of much consequence to lay hold of; and this is, that the first three were not permanent states. They were passing ones. This is marked even outwardly by the fact that the call to hear changes its place at the fourth church.

But one need not go into this to demonstrate the character of the Epistles. All prove the same thing. For instance, mark the feature of the Epistle to the church at

Ephesus. Of old it was a question of first love. This could only apply prophetically to the state of things which followed in the day of St. John. There never was a time when it could so aptly apply as then. They had the full grace and truth of the Lord brought out for them, and it they had abandoned, or were beginning to abandon. They were letting in waves of vain thoughts — doctrines soon after — which altogether weakened their sense of Christ's love, and therefore of their own love to Him. They were relaxing from their first love. Evidently, this could not apply in the same precise manner afterwards as then, and for the simple reason, that far more serious evils came up before the mind of the Lord.

Take again the second — Smyrna. It is plain that the heathen persecution is referred to. We know that this followed, that prison and death were used as engines against the church a little after the early days.

In the Epistle to Pergamos too we have the church of God establishing itself in a public manner in the Roman Empire; that is dwelling, as it is said, where Satan's throne was. Now, this could only apply then, and once, while other things of a much more serious import would afterwards call for the notice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do these admit of repetition? In fact, there was no such thing of the same character of persecution. There is a persecution of Babylon; but that is brought before us in a much later part of the Book of Revelation. The old heathen persecution assuredly could not be repeated after there ceased to be heathens within the bosom of Christendom. So, again, the church getting established in the world was not a question after it was established.

We find her acquiring a place, a settling down, on earth. Afterwards much greater abominations were seen.

It is exactly at this point that the Lord makes a most strikingly new feature enter into these churches; and what makes it to be of so solemn an import for us is, that it is His account of the permanent conditions that follow. Thyatira is the first one; and the only or chief reason for entering into this now is to give a greater definiteness to what one has to say about Philadelphia and Laodicea. I want to show it is not the mere application of these letters, or that they illustrate truth by the past. There is much more than that. In fact they apply chiefly to what I am going to spread before you for our own spiritual judgment. At least, such is my conviction. But the word must be mixed with faith if it be really the mind of God to profit souls. It would not become me to speak so plainly and distinctly if I had not the firmest conviction of the truth.

Thyatira is the first, then, in which there is the marked outward change referred to. But there is a more remarkable characteristic than the call to hear. It is here, for the first time, that we have the Lord distinctly bringing in His coming again. That is, the Lord intimates to these that the state goes on till He comes again. It is not so with the first three. With Ephesus, the only coming described is a providential coming, “or, else, I will come to thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place;” and so with Pergamos, fighting with the sword of his mouth, but not His coming to receive the saints. nor yet to introduce His kingdom. Here it is in Thyatira for the first time; and, what is more, He introduces it in the body of the Epistle before the promise. See that which we have in the twenty-fifth

verse of the second chapter: “That which ye have already hold fast till I come.” The plain intimation is, that what He describes here goes on until He comes.

Now, this is evidently very much to be weighed, in order to have a sound judgment of these Epistles. When we look into that to Thyatira, it becomes still more manifest. Here we have that portentous personage Jezebel, the false prophetess. I do not mean that Thyatira is embodied in Jezebel; far from it. We shall find, on looking into it, there is a remarkable conjunction of opposites. In Thyatira both good and evil are brought together. But still here we have Jezebel. It is a most apt figure of that Popery which, I have no doubt, is also brought before us in the symbol of Babylon given much later. Here she is presented as a false prophetess. We know how thoroughly this represents the character of Popery: that is, her pretension to continuous inspiration, a claim to pronounce the voice of God on whatever point may come before her, is really setting herself above the written word of God, as if she alone had His living voice. We know that such a procedure always does set aside what is written.

It is not altogether a peculiarity of Rome to indulge in a self-assertion which enfeebles scripture; but in Rome it takes its most determined and most pronounced form. Here then, first of all, we have Jezebel: “Thou sufferest that woman, Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce My servants.” It is a striking fact that the Lord Jesus intimates that, in Thyatira, there were persons whom He characterised in the face of all drawbacks as “My servants.” And so it has always been. Not a few, there is every reason to believe, who were God-fearing had a conscience about the word of God,

with a love for the Saviour, that never really left Romanism; while, at the same time, there was still plainer the fact that they were stupefied by the acceptance of fleshly unity, and by the doings of Jezebel. There was thus a most painful issue, the alliance of those that were the Lord's with a system which, in itself, was the most cruel enemy of those that He loved.

This, then, is the first thing here called to your notice. It is a picture of the Middle Ages. We find that, if the Lord had His servants there, Jezebel had children not only then but later. There is a perpetuation of the evil race — a continuance of the same character of persons. Then, thirdly, and this may go along with the rest, there is another distinct feature, only found in connection with Thyatira, namely, a remnant; that which must neither be confounded with Jezebel's children on the one hand, nor with His servants on the other. Surely this is a very remarkable state of things. And what demands all your attention is, that it was found here only for the first time, while it continues up to the present day. That is, you have what may be called the Romanising or Ultramontane school; the Papistical party, thoroughly determined in carrying out the system to the uttermost — Jezebel and her children; next, those whom the Lord called "My servants," in the Middle Ages, such as St. Bernard, or, in later times, Pascal and Fenelon, if I may mention the names of such, down to M. Boos — saints who really had a moral abhorrence of what was enforced by Jezebel. Yet there they are, at the same time, all mixed up together.

But mark, contemporaneously, another party, which had its spring in those early times before Protestantism — the remnant or "the rest," mentioned in Thyatira, as it is

said, “As many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak.” Who are they? They are such, in my judgment, as the Waldenses, that is, a body of Christians who feared the Lord, though in ignorance, who lived before the days of the Reformation, yet quite refused the wickedness of Rome, and who were, therefore, distinct from “My servants” found in and seduced by Rome. These rejected the overtures of the harlot, but, at the same time, they were more known for their practical godliness than for any clearness in the truth of God. They were exceedingly unintelligent, as we should call it. They but imperfectly understood even justification. Compared with the measure of the Reformation, they were far behind; and it is remarkable that they have remained much in the same state. They seem to have paid little attention to light from without, which is common in these days of ours. Substantially they only retain their old attitude. They were, no doubt, undermined, abused, attacked by everything that either the power or wiles of Rome could do to destroy them. But there they abode in their secluded valleys, and there they are still, and I believe there they will remain till the Lord comes — not merging into Rome on the one hand, nor Protestantism, nor fuller light on the other. They retain the peculiar place, which they had even before the Reformation. Here, then, is the picture; and I ask, Is it not striking that from the first the Lord should have so sketched it out? There is nothing like it previously, and nothing like it in what follows. It began at that time and no other; and let us always remember that this state of things goes on till the Lord comes.

Then, in the next Epistle, we have a wholly different character. There is the absence of all the revolting features that were found in Thyatira, or even in Pergamos. Pergamos was what we may call the Catholic system; Thyatira brought in the Romanist. The first was the exaltation of the church in the world; it was what far and wide prevailed before the Pope set forth his aspiring and worst pretensions. The empire had become Christian in name long before. Thyatira, as we have seen, gives us the Roman system, but with these remarkable features which we have just endeavoured to indicate as predicted by our Lord.

But here, in Sardis, we know nothing of the persecuting or idolatrous queen. There is rather what we may call outwardly a respectable orthodoxy. One can understand how this came to pass when energy failed: a name to live, while ready to die. Sardis indicates what came after the Reformation. The Spirit of God does not describe that wonderful work as far as it went, the power which, in various lands separated souls from Rome. He gives us here the cold condition into which they settled down after form superseded the preaching of those stirring days: “These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; 1 know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that were ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.” And one understands readily why it was that death is so marked. It was the universal doctrine of all the Protestant bodies that when souls are justified, they are put under the law as the rule to live by. Now, the necessary effect of this is the ministry of death, a most effective way to deal with a sinner to convince him

of death. But the apostle, in the third chapter of Second Corinthians, sets forth a distinct contrast of the ministration of the Spirit, which is God's will about His people now, with the ministration of death under the law that which was written and engraven on stones. As no man can deny this to be the law written by Moses, so he contrasts the two, and insists on it that the ministry of the law has, for its effect, death and condemnation.

Now the Lord here contemplates the result. It was, indeed the inevitable effect of not going on, in the possession of life and acceptance of God, to walk in the Spirit as they lived in the Spirit. They attempted to embrace what was utterly incompatible; to put those born of God, and set free by His grace, on a common ground with the mass of men in all Protestant lands - that is, to bring in the whole population. Now the natural way in which this could be done was by the law; and the consequence was that, while the Lord might use the law in particular cases for the conviction of sin, the saints of God suffered irreparably. For the law provokes and condemns evil; it neither quickens, nor strengthens, nor justifies. Souls never enjoy settled peace; and the walk is as feeble as is the hold on God's grace. So He says: "I have not found thy works perfect." There was an incompleteness about them. The savour of Christ was not there, life in Him being little known, any more than full redemption. In fact the law displaced the Holy Ghost. "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." So the Lord threatens, because the Protestant bodies fell back on the power of the world. Every one of them sought the

patronage of the great. There were not any of them above thinking there was a mighty influence for good where there was an acquisition of worldly authority. And hence, therefore, it is that they were threatened by the Lord with the judgment which is to fall by-and-by on the world. The Lord, in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, brings it before the saints that He will come as a thief in the night, but not on the saints of God — they are distinguished: Christians have a different position from the world. In 1 Thessalonians 5. He threatens the thief-like coming; and this is the very thing that is repeated here. I scarce know a more solemn thought than that Sardis, having accepted the world to govern itself in the things of God, has the Lord speaking of His coming as He threatens it on the world itself. If men choose the world's power, how can they escape the world's judgment? Such a choice is the less excusable if they boast an open Bible; and this is the prospect of Protestantism. The bright hope of the church is wholly wanting.

But now we come to another thing. And if it has been shown that Thyatira affords us a prophetic picture of what would be in the Middle Ages, and Sardis of what followed the Reformation, let me ask you to weigh before God, beloved friends, what the Lord means by the new and most singular testimony that is implied in the message to the church at Philadelphia. It is entirely different, not only from Romanism, and from everything that is found connected with Romanism, but not less distinct from the picture of Protestantism. What does the Lord mean? What in fact does He characterise by it?

The first notable feature is Himself — His own person — and His own person judging according to the truth; His

own self so revealed as to act practically, to insist on genuineness, to allow no longer a mere acknowledgment of truth that was not carried out. He will have moral reality. This is what I think the Lord intimates in saying: “These things saith He that is holy, He that is true; He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.” He looks after all.

And when did the Lord distinctly thus work in Christendom? When did He make His own feel how useless it is to acknowledge truth that we do not live? When did He thus recall His saints back to His word, and to own the power of the Holy Ghost in making that word living? Where is this found? We all know that there are those in Christendom that have set up for the Spirit of God without the word; and we are not ignorant of others who have set up for the word without the Spirit; and in both cases with results the most disastrous and withering. But where is it that the Lord has recalled His own to His word, insisting also on that sovereign place and liberty which is due to the Holy Ghost?

It is freely granted that there is another thing calculated to cause distrust in connection with this, among the children of God — namely, mere assertion of the rights of the Holy Ghost. And for this reason, that the Holy Ghost is here to glorify Christ; and, therefore, if it were but the revival of long lost privileges of the church, there is only partial recovery here. If it were people seeking to set up the church again on its own foundation, we ought to hesitate, not as if it were not a right desire; but it is hardly a becoming aim in the present state of things. Ought we not also to feel its sin and ruin?

Supposing a man were to receive, for instance, the truth of the church of God in all its fulness of privilege and power, do you think, blessed as this is, that this alone — where the recognition of the church of God filled his soul — would make him an adequate witness of God at this moment? Very far from it indeed; not because the thing itself is not true, but because alone it would be accompanied by high thoughts and hard measures. It would inflate the soul, and be no better than an utterly impracticable theory, too, as far as that goes.

Beloved friends, there are two things necessary — real faith in what the church of God is, as God made it; and, along with this, the sense of the utter ruin that has come in. For such is the state of soul that suits the man who feels he is part of the ruin as well as of the church. And how are these conditions produced? Not by looking at the church only, but at Christ. And this is the very thing that the Lord brings in here. It is the re-awakening of the heart to the place of Christ — to Christ as the Holy and the True. The effect then would be judgment of the present by the past — ah! how changed. Nothing is more needed than judgment of what man has made of it, by what God Himself set up in His own incomparable grace. There will then be no pretension to recover; no thought of setting up what once was, or rather no attempt, on a little scale, at what once was in all its fulness. This would be a denial of the ruin of the church.

No; there is a true path for faith; but it is a lowly one. There is a path that uses what God has given, what is imperishable and unchangeable — what God always makes to be the portion of faith. But then, it is in the sense of deep dishonour done to Him, and the going out

of the heart to every member of that body, with the patient waiting for Christ's coming.

Now, the only way in which this is wrought in the soul is by looking not at the church or the Holy Ghost either, but at Christ. Hence you will observe here that He brings in no powers of the Spirit of God; it is "He that is holy, He that is true." I am sure there is a power deeper than miracles; but then it is a power that works morally. It is a power that effects self-judgment in the Christian, even as repentance is to the soul under conviction when being brought to God. "These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." One may perfectly confide in His resources; He has got all under His hand. He opens; who shuts? He shuts: who opens? But the way in which He uses His power is to set before them the open door; and surely the man must be blind who does not own that it is precisely in this way that grace has been at work. Nor can one doubt that concurrently God has been working providentially in this way; for how often, while the Lord may exercise faith by difficulties, He also shows His own power by surmounting them all in a thousand different ways!

Thus there is nothing more ordinary in the way of God, than that He works in His own power providentially at the same time that the Holy Ghost works morally. And so it is at this present time. There is the greatest possible indifferentism growing up, breaking down the barriers on all sides; and though man misuses grace for his own licentiousness, the Lord, in every sense of the word, sets before His saints an open door. It is not a question of preaching the gospel (one can understand the

importance of it for the service of God); but the church does not preach any more than teach. We must not think of narrowing it to evangelization. In that respect there may be an open and an effectual door; but here it is an open door simply, by which one understands that the Lord makes clear the path in the midst of all obstacles — opening a way for what is for His own glory in the doing of His own will. Will any one maintain there ever was a moment since the church fell into disorder, when the Lord has made the “open door” a characteristic of His working so much as at the present moment? “I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.” All mankind cannot open it; nor can all the power of Satan shut it. It is but for a little while. The Lord has opened the door to His people, and they are using it. They see the way clear before them, and they act on His grace. And the reason, too, is remarkable: “Thou hast a little strength.” He does not say so to Sardis or Thyatira. They might boast outwardly. Not so Philadelphia. And anything that takes us out of our weakness, anything strong, is incompatible with the mind of the Lord at the present time. Whatever is a seeking of greatness in any one way does not suit the testimony of the Lord or the church’s state. “Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name.”

I should like to put it to the conscience of any Christian person here, who doubts the soundness of what has been said, to answer me — Where do you find the word of Christ kept in any remarkable way? where do you find it treasured and carried out? One might ask even the enemies of the Bible, whoever they may be, where that word is heard and prized in away comparatively unexampled? Would any one say — without wishing to

utter a word in disrespect of the Wesleyans — would any one say that it stamps that society? I do not care to be personal, and shall not go round the compass of the different Protestant bodies; but we ask any person who has a conscience, and who knows the facts of what God has been working, where they find Christ's word really kept. You may tell me of the extension of missions, and of the conversion of souls; and I do not deny it. Would to God there were far more zeal in spreading the gospel in foreign parts, and seeking the conversion of souls at home! But one asks, Where is it that you find the characteristic so marked, that the Lord Who weighs all could say of them, "Thou hast kept My word?" Where is the reproach of bibliolatry cast most, if we may put it in another form? Where in Edinburgh, or in any place whatever you choose around you, is this stigma to be seen?

Remark, that our Lord is not here speaking of the old bodies of the Middle Ages — that is to say, of Thyatira. We must leave them behind: it is not among such; nor, again, in the Protestantism of Sardis. It is a new action of God, distinct from both. Where will you find, then, those that love the Lord — disclaiming any kind of kindred in an ecclesiastical way with Romanism and Protestantism — who are content with Christ in His moral glory, and characterised by keeping His word here below?

But there is another thing. They are described as not denying the power of that name — His name as a centre. That name is one that must not be slighted. It is the resource for all difficulties from forgiving sin to the dealing with every kind of need. It is the only name of holy power; and, for this very reason, a name of

unfailing avail in dealing with what is contrary to God in the way of false doctrine or unholiness. Where is it that there are children of God who love to confide in it, to gather round it, knowing what it is to trust it? Where then must we look for those to whom the Lord says distinctively — “Thou hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name?” It is not for me to say where they are. It is for you to find them out. And may the Lord give you to prayerfully search before you settle the question! For you ought to know well that no one here wishes to urge anything that does not commend itself to the conscience of the children of God. Christ’s word and name concern them most nearly; and He assuredly speaks of those who cleave to both.

I should not, on any consideration, be here to speak of a party interest, or some object of man upon earth. Such aims must be always low and unworthy of those that, having Christ for their life and righteousness, are looking for Him to come, and know He is coming quickly. But here is His intimation of a peculiar blessedness. Let it be yours and mine not to let slip this grace! Is this presumption? It is rather faith, which unbelief counts presumption. How much there is on the contrary to judge us in the words the Lord has addressed to us! I wish to show that these words concern you and every one of us here; and I cannot but say, that these words are either true of us as Christians, or they are not. If they are not, it is serious for us, for we are not in the current of what the Lord values most at this moment; if they are, blessed are we. Blessed are those that do the truth — wretched such as know and do it not.

But let us follow what He says: “Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are

Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." Now it is remarkable that, at the very time when the Lord is making this special testimony, Satan has been forming counter testimonies. Take, for instances, the outbursts of Tractarianism, Irvingism, Mormonism, Christadelphianism, and I know not what — those enormous and frightful evils growing up so rank and luxuriant at this present time. What are they? Devices in order to bring discredit on the action of the Spirit of God according to the word. When the Lord is thus calling out and forming for Himself according to His own glory, the enemy would distract by novelties, or keep fast in the darkness of antiquity. But even the stoutest of them shall be compelled to acknowledge — "I have loved thee." He will at length vindicate His own grace.

But turn we to the words that follow: "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come on all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth."

Now, I ask, how could such a promise affect a person looking for the progress of Christendom and the improvement of society, who was looking for all things to advance gradually, and improve on the whole? who thinks that the heathen are to be converted, and the present evils that afflict Christendom to be all expelled? Why, it would have no force at all. But take now the other side. To those who know that the hour is approaching — that hour of deceit as well as tribulation, who know that Satan is to be allowed a special power for a little season, who know that we are on the eve of what, when restraint is gone, will work both in a seductive and

in a destructive way, how blessed to have His own voice saying, “Because thou hast kept the word of My patience!” Christ’s patience is sweet and good for the people that are despised and scorned. As He waits to come, so they wait for His coming. They have communion with Him about it.

Let me ask again, Where are those found that are, as a whole, waiting for the coming of the Lord? Wishing not to be invidious, I put it to the conscience of any intelligent person, even of those who are opponents, where are the Christians that, as a whole, ever look for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ? That such are meant here, can scarce be denied. Do not imagine that great things are said of a particular position. It is a sorrowful fact, that those enjoying the most blessed privileges, if they prove unfaithful or turn aside, become the bitterest enemies. None will be keener to oppose. So it must be with a bad conscience; which has turned such away from what was once the deepest enjoyment. They affect to despise and deny what they once appreciated. It is the enemy which produces this fearful change. None become such restless antagonists of what the Lord is doing. No! it is somewhat to make good in faith, nothing to boast of. And the Lord says, “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience” (remember it may be given up if not kept), “I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come on all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth.” Thus, those who keep the word of His patience are a people not settled down on the earth, but who, unknown by the world as Christ was, desire to walk by faith and in grace, as becomes persons united to Him Who is heavenly. They are heavenly, and wait to bear His image shortly, purifying themselves as

He is pure. But who would value this promise, except those keeping the word of His patience?

Mark the further words, “I come quickly.” Blessed, indeed, is this for those that are waiting, for those that watch, for those that with joy welcome Him. Mark this also; it is only now, for the first time, so brought before any of these churches. Surely there is something significant in this fact: we have perhaps looked over these messages vaguely, and might have imagined it elsewhere. But here only it is thus. The Lord did give promises that referred to His coming, as for instance to Thyatira, and a solemn warning again to the church — world of Sardis. Here is quite another thing occurring, before the promise comes. And why so? Because it is a part of their spiritual life, and spring of their constant heavenly hope. The Lord, therefore, refers to it graciously as a thing that occupies their heart. He could not have given a word of sweeter comfort to those who enter into His patience. He says, (not, Behold) “I come quickly.”

But there is another word: “Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” How little others understand your weakness and mine? Some are perhaps reputed so firm in convictions and ways, that it is useless to say a word to them. Oh! how little people believe that none require such sustenance of grace as those who are exposed to the difficulties we know every day. I should say, that if there are any apt to be swayed to and fro, and peculiarly open to be assailed by the enemy, if any exposed to danger in every shape, it is those who, abjuring forms, need the direct power of the Spirit of God to keep in obedience and hope. Hence you can understand how needed is the admonition in the

Lord's message, "Hold that fast which thou halt, that no man take thy crown."

Let me tell those, if there are any here, that know what it is to be separate to Christ in every-day walk, who, without setting up to be, are Philadelphians in the reality of faith, who really and humbly are standing on that ground, not merely in name and desire but in truth before God — let me say this to them: Trifle not with it, suppose not that you have got a lease in perpetuity, or that you have any such insurance as would preserve you against the wiles Satan is seeking to ensnare you by. I grant that the grace of the Lord has not called you out for nothing, and that He means to have a testimony kept alive till He comes. We believe there is now such a thing as Philadelphia, to go on till the Lord comes. If, proud, you will be swept away; and if cherishing what is of flesh — what belongs to the objects of men, and not of Christ — you will learn, that, far from having prospered in such licence, on the contrary this very thing will bring the judgment of the Lord on you. "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." The crown will be there, the crown is sure; but it does not follow that the same soul will have it. The men may change, but the crown will be conferred. For the Lord will set aside the haughty, and exalt the humble; and He can gather those who might seem far off — the very persons who will be found faithful when He comes to receive us to Himself.

I therefore desire to submit my own conscience and heart to this test. I also, press on you, believing it a most serious thing to flatter ourselves as to any position, simply because we are here, and happily so, as we have been mercifully kept hitherto. Let us remember that faith dries up when it ceases to be dependent on the

Lord, and becomes an outward creedism. On the contrary, it is then a source of the most imminent danger. Let us rejoice, but go on in dependence on that grace which, having called us out, alone can keep us: “Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” The Lord could easily set aside those who pique themselves on their knowledge, and form from the stones, to take their place, truer children of Abraham. Let us beware, lest in any way we presume on position instead of depending on Himself.

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out.” This seems contradistinguished from the open door. It is supposed that there is a going out of heart now: assuredly a person whose heart does not go out in love is unworthy of the Lord, and does not understand what He is calling him out for. For beyond question, one of its most distinctive qualities is this very thing, this open-door exercise of heart. It is not merely the entertaining and making use of what the Lord gives for yourselves; but as witnesses of His grace and truth, the heart going out towards all that are His, as well as towards those who know Him not. It does not matter what their state of ignorance or need may be. Nay, to tell the truth, why should one mind persons who speak hardly of those they misapprehend? It is small on our part to think too much of it. The path of faith must be unintelligible to those who are outside it. How could such a place as this seriously interest the men of Sardis or Thyatira, or those of whom I have to speak in closing — Laodicea?

Holding in mind what I have said of those things, and of the forms in which the testimony, more or less according to God’s mind, has been found in Christendom,

beginning, one after the other, but continuing from Thyatira to the end, we see that it is an extremely serious thing for Laodicea. Do not suppose that Philadelphia turns into Laodicea. This is a false thought altogether. That there are persons who, once in Philadelphia, become active in Laodicea, one can well believe. It must always be that the corruption of the best things is the worst. No doubt there is a moral link in that fearful collapse. The Lord takes Laodicea as compared with Philadelphia. There is a thorough contrast, and this in all points. But then it is not true that the one falls into the other. After Laodicea begins, they coexist. It is to lose sight of what has been remarked, that they begin, like the rest, successively; but they are also contemporaneous states that go on till the Lord comes. So with Philadelphia and Laodicea.

But we, for a little, would look at Laodicea; and here we have what is more offensive than in Sardis, or even in Thyatira. There may not be that which looks so gross; and there is that which is truly doomed to destruction in Thyatira — Jezebel and her children for instance. This may not be so with Laodicea. But still there is a most repulsive character in Laodicea. With what exceeding disgust does not Christ mention it? I am anxious to show that this is the danger, the special danger, of the present moment. Christians in general do not go back to Sardis or Thyatira; but who will warrant against Laodicea? This is what we have to beware of. Laodicea is growing up rapidly. If Philadelphia is characterised as making Christ the object in everything, here self-complacency and indifference to His glory govern. There is plenty of knowledge if not of truth; for there is a great difference between the two. They are rich, and increased with

goods. Where did they get them? They were never given in the grace of God, but borrowed or stolen. They were truths that others had got fresh from God's word. Here they are used for man's exaltation, and hence quite apart from conscience, and so without Christ. They, therefore, minister to self-complacency, and soon produce painful results, yet a certain appearance which satisfies the mind. There is nothing new you can tell them: they know it already. Truth has no power, because Christ is not the object first of all, and knowledge is not used for His glory afterwards.

And this is the reason why I think it is a destructive principle — the bringing of mere intelligence, as it is called, into the fore-ground, in the case of a soul that comes before us. In sober troth persons who make such a point of intelligence about souls do much to damage them. But more, can those who do so be really intelligent themselves? It is then unfortunate on both sides. For the truth of it is, that you cannot get true intelligence apart from obedience; and, if you could get it apparently, is it worth having? The only thing that seems to be desirable, or of the Spirit of God, is a little light acted upon leading on to more; and this, beloved friends, found in the place that is according to God. And, therefore, it is sorrowful indeed when undue moment is given to knowledge. Suppose a person is not in fellowship, and wants to understand all about the nature of the church before he comes, and it is thought he will not make a good brother unless he be first intelligent ecclesiastically, the whole principle seems false from beginning to end, a mere substitution of knowledge for Christ.

For according to my observation the best men who have grown up into the truth of God are those who, many of us can remember, were unintelligent enough when they came in; and the men who complain, are they intelligent now?

Supposing the case of Christians seeking fellowship; some may object to a sort of back bench for catechumens, whereas you want them to understand about the church and the Spirit before they are received: how are they to get this? What are they about and where, while it is to go on? Perhaps they feel a certain need of remembering the Lord, and they are accustomed to do so. But they must not yet be received! they are not intelligent enough, it appears. Are they meanwhile to drift into churches and chapels in order to get intelligence? Is not the whole notion in every way wrong, and, what is worst, contrary to the word of God. For it is plain that, for the most part, persons will not leave denominations unless they have a substantial ground of attraction in the Lord. For more you can hardly look at first. But there is enough in them to discern what is according to God; and far better act on Christ's title than keep them out shivering in the cold. Receive them and welcome them as members of the body, of Christ. Of course, there may be a question whether they are His, and there can scarce be too much care here; but it is in the true place, according to God, that truth is divinely learned. There may be value for Christ before, just enough to attract them; yet do not look for knowledge first, but fidelity to Christ. Be sure they know the Father.

Have you not known persons in fellowship, who talked exceeding strongly of their ecclesiastical principle, yet

let all principle go to the winds when something crossed their will? I have known tried and feeble souls who came in, attracted by the savour of Christ they found as nowhere else, and these grew up in the truth, and stood firm and true, whilst your intelligent persons fell away to nothing. Have no confidence in anything but the name of Christ. And when it is really Christ Himself, the grace and truth found in Him, it is found strongest, and ministers grace to the soul when acted on obediently.

Thus, it is a real evil to souls and far from Christ, when an undue place is given to intelligence. This is the material to build up Laodicea and not Philadelphia. "Rich and increased with goods," is exactly what results, and it is repulsive to the Lord, Who says, "I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because 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: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thins eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest see." Is not this solemn? Where is now the place given to mere knowledge — not Christ, nor truth, but knowledge? These riches in the way of goods were acquired. There was a total absence of living truth, even as to the fundamentals of Christianity, so much so that people constantly apply this to unconverted men; and it looks like it. Gold, that is, divine righteousness, white raiment or practical righteousness, and eyesalve, the power of divine discernment, are the very things that ought to

characterise simple Christian men from their start; but there is a total absence of the needful, and the Lord counsels them to buy.

There is more too. After mentioning His rebuke and chastening of those He loves, He calls them to be zealous and to repent, saying, “Behold I stand at the door.” It is not now the open door but the shut one. “I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.” For the same reason, it is a text applied or misapplied rather in the preaching of the gospel. But this shows the widespread latitudinarianism which grows up through the misuse of Philadelphian testimony. It is the state of things for people who are not satisfied with any Protestant body, nor perhaps with anything of the Catholic kind, but have not got the faith to go forth without the camp to Christ only, to keep His word, and not deny His name. They think they can get the truth without the coat, hate exclusivism, decry brethrenism, love nothingarianism, and keep a place of respectability in the world. Laodicea is the consequence, and the moral state that ensues on this is a total enfeebling — I will not say of the church, nor yet understanding of the heavenly glory of Christ but even — of God’s gospel. Oh! is it not solemn? “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white garments, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.” So the very elements of what a sinful man wants for his soul is what these Laodiceans inflated with the idea of knowledge and privilege, need at the last; the Lord brings before them this humbling testimony. Such is the

result of man’s self-complacent misuse of the truth God gave in His grace.

Let us mark the closing scene: we are on the verge of it. Let us, therefore, look to the Lord, for I am persuaded there is very imminent and increasing danger. No doubt there is the blessed hope that He is coming, and coming quickly. There is the grace that keeps us, if we look to Christ as the object of our souls: there is no other which does not lead astray. And I would press this on you, that the very fact of our indulging in any confidence in position will be found, not only a total failure, but a delusion and a snare. The result will surely be that these things will not stand the day of trial — the fatal leap will be taken. Laodicea is the new title of neutrality or indifferentism growing up rapidly around us at this moment. There is on one side what is of man, on the other what is of God; and the Lord introduces all that and more in this most affecting picture of the end of Christendom. Oh! may there be grace and power to deliver, and set souls in perfect freedom to worship and serve Him. May the Lord give us, cleaving to Him, first and last in fellowship with His Son, also to be found simple and earnest in our desires to make known His name. If there are those who leave Philadelphia for Laodicea, there may be others gathered to Christ out of that which is most offensive and nauseous.

Hold fast that which thou hast - Rev. 3:11

There is a striking coincidence in the facts of the word of God with the ways of God at this present moment. I daresay many have been struck with, and unable to account for, the circumstance — and I remember when it exercised my own mind many years ago — that God should have given such a setting forth of His grace in the twenty-first of Numbers, when the children of Israel were nearing the end of their journey. I think that we should have more readily thought of it at the beginning. But God is always wise. We may be exercised; He may bring in apparently a difficulty; but a difficulty overcome by faith, in the mind of God, a difficulty that has long been uncertain, when once apprehended, what a gain it is, not merely to our own souls, but for others, as leading into fresh confidence in God and His word!

And truly the word of God is a mighty thing, not merely for us but for Him at this moment, a moment when Christendom is abandoning it, and when its leaders, blindly, I am sure, and not knowing what they do, are doing what they can to undermine it. His grace has caused that word to shine out in fresh power. For I speak not only of the beauty of the word, but of its authority; and this has a most weighty place. By it God Himself puts and keeps us in subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I would first ask, beloved brethren, whether we have not felt that which answers to it, that God has given the living power not merely of much in His word that we had not known, but also of fundamental truth that we knew imperfectly?

Has He not given us back again the gospel, and that which is the fruit of receiving it? Not that He has poured out the Holy Ghost again, as some have wrongly asked at His hand, but most assuredly He has given us back the truth of it again. I do not speak now of individuals. It has been very properly said, that when we are speaking of that which is the mind of the Lord, we must distinguish between that which is for His own glory and for the church at the present stage of it, and His special guidance and working in individual souls. It would hinder a little misunderstanding of thoughts very precious in themselves, but very capable of being misused.

It is the mind of the Lord at the present time to be forming and fashioning the church as the bride of Christ. It is His mind that we should be awaiting Him from heaven. But it would be a very grave mistake to substitute that which is His will for the individual, for that which is His mind for the church His body. It is the truth for us all — what the church should never have forgotten. But this does not in the least degree interfere with the particular work of the Spirit of God by each individual believer.

Therefore, whether in the fishing or the feeding [which we have had brought before us], servants have each their place — they in no wise supersede each other. When the heart is filled with Christ, the heart recovered to Himself personally, Himself as an Object before us, and Himself in His moral discerning power — for this is one of the most remarkable features of the way He reveals Himself to the church in Philadelphia — are the fishers to be less simple, earnest or devoted? Is the feeding to be relaxed? The very opposite! There is a

heavenly impulse given to it. There is also a freedom from excitement, a solidity and a separateness of character. Not a single want that is not met in the fulness of Christ. The love of Christ constrains.

Knowledge puffeth up, love buildeth up. You cannot separate love rightly from the truth. This personal revelation of the Lord Jesus at the present moment — this use of truth, not as putting something between us and the Lord, but putting away all that separates — is what we must all have found not only our deepest joy, but our best security.

Let me recall this word as a very solemn one. Do you think any are in such danger as the men of Philadelphia? I do not find that such a sifting goes on elsewhere. But I do not believe that Philadelphia is gone. I believe that Laodicea is come, but that Philadelphia is not gone, and will never go until the Lord Jesus comes; and that what He has set forth as a testimony, by revelation of His person, will never be rendered void. I do not believe that Philadelphia will go, but that the souls that fall short of attachment to Christ there revealing Himself, will go, and that grace will bring others to fill up more worthily their place. Assuredly the grace of God which began will keep those that have been there and go on with Christ.

But further, it may be well to observe that the most painful elements in the forming of Laodicea may well have had their place in Philadelphia, when faith failed and flesh gave place to Satan. But if they were in Philadelphia (or separation to Christ), they never were of it. They were such as never appreciated the testimony of Christ; for my heart fully goes along with our beloved

brother in the thought of the Lord having a present mind.

I believe that, while something more has come in, we must not allow that which we have to slip from us, as it would if we were to get under the clouding depression that Philadelphia has so failed that there is no longer now anything of that character. I am saying this as a word of supplement. I believe this is on His mind, that those who are accounted of Philadelphia — surely not a mere question as to position but morally — do specially need His grace; for Satan uses all his arts to deceive and injure them. Where the heart is with Him, there He is all to the heart. But you have not Christ thus unless the Lord has led you back into understanding of what His church is to Himself. The most remarkable features of the appeal to Philadelphia suppose a knowledge of the truth and of grace found nowhere else. There must therefore be a very striking commentary within that Epistle. It is simply true. “Behold, I come quickly.”

But we find that the Lord warns. “Hold fast that which thou hast, that none take thy crown.” Do we not know, beloved friends, that never were men more liable to be carried away by feelings, and to be caught with novel teaching? People outside do not believe it; they think if you know one, you know all! We know a very different thing, and that as grace began the thing, so grace alone sustains and completes it. If any people are liable to be moved, we are. The very fact of being alone with Christ, away from the various means of occupying (I might say, of entertaining) the saints of God — for what else could I call the excitement of gathering thousands, with the attraction of music, etc. — makes us seem ungenial and ungracious in these days of exposure to the efforts of

Satan in ways most trying and delusive. Let us cleave to the evident truth of the Lord. It is a caution given to Philadelphia more than to any other — “Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” It is hard for love to look unamiable; but Christ should be beyond all to us, and His love is alone true.

There are other reasons. This I would add: If you look back over what the Lord has been doing, you find that when souls do slip away, it is rarely into Sardis, still more rarely into Thyatira, but Laodicea is the common direction into which those who fall from Philadelphia gravitate; and there you have that which is most painful, nay, repulsive, to the Lord Jesus. Self-complacency of knowledge abounds, but Christ is outside the door. It is not lapsing from first love, it is far worse than that. It is indifference to Himself, with total lack of spiritual discernment. What state is farther from the mind of God?

Philadelphia, I believe, according to marks that, to my mind, are incontrovertible and sure, will be found when Christ comes. I believe that as Sardis does not supersede Thyatira, the state abides, but, through the infinite mercy of God, I see in Philadelphia the saints enter there as a question of Christ. It is not merely a true thing here or there known, but the truth bound up with Christ is apprehended, and there only presented morally and in love. Now, this is in no way boastful. There is no man that is led by the Spirit and enters into the mind of the Lord as regards the church but is ready not only to live for it, but to die for it; but Christ is nearer still, not merely this particular service or that rendered; though God has been recovering the cream of the gospel, and putting it in quite another fulness. Who

does not know the controversy as to the righteousness of God? The heart of each of us owes much to the recovery of that truth at the end.

Another thing it is well to bear in mind, for it is important for God's glory as for the saints. Christ leaves room for all liberty and variety; for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." We must not set one thing up against another. Evangelising is a special power, and the Lord calls upon us, as we are enabled, to spread the gospel, and not to teach only. We may be called to correct and be corrected, but our place, I am persuaded, is one of freedom and responsibility in individual service. So the apostle, in exhorting Timothy as to the last days, bids him do "the work of an evangelist." Nor can any who are not evangelists duly enter into the feelings or appreciate the mode of that work.

"I have a few names even in Sardis"; and suppose any of these came; suppose they misunderstand those who do not happen to be in their own circle, and apt to be fault-finding if not captious, would it not be humbling for those who are blessed to be offended by their remarks? If the Lord has borne much from us in many ways, and yet has shown the fulness of His grace, brought out in the greatness of His love, we too are called to answer to His mind. And what is it? There are many saints that pine for a better knowledge of His truth, and desire to enjoy the presence of the Lord who is very dear to them. We know that whatever He may give to some in His abounding grace, the true way to enjoy His presence is according to His word, to be where saints gather to His name. There His Spirit works freely.

He says to the angel of Philadelphia, “Thou hast kept my word, and not denied my name.” I should feel it was making His word of none effect if we allowed that there was the same enjoyment of the presence of the Lord where His name was not the centre, and His word not maintained. He has brought out His truth in such activity that those who would follow Him fully now are called into the place of Philadelphia, to know Him who is holy, Him who is true, to hold fast His word and not deny His name. Other things have come in. The most evil departure with good and bad together leads us in it. We would never forget that is what grows until Christ comes. We may let go that which we have! May we hold it fast! May it be true of us, “that no man take thy crown”!

The trials will be fierce and fresh. There are constant dangers and constant difficulties. Only one object keeps, as well as awakens, while in this world, and that is Christ. But there must be self-judgment, weighing truth and judging self solemnly, in order to communion. So only can we have Christ’s power, in our weakness, resting on us. Who or what will make more complete shipwreck than the attempt to take up such truth as this in a mental way? Persons that seemed Philadelphians when they started, where are they now?

Yet I have no such thought as that Philadelphia will end before Christ comes, though individuals may come or vanish. It is precisely this which is so serious. We are on a ground where nothing can sustain us but the Christ who led us there. The word without the Spirit of God always ends in intellectualism, Sandemanianism, or rationalism; as the Spirit without Christ goes into fanaticism for a while, and fleshly form in the end.

What avails to offer the brightest visions possible of the church? Better have Christ with self-judgment. The grace towards the end of the journey teaches us how He recovers. The Lord at the beginning, and before the beginning of the church, gave us these very words: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst”! Did He not contemplate our need at the end? Faith in them and Him thus really forms Philadelphia. I do not believe that we shall be ever driven to isolation, though desire after union will never keep us together — nothing but the power of His name. There may be a thinning of numbers instead of that increase which some complain of. All but Christ will fail, no flesh shall glory in His presence.

There is another word, and a weighty one — “The Spirit and the bride.” The Holy Ghost has had His active presence and power confessed. It is a great thing to the Lord Jesus that the One sent down from heaven to glorify Him be owned, and this too in our proper nearness to Christ.

It is not that He does not bless where this is not so. But there is an immense difference between those that are merely blest by preaching and prayer, and those that own the Spirit’s presence and action in the assembly also. For my part I see in verse 10 an intimation that there will be the expression of it going on until the end. Saints will be together, and not breaking up into mere units — “the Spirit and the bride say, Come.” I do not say that all that ought to have it, have really the intelligence of the place. But there are those who do cleave to Christ thus by the grace of God, who prize it above all things here, and that because it is the grace of Christ.

“The Spirit and the bride say, Come.” It is the due answer to the voice of the Lord Jesus who is coming. It is His word that gives the ground to faith. Such His grace will keep; keeping together, too, those who have kept the word of His patience. Where He is, He not only produces liberty, but sense of unity. It would be a most painful thing, and disheartening to our faith, for those for whom the Lord had interposed — separating them to His name — if they must think that all that is found henceforth would be merely Laodicea. Let none think so. Sardis will go on to the end, and Thyatira. But it is solemn enough and searching truth for us, and for others, I repeat, that while Philadelphia is not gone, Laodicea has come!

If the worldly-minded slip into Laodicea, God is working to bring out of it also, and into Philadelphia, just as those who become more simply set for Christ must do. May our Lord, beloved brethren, both warn our souls, and at the same time encourage our hearts, for His name’s sake! Amen.

W. K.

The Coming Hour of Temptation - Rev. 3:10

That there is a time of trouble, a special season of tribulation for the world, revealed in several important and plain passages of the word of God, no thoughtful Christian can for a moment question. All may not be clear as to those whose lot will be cast in those days, but that such a season is to befall the world is not to be doubted. That it is also to be a day through which some of God's own people are to pass is equally certain. We shall now enquire what it is that God's word affirms as to both those who shall be there and those who shall be in the grace of God exempted from it.

At the same time a wider question arises than the hour of tribulation. We must not confound scriptures that differ, even if the difference be comparatively slight in appearance. "The hour of temptation" does not appear to me to be exactly the same as that of the great tribulation. Temptation may take the form of severe affliction, but it is not limited to such a type of things. Temptation may assume the character of seduction, as well as of trial in the shape of tribulation. I shall show tonight that there is a well-defined period as to which scripture leaves no just ground of hesitation; that there are preliminary judgments on one side, and on the other snares of all kinds, as well as a storm of trouble that will fall on those who have slighted the grace of God, and cast away His truth.

I shall show further that it is by no means true that none of His people are to be exempted from that "hour of temptation." The verse that I have read proves the

contrary. We have the Holy Ghost here addressing to this effect the assembly of God in Philadelphia — the Christian assembly there. More strictly speaking, the angel of the church is before us — who was, it seems, a kind of ideal representative of the assembly — and the promise runs in the most distinct terms: “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”

It is evident that the import of this is not merely that the faithful are to be preserved. I shall prove that for others preservation is assured; but there is a special exemption promised here. We can all conceive how, supposing the fearful time of trial came, some might go, however secured, through that hour, and others might be kept out of it altogether. The question is, whether the scripture is clear that both of these methods are to be made good — that some are to be exempted from the hour of trial that is coming upon the habitable world, but that others are to be kept not out of it, but through it. I have not a doubt that these two schemes are true, and that God’s word explicitly teaches both.

Further, the analogy of the dealings of God in past times leads to the same conclusion. If we look back to the earliest times, when God dealt with the world as a whole, undoubtedly He kept for His own name’s sake some through that flood that swept the world away before it; but was that all? Was there merely a Noah and his family preserved in the ark? We all know the contrary. We know of one at least that walked with God before the flood came, and was not insensible to what was coming. He knew it as well or better than Noah; and whereas he walked in communion with the Lord before

the season of judgment came, he was taken without seeing death. Enoch was translated from the earth, and taken to be with God above. Thus we have the circumstances of a great divine intervention — a time most striking and unexampled in the previous history of the world. When God was visiting the sons of men, and this with displeasure, for there was manifestly a tremendous judgment coming on the earth, God wrought in a twofold way. He removed one who looked to Himself and walked with Himself before the flood came; He brought others through the flood of waters that they might be a nucleus of blessing for the fresh conditions of the earth that were to follow the deluge.

We find again, if we look farther down the history of God's people, one similarly taken in special grace out of the world. In the course of the Jewish nation Elijah was caught up to heaven, while his successor, Elisha, was left to testify on the earth. Thus we have clearly God giving more than once a premonition of His will and of His ways in both respects. Therefore, in setting before those who are here tonight, as distinctly as God enables me, a sketch of what awaits the world, at least as to this short season of signal trial, we are not left without signs and tokens of what the Lord has done: this we may do well to compare with that which the Lord is going to do, both in exemption and in preservation.

Nevertheless, be it observed that I do not rest the proof on types. Nothing but direct scripture ought to be the foundation for any man's faith; and I shall cite enough to demonstrate that the word of God is as precise and positive as possible. I shall show that no other meaning is so satisfactory; that it is the simple unforced sense of the word of God. At the same time I shall be exceedingly

obliged to any child of God who doubts it if he will only favour me with what he conceives to be a more satisfactory exposition of any one of the scriptures we may refer to. Need it be said that we ought to be above any question of our own opinion in these matters? They are too serious; they too closely affect the glory of God and the well-being of God's people.

Let me add, beloved friends, another thing, that my aim is not at all to excite or entertain any one's mind, but to furnish from the Bible for the Christian's faith what is of very great importance. Clearly if this is what is before God, if He means to remove some of His people from the earth, if He means also to have a people for His name to go through the time of temptation as well troublous as seductive that precedes the day of Jehovah, it evidently must be of the utmost possible interest and moment to know whether we can on scriptural grounds look confidently to the precious blessing of being with Christ Himself when the fearful hour of retributive infliction shall come upon the world.

Whether we open the Old Testament or the New, however we take the passages to be cited, we shall not fail to gather instruction. But to show how little depends upon anything artificial, I shall at this time take the texts simply in the order in which they stand in our common English Bible. The Christian has no interest — we ought surely to have none — but the glory of God.

No doubt by putting together particular passages in an artful way it is very possible to impose on the ignorant, whether by a show of strength or by a concealment of weakness. I am giving the best conceivable evidence

that such a suspicion need enter no man's mind in this case.

The first passage then that occurs to me as bearing directly on the subject before us is found in Jeremiah 30. There we read of a day of trouble, a time of sore distress, and we are told who are concerned in it. The seventh verse is express: "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." There can be no doubt as to the force of the passage. This is a time of trouble, of special sorrow, and the one who is said to be involved in it is Jacob — a well known designation of the Jewish people. They are thus called in their weakness, and trial, and suffering, and bitter experience of their own faults, but at the same time objects of God's faithful care; not looked at as Israel, a prince with God and men, but Jacob, as learning not a little of themselves.

Accordingly we may see how appropriately the term is used here. This time of trouble will come upon the Jews because of their unfaithfulness. God does not willingly afflict the children of men — never His people, but for higher and more blessed objects. Thus we find trouble referred to in these two ways — the loving discipline of a Father who seeks our better blessing, and along with that, in the Christian's case, as we know, the privilege of suffering for righteousness' sake, or, still more, suffering for Christ's sake. But such is not the character of this time of trouble. No scripture intimates it. It is never presented as being an honour: it is a time of judicial sorrow and affliction.

Again, the party here shown to suffer in that time of peculiar trouble is clearly a Jewish one — Jacob. At

present I shall not, of course, enter into a detailed proof of the impropriety of applying the terms “Jacob,” etc., to the body of Christ, the church. Perhaps it may be assumed that most persons in this room have no question on this head at least. They know perfectly well that Jacob or Israel, in the Old Testament as well as the New, means the Jews. They know that the Christian church is otherwise characterised, and that the greatest care is taken to keep the new thing distinct from the old, and to mark the distinction. There are principles in common no doubt. There is a great deal of the truth of God in the Old Testament which applies with equal and sometimes with even increasing force to the Christian. No one need question this. For instance, holiness, obedience, submission to the will of God, delight in His ways, suffering for righteousness’ sake — all these terms we get in the Old Testament, and they are found even more emphatically true in the case of the Christian and the church. Therefore none can fairly suppose that I weaken the exceeding value of the ancient oracles. If I am addressing my servant, it is quite right that my child should profit by what is said to the other. Again, supposing a wise father might give instruction to a child, it is all well for any other person to profit by it. But then we must not confound the relationships. In the Old Testament clearly the Jewish people are primarily the object of God’s direct dealings. In the New Testament the great object, after the Jews had rejected their Messiah, is to bring out the church of God as a new building, characterised after another sort altogether, nevertheless surely bound to profit by all the ways of God, especially with Israel.

Without further notice I assume, therefore, as a thing beside the present mark, and not needing discussion just now, that where the Jews, Israel, Jacob, Zion, Jerusalem, etc., are referred to, these words really do refer to them, not to Christians. If so, the bearing of the word in Jeremiah 30 is plain enough. The Jews are expressly supposed to be exposed to some exceeding trouble, but with this comfort, that they are to be "saved out of it." They are not to sink utterly in this time of trouble. Here then we have at least an analogy with one of the parties described at the beginning of this discourse. We have not persons kept from going into the time of trouble, but people that are brought through it. In short, we have the Jews saved out of their most dismal day.

If we turn to the prophecy of Daniel, we find, in the last chapter and first verse, an even stronger statement of the same fact: "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." Dan. 12:1 By this of course the meaning of the passage in Jeremiah is strongly confirmed. There is the same time described, but in yet more emphatic terms. The trouble is to be not only "great," but none before so great, and never any to be so great again. It is manifest and certain that there can be only one such time. This is important. There is an hour to come beyond all that has passed upon the earth, and no subsequent hour can equal it. It is this very time of which Jeremiah was speaking; for we find, first, Daniel's people; then, involved in that dreadful hour; and, yet more, delivered out of it. These

are precisely the three points in the passage already extracted from the elder prophet.

Thus Daniel and Jeremiah do not merely confirm each other mutually, but add exceedingly to the force and clearness of the truth in question. Nothing can be plainer than this conclusion. It is true that the Jews who are brought out of this hour of trouble are supposed to be persons of whom God has a record. They have a real living relationship with Him. That is to say, it is implied that the mass of the Jews will not be brought out of that hour; but as all then alive are to pass through it, so all will be delivered from it who are “found written in the book.”

And this is the more interesting because it is from this same chapter that our Lord Jesus quotes in the discourse recorded in Matt. 24, as well as in Mark 13. In Matt. 24:15 we read thus: “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whoso readeth, let him understand),” etc. Now this is a citation from the latter part of Daniel 12. It is evidently implied that many who read it might not understand; at least our Lord particularly cautions those who read to see that they enter into His thought. “Whoso readeth, let him understand.” Never does He discourage from reading; but He would have understanding. His prescient eye foresaw the confusion that would pass over the minds of men, even of His own disciples. He knew well how much earthly objects of one kind and another obscure the spiritual vision. He knew well that there would be all sorts of notions afloat, more particularly about prophecy; so that many children of God mistake, and many more dread, the subject. They feel that there is

gross confusion, too much of conjecture, and very little positive truth to build up the soul thereby, and thus they allow their minds often to be prejudiced. Instead of judging the thoughts of men and their systems, they turn aside from that precious word of God which certainly deserves better treatment. Surely it is to their own great loss; and it will be so increasingly; for as darkness sets in, and as all kinds of evil are brought up to the surface of the world, more and more as time goes on, the children of God will need to take heed to every word, and indeed especially to the word which casts divine light on the future.

In fact a man can no more avoid looking forward mentally than he can forbear ordinarily to look forward with his eye. It is the nature of man to do so. He ought to look up; but he certainly looks forward. But if you do not subject your mind to God's word, you will be sure to fill it with your own thoughts, or those of other people. That is, you must either be a student of divine prophecy, or you will be in danger of setting up to be more or less of a prophet yourself. Depend on it that to study believingly, earnestly, humbly, self-distrustingly, the word of God about the future, is exactly the way to keep oneself from being a prophet, and, let me also say, from being a false one. Nobody will turn out a false prophet who is content to be only a student of prophecy.

The word of God then, where Christ, not self governs, is the truest preservative from all error. I admit there prevails great and strange misuse of scripture. I entreat my brethren, whoever they may be, to watch against this with all earnestness. There is no need of hurrying to a conclusion. It is better to acknowledge our own ignorance; it is much better to wait on God and His

word, and meanwhile to confess we do not know this or that. Why should there be haste to form a fully and clearly-defined sketch of what is coming ? Be content rather to get truth in a detached way; to let this matter that God reveals in His word fall into your soul, and then another matter, as He gives it. Almost all the mischief is done by forming, or attempting to form, a complete theory when we are but learning the elements. It is far wiser to take the revealed facts of the word of God, and gradually to link them together as we become matured. This is the right way with all truth. It is no otherwise even in science. It is the most serious hindrance to progress when men form a hasty hypothesis, instead of first collecting all the facts; that is to say, they thus foreclose the case, and take the place of being masters when they may be but scantily-taught disciples.

In the things of God, indeed, it is true and certain that there is One pre-eminently capable of teaching, even the Holy Ghost; and we may be perfectly sure that He takes the deepest interest in this; for He was given to show us not merely the things of Christ, but “things to come.” Let us then thankfully and humbly look up to God, that we may be led into all the truth.

Turning then to the words of our Lord Jesus (Matt. 24), and the use that He makes of the prophet Daniel, we have the same elements as in the Old Testament, but with especial light and fulness. He was instructing His disciples, no doubt; but evidently a disciple in his then condition might represent either a godly Jew or a Christian. The reason is plain. The disciples were not on proper Christian ground until the death and resurrection of the Saviour, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Everyone knows this who bows to scripture about the matter. The

proof is very evident. Going up to the temple, attending Jewish feasts, keeping rigorously the traditions of the law and the ordinances of it — no one can say that all this is Christianity in its due form. But it was the condition of the disciples then, and for some time after.

Consequently the disciples were capable of being used, according to the intention of Christ, to represent those who would be raised up in a day that was coming, substantially similar in point of circumstances to themselves; that is, men converted but still connected with Jerusalem, the land, and the hopes of Israel. Such was their condition at this very time, and therefore they were even more fitting representatives of such a state than they could be of Christianity proper. At the same time the Lord does afterwards give prophetic anticipations of what would belong to Christians, properly so called. It is entirely a question of the manner in which He was pleased to speak, and the subject of which He treats, which enables us to form a sound judgment in which relation the disciples are viewed.

Let us apply these principles to what we have here before us. What originated the discourse? The admiration expressed by some of the disciples at the beautiful stones of that splendid and wonderful fabric which was then the special adornment of Jerusalem. But the Lord told them that every stone should be thrown down, not one be left upon another. Is this Christianity? It was Christ predicting the downfall of Jerusalem, and the overthrow of their temple. Does this overthrow any of our hopes? It has nothing to do with our place and relationships. It had a vast deal to do with Jewish feeling and thought and expectation.

The Lord accordingly gives first various general warnings which dealt with them as they then were. In Matt. 24:15 He comes to something much more precise. He launches out into the circumstances that surround the end of the age, and says, addressing them naturally as representatives of those faithful Jews who should be in those days — “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whoso readeth, let him understand), then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains.” Who can be so bold (to say the least) as to affirm that this is a picture of the church at large? Do you suppose that Christians would ever be contemplated in the land of Judea alone? Clearly not. All is plain if He is speaking about Jews — godly ones no doubt, but Jews in that particular land. It is not at all a prophetic declaration as to the saints of God in different parts of the world. It is here nothing but a view of what would be in a future day in that land alone. We all understand that the mission of the gospel of the kingdom to all nations is to be from that land as from a centre; but in Matt. 24:15, 16, etc., He speaks exclusively of those in that land. “Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.” Their flight was to be so immediate, that if a man was on the housetop, he was not to come down through the house; and if he was out, he was not to come back for what might seem ever so necessary.

I know there are many persons of old and to this day who apply this to the past siege of Jerusalem. But the proper prophecy of the past destruction of Jerusalem is

a part of Luke 21, not Matthew 24. There our Lord speaks about Jerusalem as encompassed with armies; but there is no such sign as the setting up of the abomination of desolation, no such rapid flight called for; and, in point of fact, every one who knows history at all must know that there was neither one nor other as in Matthew, but exactly as Luke says in the past siege of Jerusalem. The Roman lieutenant who came and encompassed the city did not at all demand to be at once heeded after this peremptory sort. There were months that elapsed between the retirement of Cestius Gallus and the arrival of the still greater force under the emperor when the destruction of Jerusalem took place some years afterwards. That is to say, there was plenty of time to get away, family, friends, baggage and all. There was no need, therefore, for so urgent a flight. All this is to me decisive, that our Lord did not in the first Gospel refer to the past historical siege of the city. There He says, “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place.” This, we have seen, is never once referred to in Luke 21; but another fact, as follows — “And when ye shall see Jerusalem encompassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.” There is not a word here about coming down from the housetop; not a word that forbids the man in the fields from coming back. In short, it is a different and more ordinary state of things, characterised as “the days of vengeance,” etc., “great distress in the land and wrath upon this people,” but not speaking of the tribulation, as Matthew and Mark do, and consequently without the

citation from Daniel. The times of the Gentiles clearly run on after the siege in Luke, and as clearly not after the scenes of which Matthew and Mark speak. There is a flight enjoined, but no such instant flight as in Matthew. There is an analogy, and nothing more, between the past siege and the future of Jerusalem; but the past event, as Luke reports, admitted of a retreat from the city far more quietly, and with greater ease for their escape to Pella, etc. The future siege will demand a peremptory flight from Jerusalem, according to the word of God given by Matthew, who consequently (not Luke) speaks of the end of the age.

Coming back, then, to the earlier Gospel, Matt. 24:20, the Lord says, “But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day.” We see that it is not a question of the world at large. The winter would not affect all the earth at the same time; what is winter in one place is summer in another. It is not a universal picture. Again, there is “the sabbath day.” Everyone here, it is to be hoped, knows that such is not the name of the Lord’s day. We as Christians very properly keep not the seventh day, but the first. A man who does not know thus much has a great deal to learn, it seems to me. Christians deny, and very rightly, that there would be any sin, in case of death, or sickness, or any peremptory call, to walk a mile and a half in order to do good to a neighbour, or to seek the blessing of an enemy. I suppose there are many here in this room who would feel perfectly ready to go twenty miles, if they could visit twenty sick persons in the course of a Lord’s day. All Christians surely would not censure but value it. What do I infer from this? That the Lord is not speaking here of Christians at all. He contemplates godly Jews who are

to be under the sabbatic law, and who would feel themselves in a grievous dilemma, therefore, if they had to flee on that day. He says to such, “Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter” (when inclemency might hinder), “neither on the sabbath day” (when legally their flight could not be permitted). Then He gives as the reason for all — “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” Matt. 24:21 The conclusion to be formed from these considerations is this, that our Lord was addressing the disciples as representing future godly Jews — “every one that shall be found written in the book,” not Jews as such simply, but the godly remnant of the last days, those that shall be delivered out of the final and awful tribulation. He is referring, in short, to the very same period as Jeremiah in his Jer. 30, and as Daniel in his Dan. 12. Our Lord makes this to be still more manifest, from the fact that He quotes from this very twelfth chapter of Daniel. If there could be any doubt about it here, we have His discourse again in the corresponding passage of Mark (Mark 13), where it is said, “But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not (let him that readeth understand), then let them that be in Judea flee to the mountains: and let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take any thing out of his house: and let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment.” Mark 13:14-16 Thus we see Mark does not take up the same ground as Luke, but agrees with Matthew.

Remember, there is no discrepancy whatever. No more impudent belief can well be, than to set one part of the

New Testament against another, or indeed any part of the Bible against another. Such a handling of scripture is not only dishonest, but profound ignorance. There is not in all the Bible one passage that really contradicts another. Of course, there are passages that may seem at variance; but then, as we begin to get a little more light, these diminish in their number; and hence modesty would feel, if there were but fuller light, all the appearances of inconsistency would vanish away. It is just the same thing in the moral world, nor is it otherwise in the natural world. There are everywhere apparent contradictions and exceptions, but a larger knowledge of things bring these under a deeper rule. So it is with the word of God. Greater spiritual wisdom causes these apparent anomalies to disappear. Sometimes they may be in the translation; sometimes they may be in faulty manuscripts of the original; sometimes, and most frequently, they are in our own understanding. But the great lesson learnt throughout is, that the Bible becomes more manifestly the word of God in its every detail. No doubt the more ignorant people are, the more fault they find with the Bible; the wiser they become, the more they rejoice in it, and bless God for it.

This being so, Matthew 24 and Mark 13 will be found to coalesce with the Old Testament texts we have weighed. All these scriptures suppose godly Jews to be involved in this unparalleled time of trouble, and that they are at the same time to be saved out of it. Thus far then the Old Testament and the New Testament clearly confirm each other. Every Christian man ought to accept this, even if not thus demonstrated; but I trust that what has

been alleged may help to prove it in the face of gainsayers.

But this is not all. We come now to the Revelation, where we find a passage or two of a different nature. First of all is the one with which we began tonight: “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.” Rev. 3:10 What have we here? Jacob? Daniel’s people? Not a trace of them. Every one knows — it cannot be questioned — that the Lord Jesus is here writing a letter by His servant John to the angel of the Christian assembly or church in Philadelphia. Here at once we find ourselves on different ground. Jews are not addressed, nor is it by a Jewish prophet, either before or during the captivity. It is now the Lord Jesus, who has a double relation. He is the Messiah, the hope of Israel, but at the same time the Head of the church. I have already shown that in the passages of Matthew and Mark He is instructing His disciples as to Jewish expectations connected with the land of Judea and the temple. It is clear that they had the sabbath-day, and the number of arguments might be largely increased in proof that Jewish disciples in the latter day are referred to, and such only. But now we find none of this. In all the scriptures that concern the Jews, they are supposed to go through this hour of temptation, but at the same time they are to be saved out of it. They go through that hour; they are protected of God; but none the less are they in the temptation, although they survive it, protected by divine power. Here, contrariwise, when the address is to Christians, the word is, “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience.” The Jews were far from keeping

this; they had rejected Himself; they despised the word of His patience. But one of the great distinguishing features of the Christian is, that he suffers with Christ, and, more than this, that he is content to wait, as Christ waits, for the great day. He is not anxious for the glory of the world now; his portion is not here; the Christian is waiting, as becomes the bride, for the exaltation of the Bridegroom over the earth. The bride knows that the Bridegroom is exalted in heaven, and her heart is where her treasure is. Christ is glorified at the right hand of God; and her present joy is to know well that He who is her Bridegroom is coming, and that He will first gather to Himself His bride, and that in due time He will display His bride with Himself in glory. “When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory.” Col. 3:4 It is not merely that He shall take us away to be hidden in glory. He is hid in God now, and we shall be shortly. But when Christ appears in glory, those who are waiting, and are content to wait, keeping the word of His patience, will be displayed in the very same glory as the Lord Jesus. Such is the Christian’s expectation. Christ is to come for us, and when Christ is manifested we shall be manifested with Him in glory.

Entirely falling in with this sketch of the difference between what a Jew expected and what we are now expecting, the Lord directs His servant to write thus to the angel of the church at Philadelphia, “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience.” Christ is patiently waiting to come; He looks onward to the future as much in heaven as He did when He was on the earth. He has not left His manhood behind Him because He has risen from the grave; on the contrary, the resurrection is that which binds indissolubly His manhood with His person.

He took manhood in His incarnation, but He has manhood bound up for ever with His own eternal glory. As He retains manhood now in the glorified state, what a pledge this is of our blessedness with Christ when He comes again! We wait for that moment; and because we keep the word of His patience He says, “I also will keep thee,” not from the tribulation only, but “from the hour of temptation (or trial) which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.” Mark, He does not say, “I will keep thee from a certain place of trouble, or from a given sphere where the tribulation is to fall.” We can understand that a man might be taken out of a particular locality under judgment. For instance, supposing Europe, or the Roman Empire, or the Holy Land, to be peculiarly the spot on which the tribulation is to fall, we can easily understand how persons outside the doomed limits would not suffer temptation in the same way. This has been a favourite theory; and I have heard of devotees who have gone east and west in order to get out of the scene of dreaded trial. But this is folly, and a total mistake as to the word of God. What the Lord Jesus says is not, “You are to go from the sphere,” but “I will keep thee from the hour.” Nay, it is a far greater promise, and infinitely more precise, than saying, “I will keep thee from the place of the temptation,” etc. Those who keep the word of His patience are not to be there when the hour comes; that is to say, it is a complete removal (not only from the circle but) from the time of the trouble. The church of God will be exempt; the faithful will be kept from it. By the faithful I mean all the children of God.

I beseech all that are here to guard against certain and self-complacent notions opposed to this, and too widely

spread in America, and sometimes nearer home. They will have it that such exemption is a reward for believing in pre-millenarian views, and that those Christians who are not so instructed are to pass through the future hour of trouble, — some going so far as to teach that they will be in torture for 1,000 years. I beseech you, brethren, treat these notions as they deserve; treat them as bad and base, as altogether opposed to revelation, and the greatest dishonour both to the person of Jesus whom they love, and above all to His work, on which their souls rest before God. Oh, is not this idolising knowledge? It would not become us, assuredly, to slight the study of prophetic truth in which we have found, if one may speak about ourselves, not a little profit and enjoyment. But at the same time to suppose that those who may love Christ quite as well as we do, but who do not hold just views on prophetic truth, are to be tortured for it so many years, perhaps a thousand years, — to suppose God will punish His children thus because they have not been pre-millennialists, let such thoughts be utterly condemned and banished!

I admit that the Lord Jesus is said to come for them that look for Him; but why? Because the Spirit of God assumes that all Christians look for Him; and so they do. Some do it, no doubt, more intelligently than others; some, no doubt, do interpose their opinions on the millennium, as well as others on the tribulation. I do not agree with either. I am sure that all such interferences with the constant hope of Christ are wrong; and men suffer loss through it. I believe that those who assume, contrary to scripture, that there is going to be a great and long reign of good over the earth before Jesus comes are under no small delusion. At the same time,

while disapproving of that notion, I consider that the idea of torturing for a thousand years God's children, in order to punish them for not being pre-millennialists, is about as bad a notion as could be entertained by Christian men. I am not now speaking of those whose scheme directly lowers our Saviour by clouding His Deity, or allowing the smallest spot of suspicion to rest upon His humanity or His relation to God, because one ought not to regard such as Christians at all. They cannot be acknowledged as such while anti-Christian. They may turn out Christians, carried away for a time, of course, just as a drunkard, or any other sinner. A person may fall into a desperate sin, and after all the Lord may bring him out of it. Neglect of prayer and of the word of God, tampering with the world, etc., may draw him into any evil, as grace can restore. At the same time, if a man goes on in sin decidedly and deliberately, whatever you may hope and desire, you cannot, and ought not, to call him a Christian. It is the same with false doctrine: only I suppose that false doctrine is yet more evil and dangerous, because more deceptive than anything else; but no one can adequately judge of false doctrine, unless as taught by the Spirit of God.

This then may suffice to show how, so far as the Jews are concerned, the uniform testimony of the Old and the New Testaments is, that they are to go through this time of temptation, but that the godly ones are to be preserved. The word of our Lord Jesus in Rev. 3:10, is addressed clearly to Christian ears, representing the faithful that should be found waiting for His coming to receive them to Himself, which is the normal position of all Christians. Nor could the Spirit of God contemplate such an anomaly as those who loved Him not so looking

for Him. This scripture holds out the blessed prospect of such association with Him as will exempt them from the time of predicted tribulation and the hour of temptation also. If I do not misunderstand the latter phrase it would seem to take in the preliminary sorrows, as well as later seductions and unparalleled final judgments. These do not all come at once. There will be deceits used as well as persecutions before the crash and the frightful crisis come. There is clearly defined in this very book a difference and progress in evil and trouble. This being so, the promise here given serves without constraint to comprehend and cover all, including the time of earlier trouble and deceit no less than the pressure of special affliction.

Accordingly the Lord declares that those that keep the word of His patience will be kept from that hour of temptation which shall come upon all the habitable world. And for what purpose is this hour sent? That others may be tried by it — "to try them that dwell upon the earth." In the Epistle to the Philippians the Holy Ghost brands the earthly-minded as being enemies of the cross of Christ, "whose end is destruction." (Phil. 3:18, 19) I hope no one will contend that this is said of a Christian, however it may be of those who had once taken that place. That a Christian may venture near the brink of evil, that he may tamper with the unclean thing, that he may be for a while drawn in more or less, is possible; but it is beyond dispute that the Spirit of God contemplates those who, professing the name of Christ, altogether abuse it; and their end is certainly and literally destruction.

Here first, in the book of Revelation, the apostle John, at the command of our Lord, characterises a class of

persons who should be found just before the hour of temptation not only setting their minds upon earthly things, but if possible yet farther gone in that evil direction. They are called dwellers upon the earth. They had given up the blessed place of holy separateness as pilgrims and strangers in the world. Such is the uniform description of Christians; nay, in a measure, of the elders who obtained a good report by faith, as the Old Testament shows, although the light then vouchsafed was by no means so full as it is in the New. What intelligent soul would maintain that it was? If the Old Testament gave all the light needed now, where is the value and where the reason of the New? If it was the same thing, why not call it all the Old Testament? why the New Testament at all? The common faith of Christians knows this, if they do not frankly confess it. The one is divinely inspired no less than the other. There is no difference as to this; but there is the striking contrast that Israel's case is the history of a people under the law and government of God on the earth, while the church is a people led by faith out of all worldly connection to follow in the path of an earth-rejected Saviour glorified in heaven, and to wait for His coming as those who know their portion with Him above. This is the calling of the Christian, properly speaking.

But whenever did God bring in a blessing without the enemy seeking to turn it to a corruption? If there had not been Christianity, there could not be Anti-christ. There is invariably with the light of God the shadow of the adversary. Accordingly scripture is most explicit that the falling away must come. The falling away from what? From Christianity, to be sure; and very likely from the

divinely-inspired testimony in general — from that of the Old Testament as well as of the New. Nor do I conceive there will be long to wait for this. Time was when the only persons who used to attack the Bible were wicked men such as Bolingbroke and Paine, Voltaire and Rousseau. Now, I am grieved to say, it is fashionable for clergymen — university professors, ecclesiastical dignitaries — to be infidels. God forbid that I should single out invidiously any one individual, or any one denomination, because it is easy to see that it is found in all the nations and tongues by which Christianity is at all professed. Scepticism is confined to no class, and is as rampant in Popery, though perhaps more open in Protestantism. Honest I can call it nowhere. It professes anything, while it believes nothing. The hard thing would be to say where it has not penetrated. Not that all are as boldly bad as Bishop Colenso; not that all are infidel after so cowardly a sort as the Oxford Essayists and Reviewers. But it is plain that the spirit of infidelity reigns in quarters that yesterday, one may say, would have been ashamed and horrified; and one of the most alarming signs is the powerlessness of Christendom in meeting it. I feel often that the answers to infidelity are only less infidel, if always less, than the assaults on the faith. Witness the address of Dr. Raleigh on religion and science to which the Congregational Union of London have committed themselves. I desire only to use such facts for the warning of those exposed and for humbling ourselves before God, while cleaving to the word of His grace. The devil is now making people bolder in the highest places, as for a good while in the lowest. You may depend on it that it is mainly in the middle classes is found the chief value for the revealed truth of God at the present moment. The higher classes are largely

saturated with infidelity; the lower classes no less so. In modern times it has been seen that God, while never unmindful of the poor, has most used people between the highest and the lowest to stand for the truth, and to reject error. I believe it is so still, and that the extremes of society are those that go most rapidly to ruin. While this is no doubt true, it is patent that the extremes are advancing rapidly to a moral meeting-place, and that the number of those who are thoroughly devoted to Christ, and who have perfect confidence in the truth of all that is written, is by no means large in any land whatsoever. We may be thankful for what the mercy of God has done in our own country, but I am persuaded that the inroads of infidelity become gigantic at this present time, and that the strides it is taking everywhere are as rapid as they are vast. If this be so, it is a deeply important matter for us to be on our guard, and so much the more as the moment hastens when these things are about to be realised. Remember, I do not venture to say a word as to defining that moment. God may prolong His patience. Man is apt to be hasty in his thoughts. Just as he procrastinates in his duties, so is he apt to be precipitate in his expectations. It is unwarrantable for any man to predict the day which no one knows, says the Lord. God has kept all this in His own authority. At the same time there are moral intimations; and as none ought to be blind to the signs of the times, so the church of God ought pre-eminently to heed the tokens of what is coming — to read them in the word first, of course, and to seize their living counterpart in what is working round about us. It is not difficult to see that it is the tendency of the present moment to obliterate ancient landmarks — to cast down established distinctions, especially where there is a high or exclusive claim to

revealed truth — to put all things divine and human on a common level.

However this may be, here we have the clear promise, held out by the Saviour, of a people that are to be kept from the coming hour of temptation. Observe, it is not merely a question of the place of tribulation. From elsewhere it is clear that the centre of the worst tribulation is to be Jerusalem. So true is this, that even if the godly but escape to the mountains, they are out of the area of that burning fiery furnace then seven times heated. This is certain from our Lord's own words. They may escape in a very short time to a place where the tribulation cannot fall upon them. Therefore it is evident that the unparalleled tribulation for the Jews can only have a very contracted sphere indeed. I shall show presently that there will be a larger sphere also.

But in the message to the church in Philadelphia we have a distinct assurance of exemption, not merely from the place, but even from the hour; and this not of tribulation only, but of temptation, which takes in, if I mistake not, the preliminary troubles and seductions as well as the tribulation that comes as a scourge for such flagrant apostasy and rebellion. Thus the promise is of the largest character, and at the same time of the utmost precision. It is a positive certainty to those that really wait for Christ. It is not a question of a mere doctrine. If the heart be not toward Him, what more value in seeing the pre-millennial advent than anything else? It is obvious that there are a great many souls who have the doctrine clearly enough, of whom none can say that it does them much good after all. I believe myself, that if Christ be not the personal object of the soul, anything else is comparatively powerless; but where Christ is in

the heart as one believed in and loved, and hence patiently waited for, then, no doubt, His coming is no less sweet than purifying. Everything is seen to be precious that directs to Him, and the word of God about Him. Where truth is held apart from Him, there will be nothing to soften the spirit — nothing to maintain liberty, obedience, and a sanctifying object.

I am speaking, of course, not merely of being screened from the judgment, but of the power of salvation and of joy in the Lord now. Plainly this promise is most full, and it is at the same time no less precise as to the exemption of a people from this hour of temptation. Need it be added who these are? They are Christians, and none others. None but Christians were here addressed by our Lord. To them distinctly is the pledge made, that those who keep the word of His patience, the Lord will keep — not during, nor through, nor in, but — "from (or "out of") the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth"; to try such as may have borne the Christian name, baptised persons, but their heart not in heaven, nor with Christ; earthly-minded, earthly-dwellers, spite of the true light and the revelation of glory in the face of Christ.

But this is not all. In Revelation 7 we have another word, and here we have, as is well known, "the great tribulation." I am giving the critical reading; for remember, in cleaving firmly to scripture — and I do not see there is anything else worth contending for in this world — it is a duty to ascertain, wherever a various reading exists, what has the weightiest claims to be received as the true: we have no need to shut our eyes to any representative of the mind of God. In short, the purest state of the text must be sought as well as the

most faithful version. To perpetuate a traditional blunder is not faith, but mere ignorance or obstinate superstition. Therefore I accept, and exhort all my brethren to accept, every help that God affords for the elucidation of His word. To this end every discovery of an ancient Biblical manuscript, every help toward a more accurate version that can be gathered from the study of the languages in which God wrote His word, is most valuable. I do not say that everybody ought to set up for a judge in these matters.

In fact, very few scholars, or even Christian scholars, have this sort of competency. It is easy enough to suggest changes of scripture, and supposed emendations of text and translations. We have all heard of 20,000 corrections collected by a diligent physician. It might be a wholesome check if any competent person dealt with that magazine of misapprehensions, as Bode did with the errors made by Mill and Bengel through trusting the Latin renderings of the old Oriental versions. What a tiny residue would come out from the subjection of the 20,000 to a really critical ordeal! In general you may dismiss at least nineteen out of every twenty supposed corrections of our authorised Bible. They are merely the crude guesses of tyros, the suggestions of such as may be scholars in profane Greek or Latin, but who possessed little or no familiarity with the Bible.

Again, it is monstrous for persons to sit in judgment on such matters, unless they do so as Christians. I deny that genius or scholarship will enable a man to understand aright either the Hebrew or the Greek scriptures. The best of scholars have made the grossest of mistakes here. Take Dr. Richard Bentley. Did not he

and the like commit very painful blunders in scripture? I admit the scholarship of the famous Master of Trinity in his own sphere. He was, no doubt, a man of very unusual power, and of the largest attainments in the remains of Greek and Roman letters; but then, as a rule, no man is at home outside his own business. I do not trust people who speak confidently on what they have not made their own. I value the simplest artisan in his own craft more than the ablest philosopher who prattles about it. No doubt, if a shoemaker were to talk of philosophy, he would not be likely to throw much light on the subject. He might be a genius, undoubtedly, and to this you must give ample weight; but still, in general, one could not expect that men outside their own proper functions would be the most competent to give an opinion of value on matters foreign to them.

On doctrine I hold the opinion of a scholar to weigh about as much as that of a shoemaker. Not only is erudition in itself of no account in spiritual things, but scholarship in one branch does not give competence in another. The Attic nicety, which appreciates Sophocles, may be at fault before the abrupt passes and parentheses of the apostle Paul. But the first of all requisites, even for those familiar with Greek, for understanding the word of God is unfeigned faith in the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the sole power of comprehending and alone gives qualification to judge of divine things; and He dwells only in those who have faith in Christ. At the same time let none suppose that I exclude the use of every aid that can be brought in really and honestly to enable a Christian to read the word of God as closely as possible approaching its original form. It is, to my mind, a positive duty to

welcome and apply every such help, let it come from what quarter it may.

To those who accept this principle there can be no doubt that the true reading here is “They which come out of the great tribulation.” The omission of the article is wrong in the common text, and must be given in English to represent fairly the sense given by the best authorities. It is not always so; but it is needless to say that there are definite means of judging, and there is no question at all about its necessity here. To those who know these matters this is a ruled point, not without the effort of prejudice in some to resist the conclusion, but in vain. “These,” said the elder to John, “are they which come out of the great tribulation.” This is important, because if you read it simply “These are they which came out of great tribulation,” many a Christian might say, “You and I have known great tribulation. This is a choice scripture, and it evidently applies to you and me.” Alas! how often we are misled from the prime source of all mistakes — that is to say, interpreting the Bible by our own feelings, circumstances, and sphere. This is not the way to understand the word of God. You must look at it in connection with Christ, and not with self. Such is the only canon that will conduct a man in safety and light and joy right through the Bible by the grace of God; thus only can one be an intelligent disciple of the Lord Jesus.

Quite different is the way in which persons in general are apt to deal with the Bible; that is, they judge from their own things, and not from the things of Jesus Christ. Connect the word as well as facts with the Lord, and what a difference it makes! There may be Christians so unintelligent as to find in the Bible nothing but

Christians and their enemies; but the man who reads scripture, looking at Christ, not at himself and his church, will say, “Well, there was once a people of Jehovah before the Christian and the church of God; the Lord had Israel then the object of His care, and they broke down utterly. Then He gave imperial authority to the Gentiles, and they turned it against Him, compelling the Jews, under pain of death, to worship their idols, and give up the true God. And now the Lord Jesus, having come, has been rejected by both; and having accomplished redemption, has sent out the gospel and set up the church; and what is the result?” We have before us in scripture the revelation of the end of all, and we have the working of these destructive principles in our own day. To leave room for all is of immense importance. It clears the way for understanding these and other scriptures. The fertile source of mistake is the desire to make all bear upon ourselves.

We have seen the Jewish portion; we have heard the promises to Christians; now we must be introduced to a third party. Nor is there the least reason why we should be in the dark about it; for in the latter half of Revelation 7 we read as follows: “After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power,

and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev. 7:9-14)

How many believers here and elsewhere I can hear asking if this be not a picture of the church. Let me assure you that it certainly is not so. With the utmost desire not to contradict any one flatly, we must feel that there are times when it is much better to be plain and short. I must therefore take the liberty of affirming that demonstrably a Gentile multitude is meant, and not the body of Christ, the church. The proofs are clear and decisive. Every intelligent reader of the book, whatever his view of its interpretation in other respects, agrees in this, that "the elders" and the "living creatures," one or other or both, are the symbol of the church in heaven. How then could one of these elders describe this multitude, if all, elders and Gentile multitude, formed part of the same church? How could the party described and the party describing be the same body? Surely they must set forth a quite distinct thing. The elders were seen long before the multitude.

The context too will make their difference still plainer; and this is not an unimportant key to understand scripture. Never take a passage without examining its context. What is its bearing here? A numbered multitude we first hear of from the twelve tribes of Israel. I know the fondness of many for what they call spiritualising; but it is hard to spiritualise each of the twelve tribes of

Israel; and the whole of these are brought before us distinctly and separately, as if on purpose to set aside such mysticising; for this is its true name and nature — not a spiritual but a mystical use of the scriptures. After the Holy Ghost has shown us the one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed out of the twelve tribes, the prophet then sees an innumerable multitude of Gentiles, distinct from both the elders and the four living creatures. If the elders mean the heavenly redeemed in Revelation 4, 5, I suppose they must mean the same body till the last chapter in which the symbol occurs (Rev. 19). Wherever they appear, do they not mean the same thing?

I here take the lowest ground. Is it not a fair inference that, if a symbol is found in different passages in the same book, it is to be taken in the same sense consistently? That is to say, if the elders are the glorified saints in one passage, they are the same in all passages. How then could this multitude of Gentiles be so, any more than the multitude of Israel? In short, therefore, Rev. 7 shows us a numbered company of Israel, and then a countless crowd of Gentiles, separate from each other as well as from the elders, and characterized as coming out of the great tribulation. There is not the semblance of truth that these Gentiles are composed of the successive generations of God’s people throughout different ages of the world. On the contrary, they are not supposed to be risen but alive; to the prophet’s eye a number numberless, gathered out by grace at a particular epoch, when the great tribulation comes here below. This, long known to a few scholars, is established now conclusively by the critical researches of all competent to speak, no matter what their bias.

And why should it seem incredible, or even strange, that God should begin to deal with Israel as such, again? As to this, there really ought to be no question, if we believe the various scriptures read at the beginning of this discourse. And if God will keep them, why not the Gentiles too? Nay, is it not certain that He means to bless the Gentiles as such? Is it asked what He purposes to do for the church of God? We have already seen about it. Those that keep the word of Christ's patience are promised to be taken out of the hour of trial, and those whose earthliness covers the Lord with their own shame are the persons on whom the severest judgments are destined to come. "The hour of temptation that shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth," does not mean simply Jews or Gentiles, but rather such as have professed the name of the Lord falsely. That true members of Christ's body will be left here below is an idea not only without foundation, but contrary to the clearest principles of truth, and to express statements of scripture. The evil servant and the foolish virgins mean not the true but the false.

And let me add too another point of interest. We find in Rev. 12 one scripture more which gives a cause, and an occasion too, for this fearful time.. All this needs to be duly taken into account. You are aware, no doubt, that the reason why the things of this world constantly appear to gain the victory over the truth, as far as what is bad triumphs, is the power of Satan, the great personal enemy of the Lord. Scripture affirms that the hour approaches when that power is about to be broken (not merely to faith, as ever since the death and resurrection of Christ, but) publicly in the world. Satan, according to the language of Rev. 12, will be cast out of

heaven. From the seventh verse it is thus written, “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

Manifestly this is a state of things at which we are not yet arrived. It would be false doctrine and practically serious to say that such is the fact. A plain reason against it is, that Ephesians 6:12 declares that the conflict in which the Christian is now engaged is with spiritual wickedness in heavenly places, not with flesh and blood. As Israel had to fight with the Canaanites, so our special conflict is with spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies. Anybody who intelligently reads the Greek Testament will know, and even those who can enquire of those who do will hear it confirmed, that the expression ἐπουρανίοις means not merely “high” but “heavenly” places. No matter where you examine elsewhere, it invariably means “heavenly places”; and, in point of fact, it never does bear the sense of “high” simply, nor do I believe it to be possible. Any man who knows the language will hardly deny that “high places” is a slip or an evasion. I suppose our translators did not know what to make of the passage. They may have supposed that it would sound strange to hear of wicked spirits in “heavenly places,” and so they thought to tone it down or to obscure it a little, and so put in “high places.”

However this may have been, it is far from my wish to fasten any unworthy motives on them. They have erred occasionally, but were, many if not all, excellent men

and able scholars, and I believe did their work with fidelity, though with a certain measure of hindrance, especially on the part of the king. We know he was superstitious on some points, and would not allow them to alter ecclesiastical terms which notoriously foster much misconception and prejudice. I do not mean to insinuate that James I. had anything to do with the mistake alluded to in Eph. 6, nor does it particularly matter who it was that suggested or kept it up; but the fact is certain, that we are said by the Holy Spirit to battle “with spiritual wickedness in heavenly places,” as Israel with blood and flesh (that is, their Canaanite enemies).

It is certain then that Satan has an astonishing facility of wiles to hinder Christians from enjoying their proper heavenly privileges; but we know that, subtle as he is, it will all speedily come to an end; and this is in part what is described in Rev. 12. It cannot come to an end as long as we are committed to the conflicts spoken of in Eph. 6. None but Apocalyptic dreamers could sustain such a thesis for an instant. For, observe, what we read here is, that when that crisis comes there will be “a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.” (Rev. 12:10) Has there ever been any time so striking for God’s blessed intervention in the past history of the church that would answer to this? Is it really true that, when Constantine adopted Christianity, salvation came? Surely not. Who is so worldly-minded as to say this? Alas! such things have been said; but, after all, the idea only requires to be viewed in the light of

scripture in order to feel that it is egregious and unfounded. To suppose that the downfall of Satan occurred in the fourth century, or that the coming of salvation was when Christendom began, or any such like scheme, is to draw largely on one's own fancy. Yet sober men, in other respects learned, sensible, and even godly, have put forth such views.

They were right good Protestants withal — a singular fact that Protestants should concede that in the days of many a dark superstition, afterwards embodied in popery, salvation came, and the kingdom of our Lord and the authority of His Christ! But there is no incongruity too astonishing for the minds of men. However this may be, it is added that "The accuser of our brethren is cast down." At this point Satan will have lost the power of calumniating as well as of hindering the people of God. Hence the call to joy — "Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them." It is evident that there are dwellers in heaven then — saints who are no longer found here below on the earth — entirely agreeing with what we have remarked elsewhere. But further: "Woe to the inhabiters of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down to you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." It is the time of great trouble; that is, the time of the unparalleled tribulation that has been already before our thoughts. Thus God will have accomplished His purpose of taking away men to be with Christ in heaven, having put away their sin and given them a nature capable of enjoying His own rest. They dwelt there in spirit when they were on earth; they looked to follow Christ to heaven when they were poor pilgrims here; they waited for Christ longingly, and they are at length to be with Him whom

they loved. After this comes the downfall of Satan's power, and the putting forth of his wrath on earth for a short time. Who can pretend that this vast change has taken place? Surely if there had been a most fearful and unexampled raging of Satan here below, one would think that the world ought to know and feel it. It is a strange theory that such an immense change could have taken place without anybody being the wiser for it, and nobody particularly the worse. Be not deceived. The dread reality is yet to come. Accordingly we read of a tremendous persecution, and the rising up of the two beasts described in Rev. 13.

There is no need to enter more into detail on this subject. I have endeavoured to give a simple and unvarnished view of what the scriptures teach us of the hour of temptation as well as of the tribulation. It has been shown, I trust clearly, that the Jews are to be in the innermost circle of the trouble, though the godly are warned of the Lord to escape from it. Thus our Lord's words have the closest connection with the declaration of the prophet Jeremiah that, though so sorely tried, they are to be delivered; but how is not explained. Daniel mentions the intervention of Michael, but adds no more. Our Lord fully explains. He tells them that, when they see a certain sign, those in Judea must flee: what is that sign? The abomination of desolation. There need be no doubt what this means, according to analogy, a certain idol, the setting up of which in the sanctuary of Jerusalem will be the signal for the infliction of this unprecedented tribulation. An incident of the tribulation, or, at any rate, another element of trouble to man, and especially to Israel on earth, will be Satan's great wrath for a short time on his dejection from

heaven. Antichrist will show himself openly; Satan will work by him, also by the great imperial power of the Roman empire, as he never did before; and God will send men a strong delusion, that they should believe what is false.

As men throughout Christendom will be misled deliberately and wilfully to refuse the truth, God will allow evil to rise up beyond all precedent, and will let Satan have his destructive way, such of His people as are in Judea being saved from complete ruin by instant flight according to the word of the Lord. Jerusalem, therefore, is to be the centre, not merely of the great tribulation, but of the greatest; as being guilty of abandoning law and gospel with Christ Himself, always resisting the Holy Ghost, as their fathers did, so shall fall there such retribution as never was. But the Gentiles, guilty in their measure, are not to escape the storm; they may not endure the worst of it, but they must taste the bitter fruit of their doings in “the great tribulation” of Rev. 7, whatever may be the grace of God in bringing out of it a countless throng to enjoy His tabernacle over them during the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus.

Thus God will cause a great and numberless crowd of Gentiles to come out of that tribulation as truly as He will save the godly Jews; but observe, not a word is said about the church in either. How are we to account for a silence otherwise so strange if the church were really there? If God bound Himself to save Jacob; if He is pledged to bring out a multitude of Gentiles, why not a word about the church? Nay, rather, how could He speak of His church then on earth; for you are aware that in the church there is neither Jew nor Gentile. One great

feature of the church is the blotting out of such distinctions, and the formation of one new man, which is neither. Thus, whereas we were Jews or Gentiles before, we have put all this off, and as many as are baptised into Christ have put on Christ. We are baptised into one body — the body of Christ — such is the inspired description of the Christian; so that we who receive the Holy Ghost now abandon our Gentilism or our Judaism, as the case may be. Thus the key is given clearly and at once. The elders will have been — at a moment kept silent in the Apocalypse — translated to heaven, and they are seen there before the trouble comes, not only before the fury of the tribulation bursts, but before the preliminary judgments of God on earlier evils, and the efforts of the devil to ensnare the saints by deceit, and draw them into the final apostasy.

As to this it seems to me that the general bearing of the word of God is abundantly plain, without pretending of course, to enter into every minute point. We are only learners; and a great joy it is to learn of God and in His own way. May the Lord bless the testimony of His truth, and give every Christian to have not the least anxiety, but to cherish perfect confidence in His word and Spirit! The Thessalonians were troubled by a misuse of prophecy. Mischievous men, who knew not at all the grace of God, troubled and shook their souls by a false apprehension of the day of the Lord — the day of judgment for living men on the earth. It is a total mistake to suppose that their delusion sprang from a too eager or enthusiastic hope of the coming of Christ. The mischief was, that their hope had been displaced and practically annulled by terror from false doctrine about the day. Excited hope was not the delusion, but dread, as

if the day of the Lord was present. It was not wrong to believe that the day was at hand; but this is not what the false teachers insinuated, nor what the apostle reproves. Our English version, unfortunately, is exceedingly to be regretted here; and I appeal to every scholar with an unbiassed mind whether ἐνέστηχε does not mean “is present” (contrasted often with merely being “at hand,” and never really admitting of such a sense). They falsely taught, then, that the day of the Lord was actually come; and this was the delusion (for which they dared to allege a pretended letter of the apostle) that distressed the Thessalonian believers. 2 Thessalonians 2 dissipates the notion.

It is another instance of what our translators occasionally did. They could not make sense of the passage according to the plain meaning of the word, and so they ventured to do what no man ought to do; they gave up the real meaning of Scripture, and substituted another meaning, which they thought would make better sense, and must have been intended. Nobody is at liberty so to deal with God’s word: it is not translating, but interpreting. Beloved friends, let us cleave to scripture, whether we understand it or not. If we do not, let us frankly confess our ignorance, but faithfully adhere to the words before us. What the Thessalonians were drawn into was the idea that the day of the Lord had already come. The false teachers seem to have construed the persecutions under which they were suffering as a proof that the day of the Lord was actually there. This the apostle treats as a falsehood, and the more as they claimed his authority for it. No one ought to listen to these men, nor were they to be troubled about such a rumour. He beseeches them, by their

blessed hope of being gathered to the Lord at His coming, not to be frightened by the cry that the day was come.

Why indeed should a Christian be alarmed about anything? He is entitled to look death in the face, and to have boldness in the day of judgment, as John expressly says. And do you think that a man who can honestly and according to the truth and will of God thus contemplate the most solemn certainties of the eternal future should be justly alarmed at anything here below? A Jew or a Gentile ought to dread the tribulation if he faces the revelation of God about it ever so briefly; for the tribulation will be a retributive dealing with the unfaithfulness of the world, whether Jews or Gentiles, and especially of those who abuse the name of the Lord. But for this very reason it does not apply to the Christian at all. This is the moral truth of the case, and therefore I may well press it on all who have not duly weighed scripture as to it. I entreat you to cleave to the Lord's name and to His word. Value every help, and seek the best you can. If danger menaced your body, I daresay you would have recourse to those who, as you believe, could do you most good: I do not think you ought to do less, if the question is of your soul and God's own truth and glory.

May God bless you who believe, and give you hearts truly and humbly to cleave to Him and to the word of His grace, assured that He will exempt, according to His own word, those that keep the word of Christ's patience, and that He will also in the darkest days preserve Jews and Gentiles according to His word through the awful judgments that are coming upon the world.

W. K.

The Bride, the Lamb's Wife - Rev. 19 - 22

In the O.T. the literal Babylon on the plain of Shinar appears in contrast with Jerusalem. In the N.T. we hear of a still more portentous Babylon on seven mountains, the great Harlot on whose forehead was written “mystery,” which is in no way said or true of the Chaldeans’ pride. No principle is more unintelligent and unfounded than to assume that the Revelation, in borrowing names of persons, places, or other objects from the ancient oracles, is bound to the letter and takes no larger views. To confound the new things with the old in that twofold treasure is to prove oneself a scribe un-instructed to the kingdom of the heavens. For in the new things, whatever the allusion to the old, the sphere is indefinitely widened, and the character deepened, as much as heavenly associations rise above earthly. To identify them, as do the pseudo-literalists, is to lose the special light of the N.T., the gravest, the highest, the most precious communications from God, whatever the subject-matter. It is to surrender the mind of Christ; and, what is more, out of the vain conceit of an unreal originality, in rejection of a testimony which men have not the spirituality to appreciate. Is it not sad when saints decline to opposing the word and the Spirit of God?

What can be more certain in its kind than that the glorified church is the Lamb’s wife? Not less so is the World-church that sits on (or, by) many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed fornication, and she intoxicated the dwellers on the earth with the wine of

her fornication. She was seen sitting on the scarlet Beast full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns, the peculiar and unmistakeable symbol of the Roman Empire. How absurd to fancy an ephemeral revival of the city of Bel in the east, even if God had not said of it while yet the golden city, It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation! In the fullest sense Rome alone has written on her brow, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS (idols) OF THE EARTH. She indeed rode the Western Beast, she as none other was drunk with the blood of the saints, and, to make it quite plain, with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: an object of great marvel to the prophet, considering her pretensions, which are preposterously impossible of a future Chaldean city. “Mystery” can readily apply to a corrupt Christian system, which would be a hard saying of a city in the east revived through commerce.

To suppose such a revival of Babylon on the plain of Shinar is indeed a heedless misreading of the Revelation. The relation of the Apocalyptic Babylon to the scarlet Beast ought itself to have preserved every believing reader from such a mistake. For that Beast can be no other than the Western Empire, which the guilty Woman of Rome rides for an indefinite term, haughty and cruel beyond example, and idolatrous. But at the end the Beast and his satellite horns shall hate the Harlot and desolate her, eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. This is the doom of Rome only: strong is the Lord God that judges her. The East will according to scripture have a wholly different lot, ranged under the king of the north of Daniel (or the Assyrian of the older prophets),

and finally under Gog when Israel shall be dwelling peacefully in the land. It is absurd, for anyone familiar with the prophets, to confound the Western powers with those of the East, being wholly opposed in policy. The AntiChrist in the land, who will then be in alliance with the Beast, brings all into collision, when the Lord judges each in power and supersedes all by His everlasting kingdom, long promised by the prophets.

The introduction of the Harlot-church in Rev. 17:1 expressly and instructively answers to that of the Bride, the Lamb's wife, in Rev, 21:9, who is identified with the holy Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. How any sober man, I say not spiritual, could conceive this applicable to the earthly Jerusalem, no matter how beautiful or blessed in the Millennium, passes comprehension. Does it not simply show the blinding power of an idea in contempt of the clearest scripture? The just and true inference from God's word is, that it is essentially neither of man nor of the earth like the Palestinian Jerusalem, but heavenly and divine and so having the glory of God, and described in figures altogether and purposely beyond the first creation, which will be ransacked to clothe the earthly metropolis with riches and beauty. Think of jasper clear as crystal, gold transparent as glass, and each gate of "one pearl!" It is all above nature; whereas earthly Jerusalem will be founded and built up with the best things of the earth. We must not think of material beauty in the heavenly city; it is a symbolic description.

This is confirmed in a simple yet important way by the opening scene of Rev. 19 where heaven rejoices over God's judgment of the great Harlot. It is immediately followed by a yet mightier outburst of joyful praise. The

time came for the marriage of the Lamb, and His wife made herself ready; while others share the feast in heaven as the blessed guests at that scene of divine love and glory, which even John left undescribed, as Paul did that of our translation at Christ's coming in 1 Thess. 4:17. Can there be a notion more incongruous and inept than to lower this wondrous heavenly vision to earthly Jerusalem? Yet so it must be if such is the meaning of the city in Rev. 21:3, and 9.

But we are told that there are just "seven signs" that this is not the church. Let us hear, though seven thousand "signs" could not set aside the irresistible force of chaps. 19, 21, and 22.

(1) Christ is described as "the Lamb;" and this is called an essentially Jewish title, referring to the passover, and the daily sacrifice. The fact is that John's Gospel 1:20, 36 and 1 Peter 1:19 use the different word ἀμνός, the Revelation ἀρνίον in pointed contrast with θηρίον. But in no case is there a limited or Jewish horizon. What can refute this contracted view more flatly than the Baptist's words, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world?" So Peter lifts the believing remnant he addresses wholly above the nation and the earth and time itself, by pointing to Christ foreknown before the world's foundation. So does the earth-rejected "Lamb" of the Apocalypse (glorified on high while the Jews have lost their place and their nation) point to dealings of judgment far wider than the Jews, and to heavenly and earthly glories far transcending those secured to Israel according to O.T. prophecy. The true deduction is therefore quite adverse.

(2) The company is described as the Bride, the Lamb's wife. This sign again is no less invalid. For, though a wife is an O.T. figure, not so is the wife "of the Lamb," which the context states to be "of heaven," in the most evident distinction from the earthly Jerusalem, "the beloved city" of Rev. 20:9. Jerusalem is authoritatively declared to be "the city of the great King"; it is a great honour that He will reign over it as nowhere else here below. But the church is the Bride, the Lamb's wife, who, suffering with Him on earth, shall be glorified with Him on high. To confound these relationships is to lose the key to their distinctive force as revealed in scripture.

(3) It is "a city," a holy city, which John is shown. This is thought to exclude the church, Christ's body. But God declares it to be the Bride, the Lamb's wife, which we have learnt to be the church, and nothing else. It is not even the city wherein the Bride dwells. The holy city is declared authoritatively to be the Bride; and scripture cannot be broken. It is vain to fly to Heb. 12:22. The misquotation and the perversion are only fresh proofs of error, not without prejudice. "We are come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," is a daring change from God's word to man's will. "And" is left out after "Zion," and before "the city." But it is essential for marking each new object. Zion is the highest point, as it were, on earth; then follows what is above it, "a living God's city, heavenly Jerusalem." This was Abraham's hope, the seat on high of the saints who shared his faith (cf. Heb. 11:13-16).

But it was not the "church of first-born ones, enrolled in heaven," which is another object designated by the "and," though the A. and R. Vv. are here as dull as the commentators, swayed by tradition against the only sure

word of God. The bride is neither Israel nor Jerusalem, but “new Jerusalem,” which a tyro ought to distinguish. And how strange not to see that the heavenly city in Rev. 21 has “no temple!” whereas earthly Jerusalem will have the temple so minutely predicted in Ezek. 40-48. Can nothing clear such dim eyes? It may be added that “mother of us all” is a known bad reading, itself the parent of a great deal of bad theology ancient and modern.

(4) The city comes down out of heaven from God. How does this sign identify it with the earthly city? How does it clash with its heavenly character and glory? It is a necessary part of God’s counsel for heading up all things heavenly and earthly in Christ (Eph. 1:10) in Whom we also are allotted inheritance. We reign with Him, as He is Head to the church over all things. It is only when the new heaven comes that the new Jerusalem lights on the new earth in the eternal state, when the kingdom is given up to Him Who is God and Father. Earthly land, people, and city are no more then: God’s tabernacle is with men.

(5) The city had “a wall great and high” (12), the figure of its perfect security. Think what the mind must be that confounds this with Eph. 2:14, though, even so, obliged to blow hot and cold on it!

(6) The gates with the names of Israel’s twelve tribes are next alleged. But the twelve angels might have guarded from such a blunder, and also (7) the twelve apostles of the Lamb. For God evidently in one way or another connects with the holy city associations of government, whether angelic, Jewish, or apostolic. It is the heavenly seat of the kingdom; and it will display in that day, what

is even now ours to say in faith, that “all things are ours.” Paul was not given to so describe the church’s glory, but speaks of her as the heavenly Eve of the heavenly and last Adam. John, while expressly identifying the Bride, the Lamb’s wife, with the new Jerusalem, develops here only the city side. It was needless for him to dwell on what O.T. prophecy so fully reveals, the blessedness of Israel in that day. It was of interest to mark, that the kings and the nations pay the most distinct homage to the glorified church, as they will also to the earthly city and people of God. The context requires “unto,” not “into,” for which the Greek had but one and the same word. But it ought to be familiar to all that the true reading is “the nations,” omitting “of them that are saved,” which is spurious and almost nonsensical.

Having dismissed the seven “signs” which are no signs, let me add that Rev. 22 is as clearly opposed, as we have seen its predecessors to be against the earthly view of the Bride, the Lamb’s wife. “The Spirit and the bride say, Come.” Such is the constant aspiration and cry of the church as led by the Holy Spirit Who dwells in her. But it will never be the case with the earthly bride. For she will receive that great gift of the outpoured Spirit when the Lord will have appeared to her everlasting joy; and after that it will be too late to say, Come. It is ours in the power of the present Spirit to say, Come, while He is absent on high.

W. K.

The Elders in Heaven - Rev. 4, 5:1-10

There is a plain and simple fact which ought to strike any attentive reader of the Revelation: — the churches are no longer in view after Revelation 3 as subsisting and the province of the dealings of the Lord here below. I do not say that they have ceased absolutely to exist; but they are not before the Lord as the objects of His care or even chastening. They are nowhere taken account of after the seer's prophetic visions begin. They are alluded to in the concluding observations of the book, Revelation 22, when the whole course of the prophecy is closed, and the Spirit of God is merely giving, as a final exhortation, the use to be made of the book. But the fact that claims our consideration is, that from the beginning of the fourth chapter we have no longer the churches brought before us as subsisting on earth, and under the disciplinary action of the Lord.

For this reason, as well as for many others of a detailed kind which have acted on the minds of children and servants of God from early days, I have no doubt whatever that the seven churches have a mystic as well as a literal aspect. I believe that the Lord Jesus, in short, chose those seven particular assemblies in the province of Asia, because there were circumstances in them which at that time called for His particular notice. But this is not all. Along with this it was so ordered that His letters to the angels of the churches on their state should be the occasion of giving a prolonged special instruction as long as the church of God was to be the object of His dealing here below. That is, the epistles to the churches had a past historical application in St.

John's days; and from that epoch they were intended also to give a kind of prophetic outline of the chief salient points in the course of the church as long as it should be left in this world.

Thus Ephesus shows us the declension from first love which led the Lord to threaten the removal of the candlestick.

In Smyrna we can plainly see persecution from the heathen powers, but along with this the rising up of Judaism formed as a systematic body in the Christian church. It is at this point that we have the "synagogue of Satan" — those who say they are Jews and are not, but a synagogue of Satan. In the days of Paul individuals had been always endeavouring to drag the church of God back into ordinances, or other misuses of the law; but now it was become a compactly framed system — the greatest internal enemy the church of God ever yet had to contend against. Other things there were, some grosser and some subtler. Antichrist, too, had gone out from the family of God; but I am speaking now of that which has often deceived saints. Even as a Barnabas and a Peter (we are informed for our solemn warning) were drawn away at the beginning, so much-more, during the course of the church, godly and orthodox persons have been constantly in danger on this side.

In Pergamos we behold the church where Satan's throne is, not persecuted but exalted, acquiring power and influence under the patronage of the world.

Next we have Thyatira with the portentous figure of Jezebel, that murderous queen and false prophetess, the most relentless slaughterer of the saints of God in all ages. It does not require much of the prophetic ken to

understand where the reality that answers to the picture is found. Thus you see it is no longer simply Balaam, or the teaching for hire, but Jezebel, an incomparably more advanced system of evil, and accordingly children born to her. It becomes a perpetuated race of iniquity in that which bears the name of the assembly of God here below.

After this comes Sardis, where there are no longer horrors of the kind that were contemplated under the preceding; yet, while there is profession of the truth, the Lord tells them that their works were not found perfect before His God. Worldliness, accordingly, is the great snare that is found here. It is not simply the patronage of the world, nor is it only, nor so much, the endeavour to govern the world under the name of the church (this was Jezebel); but now they boast of orthodoxy and correct morals, but, nevertheless, are no better than a name to live with death working largely.

Then we find Philadelphia, which I do not doubt has found its counterpart in the amazing liberty that the Lord has given for the spread of the Bible; in the active going forth of the gospel far and wide; in the recall of Christians, not only to the love of the brotherhood, but to their own proper portion, to which their blessed relationship with the Lord entitles them, and this in the revived prospect of the speedy return of the Lord Jesus.

Lastly there comes Laodicea, a picture of indifferentism, after truth had been largely propagated and known, — but where conscience altogether fails, where the one thought is the people of God and their rights, but alas! without heart for the glory of God. It is merely man under a new form; not man in the world; but man

bearing the name of Christ, obliterating in his self-complacency all just thought and feeling for the glory of Christ; — a state accordingly of great boastfulness and pretension, — a state of satisfaction with the progress that has been made, and the largest expectation of that which is to be done. But the Lord counts it all lukewarmness, that indifference which, in His judgment, is more offensive and contrary to His mind than if one were honestly led away by error or evil for a time. It is a heart for nothing; it is lukewarmness to everything, even to Christ Himself. So it is the condition which is above all things loathsome to the Lord, and which He resents; so that He pronounces not merely the removal of the candlestick, but the spueing it out of His mouth, as most nauseous to Him.

Solemn to say, it is here that the curtain drops upon the churches here below. We hear no more about them, save only that in the conclusion, as already said, there is a call to hear the book in general. But as a history under the mysterious protracted form of the seven golden candlesticks and the Lord's messages to their angels — a kind of prophetic history of the church as a whole from that epoch till He comes, "the things that are," — there is nothing more to add.

The scene therein is changed. A door is seen by the prophet opened in heaven, not yet for the Lord Jesus, followed by His saintly hosts, to come out of heaven (which remains for a later date), but for John to go up and see in the Spirit. "After this I looked, and, behold, a door opened in heaven." It is not for drawing near into the holiest by faith: the Spirit of God never calls this the opening of a door. In Hebrews 10 the veil is shown to be rent, and the believer even now by faith draws near

through the value of the blood of Christ. But here we have the ordinary figure of that by which one enters in; and accordingly, lest there should be any doubt about the meaning, the first voice which the prophet heard was, as it were, of a trumpet talking with him, and saying, “Come up hither, and I will show thee” — not exactly “things which must be hereafter,” as if it were left vague and distantly future, but “the things which must be after these.” Simple as the change just suggested is — and I apprehend there is no question of the correctness of it; I do not think any unbiassed person familiar with the language would doubt it — the importance of it is this, that it binds what is to follow in the book with the termination of the history of the seven churches. If it meant “hereafter” in a loose general way, you might suppose the seven churches terminated a possibly long interval, and then “things which must be hereafter;” but if we have the seven churches or “things that are,” and then “the things which must be after these,” there is a close link formed between the end of the church’s state and the prophetic visions following as immediately consequent.

Now this will prove of some importance, though I do not wish to press the thought beyond that which would commend itself to any simple and unprejudiced mind But what man of reflection can avoid seeing that the very next fact brought before us after Rev. 2, 3 is not churches on earth in any shape, but the prophet entering in by the open door in heaven? The immediate object, of course, was for the vision of that which he had to write yet further, the power of the Holy Ghost giving him to behold what was seen in or from heaven and about to be on earth. And what he sees there first of all

was a throne set, and One sitting on the throne. It was the throne of God on high. It is not said to be a golden throne, as in the most holy place, whether of the tabernacle or of the temple. Such was the propitiatory seat of gold where blood was sprinkled as a means for men to draw near through sacrifice, priesthood maintaining consistency with it spite of failure. But this is in no way the object of the throne in Rev. 4. The golden throne, with atoning blood upon and before it, is one of grace; it is the expression of what God can be and is to man, where grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. The throne that was now seen set in heaven was judicial, not the witness of divine grace, though it be always, no doubt, the throne of divine majesty.

“He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone.” The jasper, as we know, is used as symbolic of the glory of God in connection with the heavenly state. In Rev. 21 it is said, “He carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone.” I consider therefore that the jasper is used here, and no doubt the sardius also, as symbolic of God’s glory, as far as it could be manifested to the creature. There is a glory of God that is entirely above creature contemplation; there is a glory which may become visible to the creature. God has at various times permitted that His glory should shine on men, even on earth; but more so when rapt in the Holy Ghost, into His presence above. At the same time, I say again, it is not, of course, the essential glory of God “to which no man can approach,” but as far as God is

pleased to make it visible to the creature. It is His glory in government, in the maintenance of good against evil by power.

Round about the throne was seen a rainbow, the sign of God's beneficence to the earth, and at the same time the pledge of a limit put to judgment; but it is not as ordinarily seen among men. (Gen. 9) It recalled that covenant with the earth; but there is no question of rain here, as even in Ezekiel 1:28. It is simply the divine idea It is not the circumstances of its use or application, but the grand truth that was represented there — the faithful sign of God's covenant with the creature. Hence it was shown in a form which was particularly refreshing to the eye; it was "in sight like unto an emerald."

"And round about the throne were four and twenty — not merely seats, but — "thrones." Every throne is a seat, but every seat is not a throne. These were not bare seats, but thrones for those on whom royalty was conferred It was, no doubt, a heavenly kind of royalty; but still the thrones were for certain to fill.

This is a remarkable feature. We never hear of angels seated on thrones. Angels never govern; they were made not to reign but to be servants. They never rise above the character of service. Man was made to rule, though, of course, in subjection to God. Even the first man was made to govern. When God made him He said, "Let them have dominion." It was not merely to do His will. As servants, all are necessarily bound to do the will of God; and all the blessedness of dominion, as of everything else also, depends on its being the will of God. No male governs aright that will not serve. No man will reign righteously that has not a just view of what

obedience is to one that is above him. How can he possibly impress the necessity of subjection upon those that are below him? But then, when God made the first man, he was not looking merely at Adam, or the race: the Second Man, the last Adam, was before His mind. Other men were not worth counting. One man, the first man, was enough to comprehend all the Adam race. That one brought, oh! what ruin upon all that followed him. And God passes quickly from the ruin, and hastens to the day when the Second Man appears, the Lord from heaven; and that man is the last Adam. There is no improvement upon Him; there is no progress after Him. The Second Man is the last Adam; and He is the one that is to govern — the destined Ruler of all, God alone excepted. For you must remember we speak here of His reign as man; and a wonderful thought it is, that every creature of God will be put under the God-exalted man — the man that never exalted Himself, the man who first showed His special and wondrous glory, not by the great deeds He did, but in obedience. Others might do exploits. His servants were to do greater works than He did. But there was one thing in which no servant approached Him — the last thing that you might expect in a divine person; but in a divine person who was a man obedience was the moral perfection of the place He took. Such is the one for whom the kingdom is reserved. He justly takes the throne. He is set, according to God's glory, over all the works of His hands; not, I repeat, simply as God, though He was God from all eternity, and never could cease to be. But He acquired, as man, universal dominion; and He acquired it, not simply by doing the will of God: had He taken it on the ground of what He did, He had taken it alone. He alone deserved it — but He took it, as we shall find, on a far deeper and

infinitely more blessed ground — the ground of redemption; and thus others are associated with Him. For that redemption was not for Himself, but for us; and it is on this footing alone that He could have the children of God associated with Him, by redemption, in that glorious kingdom for which He waits, and for which we ought to be waiting.

Here, accordingly, we find round the throne of God twenty-four thrones. What is the allusion in the number "twenty-four"? Numbers in scripture are never without meaning. Do not listen to the men that tell you it merely means a greater or a smaller number, that it is merely a sort of poetic figure. Why even you do not use language so capriciously as that! When you say twenty-four, you do not mean a mere random number, though you are certainly far from the deep wisdom of God in its symbolic use. But if you are a sensible man, you have some sensible idea. Certainly God will never be below man in the expression of His mind. Now, "twenty-four" is used in scripture; and, as far as I know, the only point with which we can compare our number was when the king divided the priests into so many courses, of which courses there were chief priests. I do not merely mean the high priest: there was but one in such a position. As there was only one among the earthly people, so there is only one for the heavenly. But here we are speaking of the creature, and it is notorious that there were chiefs of each course of priesthood; and as there were twenty-four courses of priests, so also with the singers. It was connected therefore, you will observe, with the ordering and arranging of the priestly service of God. Now this, I have no doubt, is the allusion here.

These twenty-four thrones were not empty. “Upon the thrones I saw four and twenty elders sitting” What is the idea conveyed by the term, “elders”? Clearly the possession of wisdom — in this case, of course, heavenly wisdom. The elders were seen round God’s throne, sitting on thrones, “clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.” This is another point which separates them, but at the same time assuredly confirms what has been already remarked of their separation from angels — from the highest beings of a spiritual sort suited to heaven — the only inhabitants indigenous to heaven, if one may so say.

The elders had never been seen there before. Visions of heaven have past before us in the Old Testament: why were no elders seen then? Why was there no such group of surrounding thrones? The apostle Paul was caught up to heaven, but not a word about elders in heaven then: why now? Surely there were the spirits of the blest in heaven; but spirits are never said to be enthroned; spirits are nowhere in Scripture described as glorified. They are with Christ; they are in paradise; but they are never spoken of as already crowned. The crown is always represented as a future glory. Why so? Because God does not mean to bring any of His people into the full result of heavenly blessedness until He brings them all in. The same moment is destined for the heavenly gathering together of all saints changed into the likeness of Christ. It matters not at what time they lived or died, or if they survived till He comes. I speak, of course, now, of heavenly saints — of those that are to be above. I do not at all exclude the fact that God afterwards begins to form a people upon earth; but I say that those who are destined for the same common

heavenly blessedness are caught up together, and that the point of time when they are caught up — the turning-point on which their translation to heaven depends — is the presence of the Lord Jesus for them.

Proofs abound. “We beseech you, brethren, by the presence (or coming) of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him.” Any scholar knows that the presence of our Lord Jesus, and the gathering together of the saints to Him, are here represented in a remarkable manner as one combined idea. There is only one article, which therefore acts as a kind of bracket, and binds together the two thoughts. That is to say, the gathering of the saints is not before the presence of the Lord, nor is it left for a separate act after He comes to meet them. The force is, that the presence of the Lord at once gathers all the saints: whether the dead, by raising them; or the living, by changing them into His glorious likeness.

The result is apparent now. Here they are seen on high. Here they are found in the presence of God in heaven; and they are there enthroned, and crowned with “crowns of gold.” They had practically manifested righteousness; but divine righteousness alone had brought them there and thus dealt with them. It is not that they lacked the witness of righteousness in their ways and daily conversation on earth, or that they were without the answer to it now in heaven; for they are seen also to be clothed in white raiment — a full acknowledgment of saintly righteousness, as the gold is of God’s righteousness. The moment you get righteousnesses, you get differences among the children of God. It is known afterwards, from Rev. 19, where the white linen is explained to be the righteousnesses of

saints. That is, each has a righteousness which divine grace has produced in them and by them, and this is recognised above. It is a falsehood that God does not own that which His Spirit has produced here; but it is a still more dishonouring and destructive falsehood to suppose that the righteousness of the saints could bring any to God. The only righteousness that could fit a sinner before Him in heaven is the righteousness of God, founded on the Lord Jesus and His infinite redemption. But then, although grace works through righteousness in the redemption that is by Christ Jesus, full room is left for whatever the Spirit of God may have wrought in and by the children of God. Thus all truth is kept unimpaired. The people that deny the righteousness of the saints are wrong; and the people that deny the righteousness of God are still more fatally wrong. The fact is, that you will find in this, as in all other controversies about scripture, that there is a great deal of truth apt to be sometimes forgotten on both sides. I am alluding, not to anything particular of late years, but to the invariable course of controversies — no matter what the occasion may have been — in Christendom.

In this case then the twenty-four elders on thrones are for the first time seen in the presence of God. Scripture emphatically marks this. Indeed it is clearly the grand distinctive feature that caught the eye of the prophet, next to the throne of God Himself. There were thrones - associated and subordinate — no doubt; but still there were thrones around the great central throne of God; and those seated on them embrace in the most distinct manner the heads of the heavenly priesthood. I say the heads for this reason; that after these saints are shown us as elders crowned and enthroned in heaven, we find

the clearest reference to others that were about to be kings and priests. That is, we find certain persons who suffer and are glorified after this. The very last words that I read today show another body of saints. It is said there, “Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed [us] to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made them unto our God kings and priests; and they shall reign,” etc. This is the critical reading. I have bracketed a disputed word, and changed where there is no doubt. And where, let me ask, is the reverence of cleaving to a reading that is undoubtedly an innovation? I hold, with due consideration of the context, to more ancient authorities. Who will deny that the nearer you get to the source, the better the reading as a rule? Of old as now many mistakes were made in copying. The scribes that followed the apostles were not inspired any more than printers or editors in modern times. We have therefore to examine everything; and the only sound principle in these matters is to look at all the evidence, and thence to form the result.

Now, I am of opinion that both external and internal evidence would lead a competent judge to the conclusion that the word “us” should be absent from the ninth verse. It would seem probable that copyists inserted ἡμᾶς (“us”) there — not that this is at all necessary or peculiar to any views I hold.1 The most competent enquirers who have no settled interpretation of the book or schemes opposed to mine, agree in omitting it. Thus the most famous editor of the day holds it — the Lutheran Tischendorf. Another excellent scholar, who was when living rather more of a

rationalist, holds the same thing — I allude to Lachmann. Again, Dean Alford, of this country, and many more, accept the same reading, agreeing as far as this is concerned. I refer to these various well-known names openly, that none may allow the groundless thought that there is anything peculiar or individual in this judgment. These matters are the common heritage of the church of God; they rest on facts that cannot be gainsaid by anybody except the ignorant.

There is another point far clearer, and, it may be boldly said, indisputable. Any one who knows anything about the sacred text must be aware that in verse 10 “them” and “they” should take the place of “us” and “we.” I do not deny that this is a considerable change of sense; but the evidence is so overwhelming that no one who respects the witnesses God’s providence has preserved can hesitate. The sense resulting is excellent, save in the retaining of “us” in the verse before, which would present a harsh and unprecedented change of persons, which nobody, as far as I know, pretends to understand or account for. Here, therefore, one ought to speak with still greater assurance than as to verse 9; though I believe that the change required in verse 10 makes verse 9 uncorrected to be hardly intelligible, and adds much internal force to the few witnesses for its correction. The tenth verse would run thus: “And made them to our God kings and priests: and they shall reign over the earth.” A distinct party is in question from those who are singing. The elders, and I suppose also the living creatures, are singing of others. They celebrate the worthiness of the Lamb that was slain and brought to God by His blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, etc. Whether the word

“us” should or should not be in verse 9 is not the point on which we are now reasoning. Certainly there is no room for doubt as to the tenth verse — “and made them,” not “us” — unquestionably not “us.” The Lamb “made them [that is, some others previously described or at least alluded to] unto our God kings and priests: and they shall reign over the earth.”

The importance of this, the true text, is very great, because it shows that besides the twenty-four elders who have this glorious and heavenly place as chiefs of heavenly priesthood, there are others bought by His blood who, although not in the place of such exalted dignity, either now or at any later time put among the twenty-four elders, are celebrated as made kings and priests, and shall reign over the earth. Thus they are not only to be spared during the judgments that follow, but they are even to share as royal priests in the great millennial kingdom of our Lord Jesus. Nothing can be simpler and surer than this, which is conclusively established by Rev. 20:4, where the sitters on the thrones are the first class, corresponding to the elders (i. a. the Bride, and those called to the marriage supper); then the early sufferers during the seals (after the elders were seen in heaven); and, thirdly, the latest sufferers under the beast in the last efforts of the Antichrist. All share the millennial reign with Christ. The assumption, therefore, that the only persons who will be found in heaven and reign with Christ are these chiefs of heavenly priesthood, is an evident mistake. Saints in a somewhat different position otherwise are to reign with Christ as well as the elders. The twenty-four, when they are seen in heaven, sing of the grace that the Lord was showing, not to themselves, but to others, and this not

merely in making them blessed under His reign on the earth, but with Him and them to reign over it.

By the way it may be just observed that the rendering to "reign on the earth" is also erroneous. When the verb "to reign" is put along with the preposition ἐπὶ, it invariably means the sphere of the reigning and not the place where those who reign dwell. There is another word (ἐν) that is used invariably for the latter idea.

Scripture is really the most exact book in the world, it matters not what author you select for a comparison with it. If you take the finest effort of Attic Greek, it will be found that there is an accuracy about Biblical language, when people once get into its spirit and understand it, which is beyond Plato, Sophocles, Thucydides, Demosthenes, or any other master of that refined and versatile tongue. Do you allege the solecisms of New Testament Greek? They are far less numerous than pettifogging, combined with ignorance of the truth, used to affirm. But let me tell you that even those authors are not free from words, turns of phrase, and constructions which offend against rule, not only bold rhetorical terms, but structures of sentence that will not bear strict analysis. For instance, it is a fact, although it may seem somewhat odd to many, that the most celebrated of the classics not infrequently make bad grammar in the best of their few extant compositions. It is not insinuated that they did not know it was unusual; they wrote as they did because it added energy to the style. It is only dull men who occupy themselves in fiddling about grammar, and think that there must be always an adherence to technical rules of common language and every-day speech; but the best writers defy such conventionalities whenever it is

necessary to give emphasis to what they wish to communicate.

It is not otherwise in the word of God. There is no doubt in scripture, as elsewhere, an occasional departure from the strict rules of ordinary syntax. Let nobody by this suppose my meaning is that it is of no importance to know how to use human speech — our own as well as the language that God used especially, or any other tongue we may be acquainted with. But it needs to be borne in mind, at the same time, that there is for the Spirit an energy of truth, as well as rhetorical skill among men, which does not hesitate to set at nought a mere grammatical point for some higher end. This falls in with what is claimed for the word of God — the most perfect form of revealing to men that which God would convey to him. Hence it is, that what some are quick to count blots or blemishes of style are all sanctioned and intended by God's Spirit; and that what sounds at first abrupt, harsh, or strange, spite of that peculiarity whatever it may be, conveys the idea more justly than anything else could. Yet, claiming all this for the word of God and for every line of it, we must not go beyond our text, but hold that the writers only used what can be proved by the best evidence of every kind, external as well as internal, to be the very words of the Holy Ghost.

In this case, then, we have the four and twenty elders round the throne, and besides, as already said, the intimation in the next chapter that others from all quarters are not only to be saved but to reign with Christ over the earth as well as themselves. This is of the highest interest. It shows us plainly that we must not adhere to those systems of doctrine that never can bear an infringement of a view that is held popularly. For

instance, perhaps we have all been brought up in the notion that all the children of God, in all ages, compose the church of God. Now it will be found on closer research that this is not supported by the word of God. While fully granting the pre-eminent place in glory to the church, scripture shows there are others to be blessed in heaven as well as on earth who are not included in that particular company. And this is proved, not only by the prophetic word, such as this, but by the plainest doctrinal teaching of God. Take for instance Heb. 12, or again Heb. 11. In the end of the latter chapter we are told that God had “provided some better thing for us, that they [the Old Testament saints] without us should not be made perfect.” Here you have clearly a distinction between them and us, as those who sing differ from those sung of in Rev. 5. The nature of that distinction is another matter. We may be more or less exact in our appreciation of the difference, but differences there are, past, present, and future, expressly laid down by the word of God. Take again the next chapter, where it is said that we “are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem;” and more than this, “an innumerable company of angels;” then “God the judge of all;” then the church of the firstborn.” It is impossible fairly to overlook a distinction here drawn (to speak of no more) between “the spirits of the just made perfect” and “the church of the firstborn.” You have clearly the assembly of the heirs or firstborn — who are viewed elsewhere as the one body; and you have the spirits of just men made perfect — another company quite distinct. This is enough to show that the word of God does distinguish where a great many excellent people confuse.

I do not pretend to go into all at once, but I am bound to produce from elsewhere support and illustration of that which is before me in the chapters we are now considering. Let it suffice to say then that the twenty-four elders are beyond doubt in a singular and conspicuous place of blessedness — saints glorified in the presence of God. Yet it is clear that, when there, they anticipate others who are to reign with Christ as well as they. These others are so much the more important, because the great object of the book of the Apocalypse is to show us the destiny, and the circumstances through which they pass in order to arrive at that destiny, of these other saints.

Let us, however, go on with our chapter. “Out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices.” To this I call your particular attention. Is this the aspect of God’s throne as now revealed and known? Do thunderings and lightnings and voices proceed from the throne of God at this present time? And is this the way in which the throne of God — the action of His throne — is or would be qualified? Certainly not. The throne of God now is a throne of grace, to which we come boldly. (Heb. 4) Impossible for man here below to come boldly to a throne out of which proceed thunderings and lightnings and voices. This would indeed be presumption; for we must then defy, as it were, that which the throne itself manifests and proclaims. Clearly the thunderings and lightnings and voices are the expression of God’s displeasure and judicial feeling, so to speak, towards things and people upon the earth.

Is it demanded, then, how the elders come to be seen around such a throne? For this simple reason — they are

in the resurrection state; they are in heaven glorified. How did they get there? They were gathered to the presence of the Lord who entitled them to stand there. How is it, then — and this is a very fair question — that the presence of the Lord which is to gather His heavenly ones to Himself is not here described? My answer is, as it is set forth nowhere in the Revelation (if so, where?), the objection is entirely invalid. It is not the fact that it can be shown to be described elsewhere. In short, you must insert it in some place where it is rather implied than described. The only question is, where is the best place to suppose it? I answer, here assuredly, and nowhere else; and here for this reason — that you have the chiefs of the whole body, and remember, not twelve, not twenty, not twenty-one, but twenty-four. They are the heads of the entire priesthood — the whole of the glorified or heavenly priesthood viewed in its chiefs; and in its chiefs, because there are others to be priests afterwards. Therefore you could not have more than the chiefs seen here. If they are gathered to be with the Lord in heaven, not in spirit, but in body also — glorified there if they are crowned and enthroned there, all this cannot be without the Lord having come and gathered them unto Himself. If so — how? How possibly conceive such a thing as the full number? Bear in mind that there is no addition to those thrones afterwards, not even one more; never but twenty-four thrones — never more or less than twenty-four elders. If it were merely the estate of separate spirits, there would be afterwards an addition. Room must be left for more at a later epoch. But no; the same unvarying body is found until a certain defined moment, when this symbol of elders disappears and gives way to another — when the time is come for

what is called the bridal or the-marriage supper of the Lamb.

At that time of joy it is no question of elders: the Lamb does not marry people as elders, but as the bride. It is the very same body, but viewed no longer as invested with the wisdom that God conferred through our Lord Jesus; no longer viewed, in short, as elders, but as one corporate company, the bride. This is in relation to the marriage just then celebrated, which is the consummation of the hopes of the church. It is the full expression of our communion with Christ.

Then, again, when the Lord Jesus is about to execute judgment on the beast, and the false prophet, and the armies of the earth, He takes the place of a warrior, and so do they. They are at that point seen not as elders, of course, nor even as the bride; for what business has either in battle? They are seen in what is far more admirably suited to the case: they come out of heaven as, the hosts on white horses, like the great Leader they follow.

Thus, it is readily seen, we have very clearly symbolic language used with the greatest possible precision in the Revelation. Of course I admit there are difficulties in this book, as there are in every other; but the man who talks about the difficulties of the Revelation I should like to see taking-up Genesis. Very likely he imagines he understands the first book of Moses well; but it can easily be proved that understanding one part of the word of God generally goes with understanding another, and the people that do not profess to understand the end of the Bible, you may depend upon it, do not know much better about the beginning: at least, such has been

my experience in these matters. The word of God gives us the truth; and one part of revelation makes way for another. It is a living organism. It is not a mere science that you may master up to a certain point, and not understand the rest; it is a thing of life and power. These words are spirit and life, as given by the Spirit of God; and although undoubtedly there may occasionally be one that has been blessed in directing his attention to a particular part, it is the exception rather than the rule. In general, the man that understands the Bible best is the man that reads it all, valuing it as given of God to be understood by the Holy Ghost; consequently, he does not pretend to have fathomed or exhausted any part, but he, by grace, understands a little here and a little there, and so on, right through the whole Bible. This is generally true of Christians who have faith in the word and Spirit of God; and I believe it the safest and wisest way. It is a dangerous thing to have your hobbies in scripture — your favourite subjects, which exclusively occupy your mind. Those who so read get exaggerated, unhealthy notions by that means. I would urge my brethren to seek earnestly a real and large entrance into the mind of God. In order that it should be deep, be assured that this depends to an immense extent on the measure in which self is judged, and the Lord is looked to; for you cannot separate intelligence in the things of God from spiritual state. It is not genuine, wholesome, or savoury, without moral power; and it is a great mercy that so it is.

As far as concerns the subject before us, the general result seems to me to be sufficiently plain — plain enough to the simple; and the main point is to become simple, in order that we may really enter into the revealed mind of God.

Returning to our chapter, we may remark that beside the issuing from the throne of lightnings and thunderings and voices, we find “seven lamps [or torches] of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.” It means the Spirit of God. He is not now described as baptizing into one body. Such is the way in which God acts in the church. But here it is in the retributive dealings of God. It is that Spirit which perfectly discerns, detects, and judges — seven torches therefore — that which does not fail to make manifest morally before itself. God will act to this end when His throne assumes a judicial character. The evidence is abundant that it is a different state of things from what exists now. This confirms therefore what has been said before. The churches are done with. There is no such thing as the Lord dealing with Christian assemblies on earth He is no longer in that form of relationship when the fourth chapter begins to apply.

But, further, “before the throne was a sea of glass like unto crystal.” Now, in the temple there was a sea, no doubt, but it was a sea of water, not of glass (as in the tabernacle there had been a laver). Here then we have a sea, but it is a sea of glass. Why so? As long as there was one member of the body of Christ who required to be cleansed in passing through this defiled and defiling earth, so long the figure of the application of the water by the word is necessary. Why is it here a sea “of glass”? Because it is no longer a question of the word used to cleanse the defiled. Their course was over. They had passed out of the scene of defilement. Those who are here viewed in the presence of God are no longer subjects of defilement. As long as they were in the world, of course they needed to have their feet washed.

He who says that, because one is washed in the blood of Christ, he does not require to confess his sins day by day, understands no more than half his Saviour, and evidently sets one part of God's mercy and blessing against another. It would be most miserable, if it were otherwise possible, with new and eternal life, to be left under the consequences of daily defilement. It is granted that if all you care for is just that your sins should be forgiven, you may have a scanty sense of God's holiness, or of what becomes His child; but if you feel the value of communion with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, if you prize the blessedness of sharing the Lord's thoughts and feelings, you cannot but be sensitive to such defilement which grieves the Holy Ghost whereby you are sealed till the day of redemption. This is precisely why God works in you by His Spirit. He sees and feels what is wrong; He acts according to God's nature as displayed in Christ, and brings you to feel evil and to confess it before Him. Such is the effect of Christ's priesthood. We require not only a Saviour to die for our sins, but a priest to live for us, and to intercede for us though we are Christians, because we are still on earth in weakness, need, and alas! too often failure. Accordingly, it is not denying His sacrifice that will mend matters, nor will nullifying His priesthood establish souls, but simply dry them up into mummies.

The blood of Christ remains the one sacrifice; and it is of the very essence of the truth of Christianity that there is but one sacrifice, and that Christ's sacrifice has done this work perfectly and for ever for the believer But then, instead of a man merely looking back at the sacrifice of Christ, when he falls into a sin, he has, while holding this fast, to humble himself before God; for the

Holy Ghost uses the word of God to deal with him founded on the sacrifice of Christ, but never renewing it. The sacrifice of Christ abides in its efficacy; but, so far from this being all we want, because of it there is a necessity for “the washing of water by the word.” “He that is washed [bathed] needeth not save to wash his feet.” For this is he that “came by water and blood, not by water only, but by water and blood.” The Lord Jesus has provided for all. Out of His side, as we know, flowed both; and so it is, that as the blood of Christ expiated our sin as guilty sinners before God, so the water not only gives us new birth, but also, in answer to His own intercession, carries on the cleansing of the feet when they are defiled in our own passage through the world.

This is no longer the case with those connected with the sea of glass; that is, it is no longer the want when saints are glorified; and so this vision intimates. Not, of course, that the Lord will neglect any of His people who may afterwards be called. The vision to which we are here introduced simply gives us a complete picture of the change that will have taken place when it is fulfilled; and one of the new elements we see is that, instead of a laver of water to wash the feet of those exposed to the soils of earth, the saints are now seen in glory — elders in His presence, assessors on thrones round God’s throne. The whole work was done, not of atonement only but intercession also, as far as they were concerned. As they had thus passed out of the sphere where they needed the cleansing operation of the Spirit, the symbolic sea in this vision consists not of water but glass. It is fixed, not active, purity. It is the witness therefore that no defilement remains. As they had passed out of earth, and sit enthroned in the presence of

God in heaven, we can readily understand that it could not be otherwise.

There is a subsequent vision, affording an interesting point of contact, or rather contrast, that may be called to your attention. As is easy to be seen, there are others who are called by God's grace after these; but they go through a storm of suffering; they go through a sea of awful temptation, tribulation, and everything else that can harass mind and body. And this will fall, I have no doubt whatever, as a scourge on the guilty world — God's retributive dealing, because of the despising of the gospel, as well as the unfelt unjudged rejection up to death of His own Son. You know that Jews and Gentiles both put to death the Son of God. Certainly the disciples did not. Afterwards they acquired a heavenly character, and, by Paul's ministry, pass out of the earthly scene. Christians as such were not guilty of Christ's death Whatever was their guilt, it was atoned for by that precious blood; but they were not called as yet, and so not guilty of the dreadful deed. Jews and Gentiles were.

Accordingly, it needs no great intelligence to see thoroughly the moral reasons why the church, being called out after the cross, should be now taken out of the scene, and why the Lord begins to work on Jews and Gentiles. They go through this retributive chastening; they are the direct proper objects of this special tribulation; and when at the close some of them are seen as conquerors — for the Lord will surely work by grace in a certain number — when those who had won the victory over the beast, etc., are seen in Revelation 15, they are found on "a sea of glass, mingled with fire." There is no mingling with fire in Rev. 4. The fire is the heat of tribulation; and when the saints that pass

through the tribulation — those that died, and were brought by grace into heavenly glory — when they are seen at a subsequent epoch, they have on them the marks of having crossed that sea, the tribulation through which they passed. It is not so with the elders. The reason is, that the tribulation was not even heard of yet. The tribulation, the great tribulation, was long after they were gone to heaven.

On the whole, therefore, the general bearing of the chapter is not so obscure as to hinder the simplest mind in Christendom that is subject to God through the teaching of the Spirit from understanding it.

“Before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four” (not “beasts,” as is well known, but) “living creatures.” These living creatures show us the various qualities of God’s power; they represent it in a symbolic form. The heathen, as we know, who did not know God, exalted the attributes of God into idols which they worshipped. Here we know not merely the living creatures that are round about the throne, but Him that sat upon it; we know the one and only true God the Father, and we know Him by the Lord Jesus whom He has sent. But God does in this symbolic way teach the characters of His power in which His judgments are going to be executed.

First, we may observe the four living creatures were full of eyes before and behind. It is remarkable that, although we have the cherubim described in the Old Testament, they are not so spoken of there. They are here described as having not only eyes, but eyes within, as stated in verse 8. This is peculiar. They may have

eyes, but “eyes within” seems to show an intrinsic power of discernment that is characteristic of the New Testament. Thus all the description here, while it resembles the Old Testament, gives us progress and so far difference. In short, the living creatures are somewhat like the cherubim, and in other respects like the seraphs of Isaiah vi. Besides, they have their own peculiarities, resembling the cherubs of Ezekiel. The first is like a lion, the second like a steer or young bull, the third living creature had a face as a man, and the fourth was like a flying eagle. That is, you have power in its majesty, power in its patient labour and endurance, intelligent thought in that which was like a man, and rapidity of execution shown forth in the flying eagle. Again, these four living creatures had each of them six wings about him, just as the seraphs had in Isaiah; and they had not the wheels, a point that distinguishes them from the vision of Ezekiel. “And they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”

It is worth while to pause a moment and look at the great moral principles of what we have here. There are two relative qualities in reference to which may be traced a remarkable difference in the elders — I mean righteousness and holiness.

Now what is the effect of the direct presence of God on the saints themselves displayed in righteousness before Him? Revelation 4 shows more than this, the exercise of His throne being judicial dealing with the earth. There are lightnings and thunderings and voices. But the remarkable feature disclosed is, that whilst the elders are enthroned before God thus revealed in righteousness, they sit peacefully in His presence. There

is not the very smallest symptom of alarm. There is not even a movement discernible, so truly are they made God's righteousness in Christ.

On the other hand, when God in His holiness is celebrated by the four living creatures according to His own nature — when they praise Him as the "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," the elders are at once in movement. Thus before judicial dealings the elders show us the most perfect rest in the presence of God. As a question of judgment there is not one demand of righteousness that was not satisfied by the cross. If there had been any sin unremoved, oh, what trouble had been among all the twenty- four ! But no; they sit in perfect peace on their thrones. But when His holiness is in question, they fall down before Him; they do homage to Him that lives to the ages of ages; they cast their crowns before the throne. Their hearts are swallowed up in the delight of what God is. What He is in His holiness draws them out. It is the attractive power of His holiness, not the (to others) alarming power of the righteous judgments of God, which kindles their spirits and engages them in adoration. In the presence of righteousness there is nothing but rest; in the presence of the celebration of His holiness there is activity of worship.

Such is, then, the scene that is presented in Revelation 4. I shall say a very few words on Revelation 5 before I close.

Hitherto we have simply had the Lord God Almighty — Jehovah Elohim — that was, and is, and is to come; God, as He had made Himself manifest in His dealings with men here below, especially with the fathers and Israel,

but now seen on the throne. And why so? How comes it that He is not here presented as the Father? You know very well how constant in the New Testament “the Father” is. It is notorious that we never hear such a thing as grace and peace from the Lord God Almighty — from Jehovah Elohim, or any other Old Testament designation. And when the apostle Paul employs this his customary formula, never does he couple it with Shaddai Jehovah, or Elohim. The same is true of the apostles John and Peter and Jude. Nor does even James, though Israel is addressed, and there are texts throughout relative to Jehovah; but never does he give a salutation from Jehovah as such. Why is the old style and title found here? Because a change of great moment is come in; because God is no longer revealing Himself in the formation of the heavenly family. He has taken them out of the scene, which can only be by the coming of the Lord Jesus personally to receive them. (John 14; 1 Thess. 4; 2 Thess. 2:1.) But this is not brought out in the book of Revelation; it does not fall within its revealed object; because the aim of the prophecy is to set forth the judgments of God, and not the secrets of His grace Consequently, as the coming of Christ for His own is an event that does not at all directly affect the world, but is intensely a matter for Christ and the church, there is a veil naturally and fittingly drawn over it here. “Behold,” says the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 15), “I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment,” etc. This mystery will have taken place when Christ comes to meet us in the air; but the object of the Revelation is not to reveal the mystery of God’s taking us on high, but rather of His not judging evil on the earth. Besides, it had been revealed fully already, and therefore was uncalled for. It was the appropriate object

and function of the apostle Paul to show what was secret and heavenly to the church blessed with Christ in the heavenlies; but the object of John the seer is, above all, to show what would take place on earth after the church disappears from the scene.

Consequently, all this double scene of worship on: high is only preliminary to the great body of the prophetic visions. The object of the book is to unveil the series of judgments that are to fall on the earth, not the gathering of the saints to Christ in heaven. At the same time, you have the fullest confirmation of the doctrines of St. Paul, because, before the blows of divine displeasure fall, the prophet is taken up, he beholds and records the heavenly saints as already gathered in a glorified state. He notifies to us thrones that never were seen in heaven before, filled already with men risen or changed. In chap. 5 the elders and living creatures join in worship, and sing, “Thou hast redeemed [us?] to God by thy blood.” Supposing we do not accept the reading ἡμᾶς or “us” (which I am quite willing, with Lachmann, Tischendorf, and others, to allow may not be genuine), still they are clearly saints who thus address the Lamb. The position of the elders on thrones, their clothing, their functions with the bowls full of odours, &c., prove their redemption, even if they only sung of others expressly, or of the abstract truth. There could be no such ornament as the crown of gold, no such place of dignity for the creature as a throne in God’s presence, without being bought by the Lamb’s blood. No created being whatsoever could have such a royal and priestly rank on high, except in virtue of such a purchase.

It is to be remarked that here (chap. 5) we have some advance. A seven-sealed book appears in the hand of

God. The praises of the last chapter did not go beyond creation and providence; but this in no way exhausted what God had to make known to His own. He was about to reveal quite a new thing — the special process by which He will put the Lord Jesus in possession of the inheritance of creation. Such is the object of the book here seen in the vision — the different forms of judgment that the Lord will apply, eventually issuing in the taking of the kingdom by the Lord Jesus, and His heavenly ones reigning along with Him. “I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne, a book written within and on the backside:” that is, it was full to overflowing. It was not written as an ordinary scroll, within only. There was so much to say, that it was written on the back. So in Ezekiel 2:9, 10 the Jewish prophet had a roll of a book shown; “and he spread it before me; and it was written within and without.” It was “sealed with seven seals” — shut up impenetrably therefore, as far as the creature was concerned. “And I saw an angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?”

No one was found, no one able, it is said, — to open the book; and none able, because not one was worthy. But if John weeps much because none was found worthy, one of the elders — for they enter into the mind of Christ — consoles the prophet, saying “Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed (or conquered) to open the book.” And Jesus opens the book, not simply as a divine person; not simply as the perfectly obedient man; but by overcoming — by the all-prevailing efficacy of His precious blood. He was worthy and able. But He took it on the ground of the price He paid, and not on personal worth or strength.

Had He done it out of personal title alone, where were we? He did it on the ground of the price He paid — all our boast and joy except, indeed, that the best of all that His purchase brings is to delight our souls in Him who thus bought us — not merely in the blessings He has bounteously given us.

Jesus, then, is conqueror; but when He comes forward it is not as a lion, but as a Lamb. He is proclaimed as a Lion, but when beheld, it is a Lamb as it had been slain. The One who asserts this mighty and majestic power of God, and especially in connection with the hopes of Israel — that Blessed One — is seen to be the earth-rejected man, the holy sufferer whom the world would not have or suffer to live. Was it worthy of Him? It rejected Him, but rejected Him into the home and glory of God, where He is now seen as the Lamb. And mark, it is not as He descended: He came down the only begotten Son — I do not say leaving His Father's bosom. Oh, no! He never left it: how could He leave it? He was a divine person, and, therefore, even if looked at as a man, it could be said, "the Son of man which is in heaven" — not merely, who was, or, who was to be, but "who is in heaven." None but He could say this, and, therefore, however much you hold fast — (and you cannot too tenaciously hold fast — the reality of His manhood; and whoever does not hold it fast, is no Christian at all) — let it never disparage His deity; I do not say merely His divinity. We talk about the divinity of this book, the Bible, but not so rightly of the divinity of Christ as of His "deity" or Godhead.

Here then He is spoken of as the Lamb, in particular as the slain Lamb contrasted with the world-powers or ravaging beasts of prey, and especially the one yet to

rise and trample down for the last time the people of God on the earth. The Lamb sits there, but rises and takes the book out of the hand of Him that sat upon the throne, and then all heaven is filled with the praise of the Lamb as well as of God.2 If He took that book, it was not merely to read it Himself; it was in love to make all plain for us. What could make it plainer to Him? He opens the seals, and tells us the contents. He unfolds the mind of God. Oh, may we heed it!

This sketch necessarily could not be very complete but in it I have designedly passed over nothing of importance, as it has occurred to me in glancing over the portion of the word of God before us. I trust it is at least clear to those who have given me their hearing, that the elders were beyond doubt men; that they were men no longer on earth, but in heaven; that they constitute a new class seen for the first time above. Who compose them? I have not as yet sought to answer.

For my own part I strongly suspect that the twenty-four elders include the Old Testament saints as well as the New, up to the moment of the Lord’s coming to receive them to Himself. I make this remark, because we find afterwards that when the change takes place, and the elders as such are no more seen, a new symbol is seen to take its place (Rev. 19). You have the Bride; but besides her you have certain persons that are said to be blessed — guests invited to the marriage-supper of the Lamb. It need scarce be said, that nobody thinks of inviting a bride to her own marriage feast: others may be invited there of course. It seems to me, therefore, very plain that others are to be at the marriage-supper of the Lamb besides the bride.

Hence nothing is more easy than to understand that the twenty-four elders might include both Old and New Testament saints, from Revelation 4 to chap. 19, when the Bride and the guests are substituted for the elders. Then it becomes a question of the church in her own proper character of communion with Christ; and you find under the twenty-four elders a twofold company — the Bride, with others who were united for a certain end, but not in everything. This is merely a question of spiritual judgment, and depends on a great deal of scripture to decide it.

I do not therefore throw out more than a suggestion now. I have endeavoured to keep to the grand landmarks of the subject, which are especially necessary for all the children of God. What I have been saying makes this plain to any one. We see the wisdom of God in arranging this mystical history of the church. Had it been a literal history of the church, a prophetical mapping out of all with great plainness, the consequence would have been that people would have ceased to look for Christ's coming; but inasmuch as the seven churches were there before the apostle's mind at the time when this book was written, there was no check on the continual waiting for Christ. On the other hand, if the church tarried here below, these seven churches would expand, as it were, into a larger bearing; and as long as the church was continued, it would be always adding more and more completeness, more filling up, as it were, the previously unseen points which would then become obvious and salient.

This is the true way for faith; it is so that all the New Testament is written. If the Lord represents the ten virgins as showing Christendom waiting for Christ, it is

the same virgins that went forth originally and fell asleep afterwards, who go in with the Lord. No doubt we (looking back ex post facto, as people call it,) can see (when the history is behind us) that it was designed to take in the various generations of Christians. But as far as the parable is concerned, it contemplates only that one generation which was existing at the time the parable was put forth. In this I cannot but see the deep mind of God. Does it not seem to you to be consummate wisdom for Him so to write His word that there should be in it nothing at variance with the hope of the Christian in always expecting Christ, and yet that, when the delay takes place, you can see that He knew of the delay perfectly well, but that He did not open it out in word so as to hinder saints from always waiting for the Lord Jesus? Thus manifestly all is true, holy, good, and wisely ordered.

May the Lord bless His truth! May there be one desire given to the children of God, so that knowing Him as our life, having Him as our righteousness, we may wait for Him as the hope of our hearts!

W.K.

1 * Some years singe Professor Tischendorf reported to me, among other Apocalyptic readings, that the Sinai MS. omitted the pronoun ἡμῦς in Rev. 5:9. This I printed on his authority, which was followed by Dean Alford and others. But when the great uncial was published, I immediately perceived either that the printed text was here wrong, or that the discoverer had led me into an error, awkward to many more though to none so painfully as to me. But he had the candour immediately to re-examine the MS. on my appeal to him, and to

confess frankly that he had misled me. Very different was the feeling of a scholar in this country from whom better things might have been expected. He had the temerity not alone to charge me with the fault but to mix up with it the doctrine of the rapture of the church, as if this had influenced the erroneous report. The truth is, that the weighty evidence lies in the fact that, according to the best authorities followed even by my censor himself, it should be “them” and “they’ in verse 10 (as required by the true Greek text). The elders and living creatures are praising the Lamb in that verse for others made kings and priests, not for themselves. This is incontestable. The point debated is whether ἡμᾶς should or should not be read in the preceding. Even if it ought certainly to be read, it would rather strengthen the distinction between the saints represented by the elders and living creatures. But I was willing to waive what would rather fortify my position, as honestly believing with the best critics that it is a most suspicious reading, if not certainly on external evidence an intruder. And I was convinced, as I am still, that its insertion presents a sense (when the two verses are taken together) so strange that nobody has yet offered a tolerable explanation. It is therefore still more objectionable on internal grounds. But the question is really independent of doctrine, and is much more one of critical acumen and of spiritual judgment.

2 * It is well to note that Rev. 5:14 ends, according to the best authority, with “worshipped.” “Him that liveth for ever and ever” is a spurious addition. In fact, the elders worshipped both.

On the Millennium

A Review of the Late Bishop of Lincoln's Two Lectures, 1875.

The Bible Treasury, New Series, vol. 1, p. 252.

Having examined fully Bp. Hall's Revelation Unrevealed, let me now test Dr. Chr. Wordsworth's Two Lectures. But it is important to remark that the term "Millennium" tends to narrow unduly the scriptural evidence. Rev. 20 is undoubtedly the ground for defining the time. This, however important in its place (and it is just the place for it), is quite subordinate. The doctrine of a displayed kingdom, which the Lord Jesus is to establish in power and glory over all the earth and all the nations, with Israel and hence Jerusalem as His center here below, is revealed in the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets; it reappears in the Gospels, and is dogmatically laid down in the Epistles, which assure us who now believe of "some better thing." For we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies with (in is the correct word) Christ (Eph. 1:3) already exalted there at God's right hand. But this only helps those who search the scriptures, to the quite distinct truth of the first dominion, the kingdom, coming to the daughter of Zion, as Micah says with a crowd of others, when the Judge of Israel is no longer rejected by her as now, but owned as Lord in His eternal majesty. The proofs will be given abundantly from the Bible throughout. How long this kingdom will last is defined in Rev. 20:4; but the general truth has the amplest evidence.

The doctrine imputed to those who assuredly believe in the Millennium, p. 2, is stated incorrectly. "The first

resurrection" includes the general mass of the risen saints, as given in the opening clause of Rev. 20:4:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. These were the armies which were in heaven and followed the Faithful and True when He comes forth to execute judgment (Rev. 19:11-16), clad in white pure fine linen or byssus, expressly explained in v. 8 as the righteousnesses of saints (cf. Rev. 17:14). They were already risen and glorified like their Master. Not so the two classes that follow which were till now in the disembodied state. Therefore we read at this point, "and the souls of those beheaded on account of the testimony of Jesus and on account of the word of God": a description exactly answering to the early martyrs of the Apocalyptic prophecy (Rev. 6:9), who cried for vindication, and to whom it was said, "that they should rest yet for a time (i.e. in the separate condition) till both their fellow-servants and their brethren, who were about to be killed as they, should be fulfilled" (v. 11). Here accordingly, and connected especially with these sufferers, we find the later martyrs of the prophecy, "and those who [with a different construction to mark the distinct classes] did not homage to the beast nor to his image, and received not the mark on their forehead and hand," of whom we read in Rev. 13, 14, 15.

As to all this the late Bp. was as unenlightened as Bps. Andrewes and Hall, or the ancient expositors who misled them. Neither Andreas nor Arethas, nor Primasius nor Bede, any more than Origen or Eusebius, Augustine or Jerome, understood the scope of the Revelation or the prophetic word in general. Nor did the Reformers any better, Luther, etc., Calvin, etc.; nor the Anglicans, nor

the Presbyterians of Great Britain. The early ecclesiastical writers, whose remains we have, betray rapid and grave departure from the truth. In no subject do they manifest it more than touching the heavenly associations of the Christian and the church. They claim the Jewish hope after a mystical sort. Hence they deny that restoration of Israel to their land under the Messiah and the new covenant, which remains for the Jew in God's mercy, quite distinct from the far more glorious things reserved for us who anticipate them.

Again, risen saints do not reign "on earth," as the old Chiliasts taught (Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, Tertullian and Lactantius, etc.), but over it: an error which exposed them, both to much mistake on their own part, and to attacks of men like Dionysius of Alexandria and others who followed in his wake. Further, what deplorable ignorance to speak of Satan gathering the nations to battle, "in order to war with Christ and His church?" What is written in Rev. 20:9 is the very different statement that "they went up on the breadth of the earth, and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city." That is, the postmillennial insurrection from all quarters of the earth under Satan is to be directed against the saints, who will flock to the land that surrounds Jerusalem, and form an immense "camp" round "the beloved city"; for then indeed is Zion Hephzibah and the land Beulah. The church is not in question. It is an earthly scene. From Rev. 12 Satan has no place in heaven.

Further, Rev. 20 does not reveal "the universal judgment," but expressly the judgment of the wicked dead, small and great, raised for this purpose, set before the great White Throne, and consigned to the lake of fire

which is the second death, in contrast with the righteous who shared the first resurrection and reign with Christ, more than a thousand years before that judgment. Here, Dr. W., with the theologians ancient and modern, is directly at issue with the uniform doctrine of scripture, which never teaches such a (general) judgment, but denies it for those who believe. What can be plainer than our Lord's own words in John 5:24? No doubt the A. V. disguises this fundamental truth of the gospel: for it confounds κρίσις with κατάκριμα, and hence insinuates that the believer may come into κρίσιν or "judgment," though to be saved from "condemnation". But this is to misinterpret scripture according to tradition, not to receive it from God as he revealed the truth. Even the R. V. leaves such an error without a plea.

The entire context makes the truth so plain that there is no excuse for unbelief. For the Lord shows that, founded on His person, the Son of God and Son of man, are two functions. As Son of God He gives life; as Son of man all judgment is given to Him. The veil of flesh gave occasion for man to disbelieve and dishonour Him. It is therefore as Son of man He will judge those who do not believe in Him, the Son of God. He who hears Christ's word and believes Him that sent Him has life eternal and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. For it is now an hour when the dead hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live. But the unbeliever who dishonours the Son by denying His glory, and consequently does not receive life in Him cannot escape the judgment which the Father has given to Him, that all should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. This the believer does now, and therefore has life instead of coming into judgment. He hears His word and

receives God's testimony to Him Who is the true God and eternal life. Judgment is to secure the honour of the Son in those who despise and reject Him now; whereas the believer, having life eternal, lives to honour Him henceforth and for ever. They were not to wonder at this; for an hour is coming (in distinction from that which "now is") in which all that are in the tombs (it is the body therefore) shall hear His voice and shall go forth: those that produced good, unto a resurrection of life; those that did evil, unto a resurrection of judgment. Thus, if we, hear Christ's word, we know that there is no universal judgment, but, as certainly as divine truth can make it, two contrasted resurrections: the one of life for the body on behalf of those who, having life eternal in their souls, produced good things; the other of judgment, because, having refused the Son of God now Who is life, they did only evil things of their own corrupt nature. Their judgment is indeed just, as the salvation of the believer is of grace which fails not.

With the doctrine in the Gospel of John the Revelation entirely harmonizes. For in Rev. 20 we have quite clearly a resurrection of life for those who were blessed and holy, and just as plainly a resurrection for the wicked over whom the second death has power. And the Son of man is He Who, as He gave life to the saints, will judge the wicked who had no part in the first resurrection, as they existed only to dishonour Him and do those evil works which come up in that solemn and everlasting judgment.

We shall all be placed before the judgment-seat of God; and each of us shall give an account concerning himself to God (Rom. 14). We must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ, that each may receive the

things [done] by the body, according to what he did, whether good or evil (2 Cor. 5:10). Not a word in either scripture teaches that it will be at the same epoch, a mistake drawn from not seeing that the judgment of all the nations is of living men on the earth when the Son of man shall appear in His glory (Matt. 25:31). But these inspired declarations on the one hand carefully avoid weakening the blessed assurance that the believer is by grace exempted from judgment, which Christ bore for him on the cross that he might not bear it; while on the other there will be a complete manifestation of ourselves and of all done in the body, which takes the awful form of judgment for him who rejected Christ and His cross. Each shall give account of himself to God; but the unbeliever must suffer for his sins, because he despised the Son of God and His propitiation which alone annuls them before God.

It is really a question of honouring the Son and hearing His word, and of faith in His work as well as His person. He who receives the truth in its simplicity and fullness as God revealed it avoids the traditional error of a promiscuous or Universal Judgment; which is real heterodoxy as to the gospel, mixes up believers and unbelievers in a way abhorrent to the truth, and plunges souls into doubts and anxieties so that they are often constrained in unbelief to ask, Am I His, or am I not? Dr. W. raised the question as to Rev. 20, with too much confidence in himself and in other men; but it goes far deeper, and the true answer proves how little that able, learned, and pious man, entered into the truth of the gospel itself. But we may see a good deal more before having done with his pamphlet, of which we here notice not quite a page.

Nobody among the many writers on prophecy who have passed before me, ancient or modern, regards the Apocalypse as absolutely continuous chronologically. On the other hand no writer of worth denies that there is continuity in the main. This is quite independent of the view taken of Rev. 20, though of course it falls under the general plan. Assumption or theory cannot decide such a question but internal evidence. There are here, as in other books of the kind, landmarks given by the inspiring Spirit which no one can slight without loss. Inattention to its structure has made vain the attempt of many, of old as at this day, to elucidate its bearing as a whole yet more than in detail.

The co-ordinate hypothesis (p. 3), for instance, is evidently and utterly inapplicable to the two marked series which ran through the prophecy in what may be called its first part, Rev. 6-11. Within themselves the Seals and the Trumpets, as well as the Vials or Bowls in the second part of the book which begins with Rev. 12, bear the seal of consecutiveness on their face. What can be more absurd than to doubt, in a carefully numbered sequence, that the first is before the second, the second before the third, and so on, not in revelation only but in accomplishment? Some have been hardy enough to even question this relative order which is so natural and manifest; but their reasons are as baseless as their scheme refutes itself. The only semblance of difficulty perhaps is in the Seals; but even there, how untenable is the denial! It is the Bishop’s assumption (page 4), with many another premillennial as well as postmillennial.

Upon the Epistles to the seven Churches in Asia he first of all argues; but what is said there proves nothing but limited acquaintance with the subject, and an illogical

character of mind. They [the Ancient Expositors] did not imagine that the Epistles to the Asiatic churches, in the second and third chapters of the Apocalypse, are to be limited to those seven churches; but, in their opinion, they are to be applied by a figurative expansion to the Christian churches of every age and country (pp. 3, 4). This is transparently another question, distinct from the proper visions of things to come, in the book. But even here the order is not insignificant. Can anything be less reasonable than to displace their relative position or to deny that, prophetically applied, Ephesus is the first and Laodicea the last? Their "figurative expansion" perfectly consists with their order, whether historical or prophetic.

It was mere fancy to say that the period of seven Seals in the sixth chapter [it is really in the opening of Rev. 8] extends from Christ's Advent to the end of the time. What has "silence in heaven for about half-an-hour" to do with eternity? Take it literally or allegorically, the seventh Seal can mean nothing of the sort. Probably it was the sixth Seal which ran in the good bishop's head, as with the "Ancient Expositors" whom he follows, though it is well to say plainly that no exposition of the book is known for several centuries. From none of the more distinguished Fathers have we an extant commentary; any which exist in Greek or Latin are of exceedingly little value.

Those who did write and remain seem to have led Dr. W. into the strange interpretation that the First Seal applies to Christ's Advent, and the Seventh to the end of time. Every part of that scheme is erroneous. The true scriptural figure of our Lord's work at His first Advent is "the sower going forth to sow"; three fourths of the seed

failing, and even of the fourth which bore fruit, but a third arriving at perfection. How could a result so checkered and short answer to the archer on a white horse and a crown given him, who went forth "conquering and to conquer?" No room is left in such a symbol for "the apostasy" and "the man of sin," which the apostle declares must be before the day when the Lord appears in glory. Again, there is a manifest analogy between the four horses of the earlier Seals. What more irreverent than to regard the Lord as one of God's inflictions on the guilty world? or the first of them His victory in the gospel, followed by heterogeneous matters?

The Seals run connectedly as the dealings of God with man after "the things that are" (Rev. 1:19), or the church state (Rev. 2, 3). Then the Lamb opens the book that reveals the measures God takes with the rebellious to put Christ in possession of His promised inheritance (Rev. 5). On this view all is plain enough and consistent; whereas the extant early comments are as unintelligent as those of such as can only read now through their discolored spectacles. Tradition is hardly better than the poor stuff of rationalists. The world, not the church, is the object of the judgment set forth by the four horses (Rev. 6:1-8). How preposterous to look for the gospel in the white horse or any other! Never is spiritual work set forth by a war-horse of any color, however apt a figure for aggressive power in good or evil.

Hence, as is well-known some who are the antipodes of the late Bp. of Lincoln strive to see in the first Seal Christ's second Advent in judgment! Abstractly this is less extraordinary than applying it to the gospel of grace. For in that day (Rev. 19) He will come forth from

the opened heavens, the Faithful and True, on a white horse, with (not a mere chaplet, but) many diadems upon His head, clothed with a garment dipped in blood, and followed by the armies in heaven on white horses. How different from the first Seal! Instead of a bow, even out of His mouth goes a sharp two-edged sword to smite the nations, as He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. The points in contrast make the desired identification impossible.

What then, is the force? The first Seal really imports a time of conquest by prestige. The bow is enough. There is no carnage. It will be more truly than for Julius Caesar, “I came, I saw, I conquered.” The second or red horse is characteristically a time that follows of bloodshed, and probably of civil war: peace taken from the earth, “and that they should slay one another,” and hence a great sword is given; but in no way the sharp two-edged sword that proceeds out of His mouth in symbol, Who speaks and it is done. The third is the black of scarcity, which presses on the necessaries rather than on the luxuries of life. The fourth is the pale horse of Death, and Hades following, when God’s “sore plagues” accumulate over the fourth part of the earth. But a salient part of the truth revealed is their sequence in this order and no other; which is upset by making the first Seal last, or coincident with the last.

As usual in the septenaries of the Revelation, the first four have a common bond, which the remaining three do not share, though they too are connected, each following in due order as the Seals were broken successively. When the Lamb opened the fifth Seal, the prophet saw, not another horse and its rider, but the souls of martyrs for God’s word and their testimony “underneath the

altar," i.e. as if offered in sacrifice for the truth; approved of God now, but awaiting, for the time of public vindication, the completion of a further band of brethren who should be killed as they were.

Then is the sixth Seal, when not only a great earthquake ensues, but the governmental powers, sun, moon, and stars, are convulsed, and the stablest institutions are smitten, and small and great of men are filled with dread of the Lamb's wrath. They say in their alarm that His great day is come. God does not say so, but reveals that such is the thought and language of their fear: two very different things which many ancients and moderns confound in their shortsightedness. For how could the seventh Seal follow, if the sixth were really the end of man's day, and the great day actually come? It is not so: an immensely important and awful sequel of apostate lawlessness plays its subsequent part, as the Revelation shows plainly, whether people understand or not; for all do not hear who have ears.

When the seventh Seal was opened (Rev. 8:1), there took place in heaven silence for about half-an-hour; and the seven angels that stood before God have seven Trumpets given them, while the high priest (viewed angelically, for under this series we have angels throughout) intercedes in answer to the prayers of all saints, but herewith the loud tokens of deepening judgment, which falls on the third part of the earth, as in the Trumpet series on the western or Roman earth. These accordingly do go down to the close, and the mystery of God is then finished, not before. The seventh Trumpet really announces the world-kingdom of our Lord and His Christ as come, while the seventh Seal only ushers in the seven Trumpets after a brief pause.

The seven Vials or Bowls on the other hand are made to indicate a special character of judgment before the end comes, in keeping with what we may call the second volume of the Apocalypse. Hence there is necessarily a slight retrogression in their case.

But there is another feature of moment not only to notice but to understand. In each of these three septenaries occurs at the same point a parenthesis, not in the regular course of Seals, Trumpets, and Vials, but apart yet connected with each series. It is uniformly inserted before the seventh takes its course. Thus Rev. 7 is the parenthesis before the seventh Seal is opened; as Rev. 10, 11:14 before the seventh Trumpet is blown; and Rev. 16:13-16 before the seventh Vial or Bowl is poured out. It is therefore unfounded to suppose any lack of symmetry or of order in the book.

Heavenly glory was already revealed for the elders in Rev. 4, 5. But Rev. 7, however glorious, does not describe this. There are two scenes in that anticipative parenthesis. One deals with the twelve tribes of Israel, out of whom God lets us not forget that a measured number is sealed for security from the storm of judgment anticipated even after the sixth Seal. The other gives us to see the blessed ways of grace which will have a countless crowd out of every nation and tribe, and peoples and tongues, who come “out of the great tribulation” which is before the age ends. These are to be before the throne of God, and to serve Him in His temple with the Lamb as their Shepherd. It is a pretty strong draught on credulity to confound either with the crowned and enthroned elders who really set forth in symbol the heavenly redeemed (Rev. 4). Why not too distinguish the sealed Israelites from the palm-

bearing Gentiles (Rev. 7), who are both to enjoy the blessedness of the kingdom, when the Father's will shall be done on earth as now in heaven, and all be administered above and below by the Lord Jesus to the glory of God?

Far is one from saying that there are no difficulties, for such as we are, in contemplating so boundless a scene. Certainly the prejudices, natural even more to Christendom as it is, hinder spiritual intelligence of the inspired word. But let believers own that the fault is in themselves, never in the scriptures which reflect alike the grace and the truth of God, Who, knowing all perfectly, has deigned to reveal to us the things to come. Let us recognize that what is written is the communication of the Lord; "if any be ignorant, let him be ignorant." There is His word for us. It did not come out from a party; nor did it come to a party only, but to all the children of God (1 Cor. 14:36-38). Let us not through unbelief be defrauded, nor defraud others, of so interesting and important a part of His gift and of our heritage.

It is unfounded then that the period of the Seals, in Rev. 6, "extends from Christ's Advent to the end of time" (p. 4); it is at least equally so that "after the opening of the Seventh Seal St. John commences again at the initial point from which he had first proceeded." Both series are expressly and in the plainest terms declared to be "the things which shall be" (Rev. 1:19), and "which must be (4:1), hereafter," or (more definitely) after "the things which are," the state comprised by the seven churches in Rev. 2, 3. The vision in Rev. 4, 5 is exclusively future, and must be accomplished before the Seals and the Trumpets can begin. The crowned and enthroned elders,

etc., are in their due positions on high before a Seal is opened; and the Seals are all opened before the first Trumpet is blown. There is only a brief but solemn silence in heaven “about half-an-hour” between the first series and the second. What can exceed the monstrous interpretation of the ancient commentators, such as Victorinus and Tychonius, that this means the saints’ eternal rest! Yet this wild idea, which has not a shade even of plausible appearance to commend it, has prevailed from early days to our own. It is the less reasonable, as the same writers profess to see eternity in the palm-bearing Gentiles before the seventh Seal was opened. This too we have already noticed as a blunder, but at least intelligible if not intelligent: whereas their notion of the half hour’s silence, on any feasible principle, is neither. It is a marvel of credulity without reason and against scripture.

Nor is it true that, after the sounding of the seventh Trumpet, a return is made to “the first origin of the church” (ib.). For there is not a trace of “her history” beyond Rev. 2, 3. After that the symbol of the saints glorified is seen as the four-and-twenty elders in heaven (Rev. 4), till this yields to that of the bride, the Lamb’s wife, when the due moment comes to present the bridals of the Lamb (Rev. 19). What the Bp. with a crowd of predecessors calls the church (in Rev. 12) is really the symbol of Israel about to appear on the scene, mother of a Son, Male of might, Who is to shepherd all the nations with a rod of iron. Who this great personage is ought not to be inscrutable but most obvious. It is Christ, come of Israel according to flesh (as all know, and both Testaments witness), Head and Bridegroom of the church, not her Son, as perverse misinterpretation

alleges. No! The Revelation clearly distinguishes the woman of Rev. 12 from her of Rev. 19, 21, 22. The church is the bride in this book (as the great world-church is the harlot); while the mother is Israel, seen in God's purpose of glorious power as she is destined to in fact, but in sorrow before that time come. For also the dragon is invested with the form of the Roman empire to oppose and devour, so that she must again flee into the wilderness till the day dawn. There are undoubtedly in John's Revelation, as in Paul's Epistles; "some things hard to be understood, which the uninstructed and unestablished wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their destruction"; but the grand outlines here as elsewhere are distinct, and convict the mass of commentators of inattention to scripture.

The truth is, as we may state in brief, that "the beast" had only been named in its antagonism to the Two Witnesses in Rev. 11 and the general stream of prophecy to the close. Then in Rev. 12 (sic) connected with "the ark of God's covenant seen in His temple" (which verse is its proper beginning) we have retrogression to give first the complete history of that portentous power with God's ways in good and against evil. These bring in the Seven Vials, and the descriptive chapters that follow on the corrupt woman and city Babylon and her fall, before the heavenly marriage with the appearing of the Lord Jesus and the Millennial reign. Is it possible to conceive a clearer or more certain view of the order of events in Rev. 19, 20 and up to Rev. 21:1-8? There a necessarily retrogressive vision is given about the holy bride and her relation to the kings and nations; just as Rev. 17, 18 were a retrogressive description of the great whore to explain what her corrupting relations were to the kings

and nations, which at length drew down divine judgment.

In other words, no person that understands the Book of Revelation questions either the parentheses that occur at distinct and unmistakable points, nor the clear retrogression at Rev. 12 for wise and necessary reason. So it is with the descriptive returns of Rev. 17, 18 and of Rev. 21:9-22:5, which are introduced in a way precisely analogous, as if to intimate to the reader of any discernment that they answer to each other in contrast. Otherwise the book is strictly consecutive, as indeed the inspiring Holy Spirit has made indelibly plain to all who heed the strongly defined proofs of its internal order. Bp. Wordsworth is, like his guides of antiquity, altogether hazy and haphazard. He slights, as they did, the landmarks which God has given us through the prophet. Neither he nor they perceived the principles of its structure, but they caught at appearances here and there which have no bearing on the relative bearing of its parts. Thus, as all began with guess work, no considerate Christian can wonder that all has resulted in confusion.

But it is surprising that a pious and learned man, as I gladly believe Dr. W. to have been, should so misstate the views in the most ancient remains on the Millennial prophecy. Why cite Bede (8th cent.) and Haymo (9th)? He knew perfectly well that Justin Martyr, as well as the pseudo-Barnabas, Irenaeus (an Asiatic godly bishop of Lyon in Gaul A.D. 177) who wrote in Greek and Tertullian who wrote in Latin, Hippolytus bp. of Portus Rom., Methodius bp. of Tyre, and Victorinus, all the three martyrs, and Lactantius the rhetorician father, believed and taught a literal reign of Christ and the

risen saints over the earth. Origen, learned but heterodox, was the only one (those excepted who denied the genuineness of the book) of the pre-Constantinian writers who differed in principle as an extreme allegorist, though he did not live to comment on the Revelation. From Constantine's time indeed writers began to imagine, as it was not to be wondered at perhaps, a present millennium, though not all in the same sense. But it is unnecessary to speak of later Fathers, as I attach not the smallest authority to any of them, however early.

However this may be, the notion of the millennium advocated by the late bp. of Lincoln, no matter who held it, is in every respect absurd. What contempt of the Apocalyptic order to say that John "reascends once more" (p. 5)! What ignorance of Rev. 20 to fancy that it declares what Christ had done for the church since His incarnation? How He had bound Satan! though the N.T. is express throughout to the contrary. See 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:11, 2 Cor. 11:3, 2 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:27, Eph. 6:12; 1 Thess. 3:18; 2 Thess. 2:2; 1 Tim. 1:20, 1 Tim. 3:6, 7, 1 Tim. 4:1, 1 Tim. 5:15; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 John 4:1, 6; Rev. 2:9, 13, 24, Rev. 3:9, to say nothing of Rev. 9:11, 20, Rev. 12:17, Rev. 13:4, Rev. 16:13, 14, Rev. 19:20. Christ's preservation of His servants in every age no believer contests. But the vision speaks of their reigning; whereas the N. T. reproves such a present thought as the practical folly of the Corinthians, and insists on the contrary that they must suffer now, until "that day." Undoubtedly Christ has done His infinite work, and carries on His intercession and care in every suited and blessed way for us on high, till He appears the second time unto salvation. But this, or His calling to

heavenly glory all that are true to Him, or His ordaining strength out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, what has it all to do with a saintly resurrection to reign with Him?

It is a miserable bathos to conclude, that “St. John shows in the twentieth chapter of the Apocalypse that the failings, which had been described in such vivid colors in the preceding Visions of this book — under the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Vials, — were due to themselves; and that all God’s acts toward man are done in equity and love” (pp. 5, 6). A Jew might have said far more; a heathen almost as much. St. John showed this in Rev. 20! The only thing really shown is how utterly, with the one exception of Rev. 17, 18, Dr. Chris. W. misunderstood the book as a whole, and this chapter in particular: else he never could have conceived an inference so pitiful and even imbecile. And this is the real moral to be drawn: that a man, be he ever so respected and able otherwise, should seek to comprehend a book before he writes. Think of his adding, “This twentieth chapter, then, according to this view, is a summary of the Apocalypse”!!! Beyond doubt, “it is in perfect harmony with the whole.” It is the moral picture and bright issue of what he calls “this sublime drama.” And when so regarded, it gives no countenance to Dr. W.’s Anti-millenarian notions.

In the next section II. (6-14) the Bishop proposes “to consider the reasons pleaded in behalf of Millenarian opinions,” but really offers his own reasons against them. He is like others under the delusion that the doctrine rests on one single passage of scripture, Rev. 20. If it were so, God’s word once spoken is amply sufficient for faith, as a thousand times would not suffice

for unbelief. But that kingdom is revealed in many scriptures of both Old T. and New; and, once received, it is seen to fill a very large part of the Bible indirectly as well as directly in the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets, in the Gospels, the Epistles, and the Revelation. Not to have seen this implies sad prejudice and lack of intelligence (in divine matters).

John 14:2 and Luke 20:36, as well as John 12:32, Acts 1:11, Acts 3:21, John 5:28, 29, John 6:39, John 12:48, 1 Cor. 15:52, 1 Thess. 4:15, 2 Thess. 1:7, Matt. 16:27, Matt. 25:31, 32, Luke 9:26, 2 Tim. 4:1, and Dan. 12:2 are the texts culled to prove that a Millennium is repugnant to scripture. On the contrary every one of these falls in with the doctrine; some even demonstrate its truth, besides the bulk of distinct testimony which is left out.

Thus the Christian's hope of Christ's coming to present us in the Father's house above is as consistent with the Millennium as is our risen equality with angels. Other scriptures prove the blessing of Israel and the nations on the earth at that very time under Christ's reign, as Matt. 19:28, Rev. 21:24-26, and in the O.T. Isa. 11:10-13, Isa. 24:21-23, and Zech. 14:5-9.

Theologians in general quite overlook Eph. 1:10, God's purpose in Christ for an administration of the fullness of the times; which is to head or sum up all things in Him, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth — in Him in Whom we too were made to have lot or inheritance; for we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Here we learn in the dogmatic teaching of the great apostle, and not only in parable or prophecy, that God will put the entire universe heavenly and earthly

under Christ; and that we shall share it with the Heir of all things in that day of glory. This is neither the present time of gathering the heirs, nor the eternal state, when it will be no longer a question of His government; but having put down all enemies He gives up the kingdom to Him Who is God and Father, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28). Hence, as a groundwork for it, we hear in the companion Epistle to the Colossians that all the fullness was pleased in Him to dwell, and through Him to reconcile all things to itself, having made peace by the blood of His cross — by Him the things on the earth and the things in the heavens (Col. 1:19, 20). For it is to be on the basis, not of His creative rights only, or of His incarnation, but of the reconciling work in His death.

To leave out of our faith and hope the counsels of God is to have no intelligent communion with the future display of Christ's glory. It is also to ignore the mystery of Christ and the church; and this is just where believers are for the most part, since they betook themselves to the weak and beggarly elements against which the apostle strove so strenuously and solemnly in early days. He knew, and took care that we should hear, that after his departure grievous wolves should enter in among the Christian confessors, and among their own selves should men arise speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them. And so it came to pass that Christendom lost largely the sense of God's grace and almost wholly the understanding of His glory as purposed for Christ "in that day." Through the influence of such as Origen and Eusebius, or of the more sober and orthodox Augustine and Jerome, the hopes of Israel were denied; and consequently the church, ignorant of her heavenly glory with Christ, was held to have

succeeded to the earthly inheritance. This is what the apostle dreaded for the Gentile, as we may see in Rom. 11, lest he should be wise in his own conceit, and, instead of fearing, become boastful to his ruin and eventual cutting off.

Why the Bp. referred to John 12:32 is strange; for it refers to the attractive power of Him crucified, and has no bearing on the question. But Acts 3:21, especially 19-21, refutes his own view; for it proves that the Lord Jesus is to be sent from heaven for the restoration of all things according to the testimony of the holy prophets since time began. This is the Millennium, not the White Throne judgment; and Acts 1:11 agrees with it, for He will come to restore the kingdom to Israel as well as for other glorious designs of God. Among these, and of the deepest moment, is His raising bodies, as He is now quickening souls (see John 5:25-29). But it is an error of the first magnitude to think of one simultaneous resurrection. Our Lord here speaks of two, in open contrast of character, “of life,” and “of judgment,” or as elsewhere called “of just and unjust.” These Rev. 20 declares, as might be expected from the great Christian prophecy, severed by more than 1,000 years for a momentous purpose, the special reign of Christ and His own over (not “on”) the earth, where they once were holy sufferers, and distinct from reigning in life throughout eternity, wherein even the millennial saints that never suffered will in due time share.

“The Last Day” is the general expression in John 6, 11, 12 for that time which begins by our Lord raising the believers and ends with judging the faithless, answering to the two resurrections, and opposed to the Jewish hope of present exaltation under a living and reigning

Messiah as things are. There is no difficulty in the "hour" of John 5:28 covering 1,000 years and more, since the "hour" of v. 25 covers admittedly a still longer space. It is therefore unfounded and indeed plain contradiction of scripture to say "there will be no Millennial interval between the Resurrection of the saints and the Universal Judgment." It is an absurdity to talk of both taking place on one and the same day, unless the last day be understood as already explained (an epoch spanning the millennium): why imagine an ordinary day?

For not only do 1 Cor. 15:52 and 1 Thess. 4:16 fall within its capacious limits, but 2 Thess. 1:7, Heb. 9:27, Matt. 16:27, Luke 9:26, 2 Tim. 4:1, Matt. 25:31, 32, Isa. 2, 4, 11, 12, 24, 25, 26. 27, Jer. 30-33, Ezek. 12, etc., and Dan. 12:2, varied as they are in scope and character. But why need particulars be cited, when prophecy as a whole bears on it? It is the day when the Lord takes in hand His execution of God's purpose in good and evil from raising the saints to judging the wicked, as distinguished from the first man where all ends in failure and ruin through sin.

As to all this the Bp.'s views, through heeding human tradition, were vague and confused, defective and even false. With Christendom generally he was a Ptolemaist, not a Copernican; he made the church his center, not Christ; and thus, bending all scripture to his own relations, he left no room for the various glories of Christ for earth as well as in heaven, and for His reign over Israel and all nations, and indeed for His displayed supremacy over all creation, which we shall share with Him. Hence, too, his ignorance of the judgment the Lord will execute on the habitable earth (ç æ) in

righteousness at His appearing, as well as earthly rejoicing and the multitude of the isles glad at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth, when idolatry will with shame vanish for ever and the desert blossom as the rose.

No doubt the ancient Chiliasts were in error who only saw the earth restored and the glorified reigning with Christ on it; but so were the theologians who transferred all thoughts to heaven and the souls in bliss eventual if not present with Christ, among moderns even to losing sight of, if not denying, the resurrection. But even Gen. 14 might have taught these shortsighted men on both sides a better lesson of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, as will be made manifest by our Lord in His day when the enemies are delivered into His hand, and the friends are refreshed after the victory is won over all the opposing might. The great foe will then be restrained by power, as he never has been, the pledge of his final and everlasting punishment. The true or at least antitypical Melchizedek shall sit and rule, a priest on His throne (Zech. 6:13), no longer hidden, but every eye shall see Him, not only after that “order” as He is now, but then also in the exercise of His royal priesthood, blessing man from God and blessing God the Most High from man, when hateful rivals, mere nonentities with demons behind, are gone for ever. Oh, what a blank where all this, and much more accompanying it and hanging on it, to Christ’s glory, are unperceived and unbelieved, though clearly revealed in God’s word!

Dr. W. urges (p. 9) that the saints reign with Christ, not that He reigns with them. This no sound Christian disputes; but he uses it to deny Christ’s reign and ours

with Him over the earth. It is not wise to plead either Eph. 2:6 or Rev. 1:6 to get rid of that future glory we are to share. He tells us in a note that the best MSS. of Rev. 5:10 have the present tense. But the fact is that the most ancient extant () has the future, and so has the Porphyrian uncial of cent. 9, with some 30 cursives, and the best Latin copies, Coptic, etc.; whereas the Alex. and the Basilian uncial (of cent. 8) support the present with less than 30 cursives, etc. Of these the Alex. might have greater weight, but that it alone reads the present in Rev. 20:6; all else give the future. The title of king given to the believer in no way means that he is now reigning, which the apostle reproves in First Corinthians as inconsistent with an actual call to suffer with Christ. Assuredly John 10:28 implies simply that no hostile power can pluck out of His hand as Phil. 3:21 shows that at His coming He will prove Himself Savior of our bodies as He is now of our souls.

What he failed to see is that scripture is abundant and plain in assuring that, distinct from the present and before eternity, Christ will come in glory to reign over Israel and all nations according to the consentient testimony of the Prophets, confirmed by His own words in the Gospels, and the Holy Spirit’s witness in the Epistles, and by the Book of Revelation. He thought such an expectation leads necessarily into low and irreverent notions concerning our Lord. Entirely do we sympathize with the hope for the glorified of our proper blessing in the heavenly places; but to slight the prospects of a blessed earth for Israel and the nations is not faith but prejudice (p. 10). O.T. and N. we have seen to be an ample and irrefutable witness to it. If sin entered there, the Son of God came there to put it away by the sacrifice

of Himself. Satan achieved the greatest success there; Satan will be thence expelled, first for a long while, then for ever. God there displayed His grace in Christ; in Christ God will there display His glory.

So far from there being any inconsistency the kingdom of God when manifested has its heavenly things no less than its earthly; and all things shall not only be put but seen under Christ the Heir of all, heavenly and earthly headed up in Him, as they were all reconciled to God by His work on the cross. The low view is the curtailing of Christ's glory, nor is it true reverence to explain away plain scripture. Others yielding to unbelief think that for a Divine Person to take flesh and die on the cross is incredible degradation. Why should it seem to disgrace Christ risen and glorified to reign over the earth for 1,000 years, besides the perfect and unbroken rest of eternity? It will accomplish unfulfilled scripture and display a righteous kingdom over men as Christ only can. The Deity of Christ stands distinct and intact, and indeed will derive further and rich evidence thereby.

It is all a mistake (p. 11), though made by early Fathers and those who have since followed guides so erring, that the earth is to be peopled by the risen saints. Not so; they will have heavenly glory and reign with Christ over the earth, not on it, as we see in the symbolic New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:9 ff. and 22). Israel will then be on earth a saintly people, not in name only but in reality; and the nations shall seek (as they have not yet done) unto the Rod of Jesse; and His resting place shall be glory. And all the creation that still groans shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty (not of grace, as is the new creation even now, but) of the glory of the children of God. Therefore we that have

the first-fruits of the Spirit, though we too groan within ourselves, do all the more wait for the adoption, the redemption of our body; as the earnest expectation of the creature also waits for our revealing, the signal of its deliverance. What difficulty is there in believing that the unconverted among the nations, though controlled by the power of the great King, surrounded with abundance of all good, and freed from the Tempter, will relapse under his wiles when he is let loose for a little season, and be consumed with fire? It is only the “monstrous” mistake of the Bp. that the risen saints are concerned. The earthly saints, Jews or Gentiles, are threatened by Satan, not his allies.

It is false that the present mixed state (p. 12) will continue when Christ reigns. For the darnel and wheat grow together unto the end of the age (à), not of the world (åæ). The error excludes the judgment of the quick, and of the habitable earth (Acts 17), as well as of the world- kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev. 11:15). All the parables cited, good and bad fish, good and bad guests, wise and foolish virgins, find their separation at the end of this age; and the Millennium is no gulf (p. 13) but a blessed bridge between the age’s end and the eternal state.

So the Thessalonian saints (p. 13), like others, were waiting for Christ’s coming, which is followed by the Millennium. It is His appearing that destroys the man of sin before the kingdom is set up in power and glory. When Christ our life shall be manifested, then shall we also with Him be manifested in glory (Col. 3:4); we are caught up before, and follow Him out of heaven for that day of judgment of the earth (Rev. 17:14, Rev. 19:14). 2 Peter 3 warns those who mock His promised coming

with His day, which fills a thousand years and does not close till the universe melts with fire; and Rev. 1:9, Rev. 11:18, agrees with this.

The creeds of Christendom do not contradict (p. 16) the Millennium. The Athanasian confesses the foundations of the faith; the so-called Apostles' Creed is rather infantine like the Nicene. They do not assert the Millennium. Utterly false is it that, if true, it would falsify Christ's promises to His church; for on the contrary in the millennial day the world will see that the glory, which the Father gave Him, He gave them, perfected as they will then be into one, that the world may know the Father sent the Son and loved those glorified saints as He loved Christ (John 17:22, 23). I am sorry to say that such language betrays infatuation, but am glad to agree that it is no question of the early Patristic writers, but of scripture (p. 15). No importance is attached to the Rabbis either (p. 15).

And as to Cerinthus or the like, one abhors their heterodoxy yet more than Montanist enthusiasm (p. 17). What matters the opinion of a worldly-minded semi-Arian like Eusebius about Papias? Neither (pp. 18, 19) is an authority, any more than the Romanist expositor who falsely attributes the decline of faith in the Apocalypse to millenarian teaching. None love, understand, or enjoy that blessed book so much as those who believe what it teaches of that kingdom (p. 20). The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Apocalypse clashed with men's will, and hence were unjustly questioned by men of shallow faith, like Caius the early Roman presbyter (p. 20). Origen, learned and clever indeed, was but a sorry defender of the faith. Did not the Bp. know that he was unreliable and wild, even to the ungodliness of

universalism? Surely also Dionysius of Alexandria (p. 23), an able man without doubt, cannot be acquitted of strange doctrine on Christ's person in opposing the Sabellians. Nor was Jerome (pp. 24, 25) a model of orthodoxy any more than of temper, though an erudite and laborious translator. Augustine of Hippo was one of greater weight; but we have to bear in mind that the Millennial views he opposed (pp. 26, 27) were not sound, those which were rejected by the Reformers and the Puritans (pp. 28-31). Only it is certain that some of the best instructed and most pious men in the Anglican body found no such incompatibility in its formularies with their faith in Christ's millennial reign as the Bp. argues, who himself narrows "the last day" unscripturally (p. 22). The prayer in page 33 is on the contrary consistent. "The end of the world" is the mistake repeated from the A. V. of Matt. 13:39, 49. We all value the Apocalypse at least as much as the Bp. (pp. 33, 36) and do not share in daily use the slight which the Book of Common Prayer puts on that divine book, while it honours the Apocrypha for its lessons in Oct. and Nov. and more.

The second Lecture calls for fewer words. How strange the doctrine that Christ through His death bound Satan! — that this is the true interpretation of Rev. 20:1-3 (pp. 37-44)! and that the first resurrection of vv. 4-6 is not bodily but spiritual by baptism! Hence they live with Christ and are made unto God Kings and Priests in Him (p. 52), and even now judge the world and angels by the precepts of the Law, etc. represented by the 24 elders, as the four cherubim typify the Gospels! This Bp. Wordsworth will have to be the authorized interpretation of the church, attested for more than a

thousand years by such as Origen, Dionysius, Jerome, Augustine, etc.

On the face of the prophecy this scheme ignores its plain structure. For Rev. 19 beyond a doubt supposes Babylon on earth fallen for ever, and in contrast the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven, followed by heaven opened, and the Lord with His armies, His saints, emerging to execute judgment on the Beast and the kings of the earth, and their armies. Thereon, not before, ensues the binding of Satan for a thousand years (not days), and the long predicted reign of the saints over the earth for the same long period. Yet during it the Beast reigns also, not only the ten horns but his the one great authority to whom the dragon gives his power! What?... during the reign of Christ and His saints! Such is Dr. W.'s scheme. Hear on the contrary the scriptural expectation.

And it shall come to pass that Jehovah shall punish the host of the high ones on high, and the kings of the earth on the earth (Isa. 24:21). In that day Jehovah with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea (Isa. 27:1). Only the N.T. is fuller and more precise, giving stages in Rev. 12:2, Rev. 20:1-3, and v. 10, of which the present vision is intermediate. The same N.T. leaves no shadow of doubt that, though the work is wrought by which Satan will be crushed for ever, he is still active in deceiving the nations, as well as in tempting, hindering, and accusing the saints: Acts 5:3, Acts 19:13-16, Rom. 16:20, 1 Cor. 5:5, 2 Cor. 2:11, 2 Cor. 4:4, 2 Cor. 7:5, 2 Cor. 11:14, 2 Cor. 12:7, Eph. 2:2, Eph. 4:27, Eph. 6:11, 12, 16, 1 Thess. 2:18, 1 Thess. 3:5, 2 Thess. 2:2, 9, 1 Tim. 1:20, 1 Tim. 3:7, 1 Tim. 4:1, 1 Tim.

5:15, 2 Tim. 2:26, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8, 1 John 2:13, 14, 1 John 3:8, 10, 1 John 4:4, 6, 1 John 5:18, 19, Rev. 2:9, 13, 24, Rev. 3:9, Rev. 9:11, Rev. 12:7-17, Rev. 13:1, 2, Rev. 16:13, 14. These scriptures abundantly prove that the promised binding is still future, and that Bp. W.'s notion is hopelessly at war with revealed truth. Nothing could be farther from his intention; which the more illustrates the peril of deserting the plain word of God in deference to the thoughts of men, however venerable or numerous. The binding of Satan is reserved for the presence and day of the Lord.

"The first resurrection" only, and brightly, confirms this. The O.T. saints and those of the N. T. the church were already in heaven; for how else could the Lamb's wife have made herself ready for the marriage? These saints had been symbolized by the 24 elders (Rev. 4, and in 5 also by the four cherubim): which is as sure from the context as the application to the 24 books of O.T. scripture and to the four Gospels is a chimera. Here that symbol changes to "the bride," and "the guests" at the Lamb's marriage supper; and this again to "the armies" that follow the Lord out of heaven, when He assumes the character of Warrior. Then in Rev. 20 we have the change from "white horses" to "thrones" when the reign is to begin. In Dan. 7 the thrones were set. Here they are filled. "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them." These were the saints already glorified, who had followed the Lord out of heaven (Rev. 18:14, Rev.19:14).

"And I [I saw] the souls of those that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God." These were the martyrs whose souls were seen under the altar in Rev. 6:9, who were slain in the earlier

persecutions of the book after the elders were seen complete in heaven, and who were also told that they should rest yet a little while till their fellow servants also and their brethren that should be killed even as they were should be fulfilled. But now as these were fulfilled under the later persecutions of the Beast, these two classes are raised together. Hence we read, “and such as (or whosoever) worshipped not the beast nor his image, and received not his mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” “Souls” is therefore strictly correct, as in Rev. 6:9, so here in v. 4. They had died and were seen in the disembodied state; but now “they lived,” which has no reasonable sense but in a resurrection from the dead, as it must be also to “reign with Christ a thousand years.” And this is the uniform apostolic doctrine of the N.T. “If so be that we suffer with [Him] that we may be also glorified with [Him]” (Rom. 8). “If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him” (2 Tim. 2). “Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14).

Granted that “a thousand years’ reign” must not be confounded with “reigning in life,” as all saints shall throughout eternity. But the principle of the difference is as clear as it is scriptural. The millennial reign is for those that suffer with Christ, which embraces all that are His in O. and N.T. times till He comes for them and presents them on high. It is not restricted to saints who suffer for Him. All saints who from the beginning suffered with Christ share that reign. But those who suffered in the Apocalyptic troubles were only called of God while the glorified are seen on high. As they did not survive to welcome His appearing for the reign, they are

thus raised at the last moment, not to be reigned over, but to reign with Christ like those already seen seated on the thrones. Those thus honoured are then fulfilled:

The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of the Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Such is the simple and unforced interpretation of the vision, as worthy of the Lord and of the prophet, as that of the Lecture is mean, and harsh, as incongruous with the Apocalypse generally as with this particular context. The plain and just meaning furthers the action of the Book and is consistent with all revealed truth, not to say requisite for God's glory, and the Lamb at that juncture. "Know ye not that the Saints (not the martyrs only) shall judge the world?... Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" Those converted during the millennium escape all suffering with Christ; for there is no enemy there to sift or tempt, Satan being forcibly kept away. Hence they will have no such reigning before the world, then for the first time, as the millennium affords for Christ's holy sufferers. Yet like all saints, they "shall reign in life by the one, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17).

It would have been easy to have criticized the lecture in detail from first to last; as it would have been difficult in that case to have avoided sharp notice of singularly wild sentiments, if one dealt with the statements as they deserved. It is preferred therefore to let the distinct enunciation of the truth itself dispel the error, which leaves a lamentable blank in the future of the universe, where God has revealed, in both Testaments, the

grandest scheme for the glory of Christ and the saints of the heavenly places to the joy of all creation, especially of Israel and all the nations, before the judgment of the dead and the eternity which follows. How blind are all who, listening to tradition, fancy that the state of things which began with the cross, wherein Satan is still the prince and god of this age, is the reign of the saints with Christ predicted by John! No, that reign is the restitution of all things (Acts 3), the revealing of the sons of God, when the whole creation ceases to groan, the idols utterly pass away, all families of the earth are blessed in Christ, He and His heavenly ones shine in heavenly glory, and Jehovah alone is exalted in that day. The gospel and the church are given their special development in the N.T. But the visions of glory promised to Israel and of blessing for all the nations of which the O.T. speaks must surely be “in that day.”

The Rapture of the Saints:

Who suggested it, or rather on what Scripture?

The Bible Treasury, New Series, vol. 4, p. 314-318 (Also published by T. Weston 1903.)

When a bitter adversary of the Christian's heavenly hope sought many years ago to stigmatise it as having a foul and even Satanic origin. there were questions, in which he was compromised, too serious for any who weighed their import to notice so unworthy an insinuation. It is much to be doubted that the late Mr. J. N. Darby saw or heard of it; nor did I ever meet with it till lately, long after its dispersion far and wide. A recent American journal brought it first under my notice; but the idea was probably derived, directly or indirectly, from that source. I quote from a "little booklet" written with no small warmth on our side of the Atlantic by a clergyman. This one could appreciate if Christ's person or work were assailed; but is it not extravagant, if not unaccountable, in such a question where all agree in the general truth?

"I am not aware that there was any definite teaching (i.e. in the early days of the Plymouth movement) that there would be a secret rapture of the saints at a secret coming, until this was given forth as an utterance in Mr. Irving's church, from what was there received as being the voice of the Spirit. But whether anyone ever asserted such a thing or not, it was from that supposed revelation that the modern doctrine and the modern phraseology respecting it arose. It came not from holy scripture. but from that which falsely pretended to be the Spirit of God; whilst not holding the true doctrine of

our Lord's incarnation in the same flesh and blood of His brethren, but without taint of sin."

What must one think of a polemic who would extract an envenomed shaft to injure, if he could, the apostle Paul's preaching and teaching of "salvation", from the utterance at Philippi of the maiden with a spirit of Python? "These men are servants of the Most High God that announce to you the way of salvation." The then instrument of Satan was not so openly hostile as the slanderer of J.N.D, On the contrary the enemy adopted the craftier policy of commending the apostolic testimony. But Paul, distressed by it (for it went on for many days), turned at length, and in the name of Jesus expelled the unclean spirit, disdaining such an ally. The spirit's talk of "the way of salvation", however, did not hinder Paul or his companions from proclaiming "so great salvation", which, having been spoken by our Lord, was confirmed by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them. Argue, as adversaries might, from the fact that the apostle never wrote a word on the way of salvation before the evil spirit proclaimed this as his errand, he was not to be driven from the truth by the wiles of the devil; and woe would surely be to such as availed themselves of that craft to turn away from the glad tidings of God.

But let us turn from surmise to such facts as exist; for both assailed and assailant are departed. Though Mr. D., in general used to say little of himself, he does speak, in two pieces which appear in his Collected Writings, of the way in which light dawned on his heart as to the future according to the scriptures. The first bore on the change in the divine dealings with men at the end of this age. "But I must, though without comment, direct attention

to chap. 32 of the same prophet (Isaiah 32) which I do the rather, because in this it was the Lord was pleased, without man's teaching, first to open my eyes on this subject, that I might learn His will concerning it throughout — not by the first blessed truths stated in it, but the latter part, when there shall be a complete change in the dispensation, the wilderness becoming the fruitful field of God's fruit and glory, and that which had been so being counted a forest, at a time when the Lord's judgments should come down, even great hail, upon this forest; and the city even of pride be utterly abased" (Proph. 1, pp. 165, 166).

Of that light which later shone on the heavenly side of the Lord's coming he speaks rather differently. "It is this passage which, twenty years ago [i.e. from 1850 when he then wrote], made me understand the rapture of the saints before — perhaps a considerable time before — the day of the Lord (that is, before the judgment of the living.)" The difference is this, that he expressly excludes "man's teaching" in the first case, which he does not even imply in the second. There he simply says that it was 2 Thess. 2:1, 2, which made him understand the rapture of the saints to be before the day of the Lord, but not a word about the Lord pleased to open his eyes in the same way: how he does not say, as there was no call for it in his criticism of M. Gaussen on Daniel the Prophet.

Now it so happens that, during a visit to Plymouth in the summer of 1845, Mr. B. W. Newton told me that, many years before, Mr. Darby wrote to him a letter in which he said that a suggestion was made to him by Mr. T. Tweedy (a spiritual man and most devoted ex-clergyman among the Irish brethren), which to his mind quite

cleared up the difficulty previously felt on this very question. No one was farther from lending an ear to the impious and profane voices of the quasi-inspired Irvingites than Mr. T., unless indeed it were J.N.D. himself who had closely investigated their pretensions and judged their peculiar heterodoxy on Christ's humanity as anti-christian and blasphemous. As to this anyone may satisfy himself by the Collected Writings XV, the first two articles of Doct. 4, with strictures in six other volumes, to which may be added, in a new edition, a longer paper that has been discovered since.

On the other hand Mr. Newton knew, as well or better than most at this time of day, such of the Newman St. oracles as reached ears and eyes outside. But he also knew that no serious brother in fellowship regarded them with less than horror, as emanating not from human excitement merely but from a demon accredited with the power of the Holy Spirit. Their sorrow was great over E. Irving as a man of rare ability, large gift as a preacher and teacher, and zealous to live the truth in faith and love. Though he was carried away pitiably by the claim of tongues and miracles, and by the yet more dangerous pretension to restored apostles and prophets, they thankfully observed, what was his humbling admission, that he received no such endowment. It was a striking difference from his associates; that he, much the most eminent of them all spiritually, should have been unvisited by the alleged new power from on high. Yet Irving was bolder than any in affirming the fundamental heterodoxy as to Christ's person, nay that His sinful humanity (may God forgive the blasphemy!) was the basis for the divine gifts, the spirit (whatever its source and character) coming as its seal.

But Irving was at least honest and outspoken; and however erring as he surely proved, God kept him personally from the evil energy which wrought in those to whom he bowed down with abject superstition, and took him away comparatively young but worn out, contrary to their confident predictions. Their apostles and prophets with the rest of what they called the fourfold gifts, shuffled and prevaricated in the way habitual among men under demon powers. Take a single sentence of his out of many, “I believe it to be most orthodox, and of the substance and essence of the orthodox faith, that Christ could say until his resurrection, Not I, but sin that tempteth me in my flesh” (The Orthodox Catholic Doctrine of our Lord’s Human Nature, p. 127, London, 1830). And when Mr. Robert Baxter challenged this doctrine as false, Irving could reply that the spirit in their prophetess, Miss E. C., had laid down that B. had departed from the truth which I. had maintained, the Lord being pleased with him for it. This was confirmed by another prophetess, Mrs. C. (Baxter’s Narrative of Facts, etc. pp. 104, 105).

But I willingly bear my testimony to Mr. N. that he never to me thought of attributing the source of the so-called doctrine, the rapture of the saints, to that seducing spirit. It was new, however, to hear that Mr. Tweedy, who died full of blessed labours in Demerara, was the one who first suggested, as a decisive proof from scripture, 2 Thess. 2:1, 2. I so implicitly believed in his telling me the truth as conveyed in Mr. D.’s letter to himself, that it did not occur to me to question Mr. D. about it. I knew the latter to be generous in acknowledging readily any debt of the kind he owed to other brethren, having experienced it in my own case and in that of Mr. Bellett,

if not of more still. Indeed it was very touching to observe that one, to whose richly suggestive help so many were indebted, was himself so frank to own any fresh thought of value in another, and to manifest his simple-hearted pleasure, not only in hailing the accession but in adding to the evidence of its truth, as he so well could and did, while pointing out its importance.

Further, when Mr. N. named to me the disclosure of Mr. D.'s old letter, things had reached a very high temperature, and on no question more than the one before us. Mr. N. had issued the first edition of his "Thoughts on the Apocalypse" in parts, completed in 1844; and Mr. D. was at that time bringing out in parts his "Examination" of it, as able a volume as he ever wrote, not only in my judgment thoroughly subversive of the "Thoughts", but establishing on a sound basis the grand truths which were sought to be undermined. Now B. W. N. was no neutral, but abhorred it in divine things as much as J.N.D. or anyone. Christ's relation to God had not yet come into controversy, nor the righteousness of God; but he was quite right in feeling the immense moment of God's revealed mind as to the Lord's coming, the heavenly calling, the church of God, etc. These truths he opposed through his prophetic system, which was sadly narrow and crude, however assured he might be of its certainty. His antagonism to Mr. D. and his teaching as incompatible had already come out clearly and decidedly, though the open breach did not occur till some months after.

On that humiliating breach there is no call to speak here. It was followed about two years subsequently by the distressing discovery of a systematic heterodoxy, one

part of which, singular to say, appeared in the Second edition of the Plymouth “Christian Witness (vol. ii.),” an article of B. W. N. on the Doctrines of Newman St. The Editor (J. L. H.),1 through the loan to his wife of MS. Notes on Psalm 6, divulging doctrine revolting to his spirit, deemed it his duty to Christ and the church, that it should appear with his comment, no matter what the secrecy enjoined might be or any possible consequence. Mr. N. hastened to defend his scheme of thought, and thus first laid open what had been working too long in the dark. J.N.D., providentially detained beyond the time when he meant to go abroad, was thus called to deal with it searchingly, and with such effect that the most trusty of N.’s fellow-workers who remained broke down in confession of their fatal departure from the true Christ, owning the evil to be worse than what was known and laid to their door. Even B.W.N., threatened with the deserting of his friends if he did not retract, sent out (26th Nov., 1847), “A Statement and Acknowledgement respecting certain Doctrinal Errors.”

But this failed to satisfy those aggrieved. Mr. N. did confess his awful sin “in holding that the Lord Jesus came by birth under any imputation of Adam’s guilt, or the consequences of such imputation”; but he put a similar issue on His being made of a woman. Think of including Christ with the many constituted sinners! This he gave up; but he never disclaimed the horrible falsehood that He was under the curse of a broken law as a born Israelite, not vicariously, but in His own relation to God. No one any longer alleged against him his perversion of Rom. 5:19 (first half); but he gave no sign that he renounced his evil teaching against the Lord, as “come of a woman, come under law”. On the

contrary, in a “Letter on subjects connected with the Lord’s Humanity” (Oct. 1848), the latest known to me in which Mr. N. brought out his own doctrine on Christ’s relation to God, he maintained the principles of the obnoxious tracts withdrawn for reconsideration — all, save involving Christ in Adam’s guilt. He had “used wrong theological terms, and a wrong application to the fifth of Romans” (p. 32)!

It is plain that this system is semi-Irvingite, and though rejecting sinful humanity, comes to the same result of overthrowing His person directly, and indirectly the work which depends on His person. No doubt he wrote often on His work, and on justification by faith; but what is the value, as I told an eminent religious leader, of faith in a false Christ? Living faith is in the true Christ of God. Now it is one fully implicated in his kinsman’s heterodoxy who dared to impute to an Irvingite spirit the doctrine of the church’s rapture! Far from me to say a needless word of one who is no longer alive to speak and explain. Nor is it that I was with the new departure of Park St., nor approved of proceedings that led up to and followed it, and have reason to feel grief for that which there is good ground to impute to others. But unbroken deep regard to a great and good man, [J. N. Darby] an uncompromising champion for Christ’s glory and God’s truth, makes it an imperative duty to expose so low an effort of polemical rancour.

If there had been no letter from Mr. D, to Mr, N. stating the actual source, it was a rash and wicked surmise to say or think that “it was from that supposed revelation that the modern doctrine and the modern phraseology respecting it arose.” That a vexed and vindictive spirit might thus imagine under a lamentably sad temptation,

one can readily understand. But can any fair mind in God's presence, if he knew no other facts, conceive a greater improbability than J.N.D. adopting the utterance of what he believed a demon as a truth of God?

On the face of it, the "supposed revelation" [among the Irvingites] declared that, within three years and a half, the saints would be caught up to the Lord, and the earth wholly given up to the days of vengeance. The power came upon another at the same time confirming the rapture of the saints within three years and a half. Mr. N. 's words are purposely quoted from the article in the "Christian Witness'', though at hand is Baxter's Narrative from which he drew the information. This betrays a source and character totally different from Mr. Tweedy's suggestion, or Mr. Darby's letter, for the doctrine [the pretribulation rapture of the saints] which became a factor of force not only among brethren so-called but among saints of God largely throughout the world.

The oracular utterance was grounded on the ordinary system, which Mr. B.W.N. shared, of making the Lord's coming a link in the chain of prophecy. The rapture was to be within three years and a half from the time of prediction; as the voice then or afterwards taught that those described in Rev. 7 and 14 (for they confounded the two companies) would be the saints caught up. But all such ideas are baseless, and prove the absence of any real intelligence as to the book of Revelation. In neither case is there a translation to heaven, which takes place between Rev. 3 and 4. For the saints are still viewed as in the churches on earth according to the one chapter; and in the other they are seen under the symbol of the twenty-four crowned and enthroned elders. During that

interval Christ must come to fetch them on high. The hope is thus carefully kept in scripture from confusion with the prophetic account of God's dealings with Israel and the Gentiles which follow. The like distinction is not less carefully marked by the coming of the Lord in 1 and 2 Thess. with other corresponding scriptures, and has nothing in common with the Irvingite voice in its unfounded and false application to the prophetic part of the Apocalypse.

Whatever men think, scripture (in the capital seat of the revelation of Christ's coming for the church, 1 Thess. 4) is express, that the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we the living that remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. All must believe in this rapture at some time, for it is surely the common hope of Christians. The humbling fact, even among prophetic students, is that it has occupied so little their hearts and lips. But allowing this, why should any who wish to decry its prominence rush to the malignant conclusion, that it was derived from an Irvingite source, by those who are and have ever been as far as possible from such teaching, and who deem it utterly antichristian?

Ah, yes; but the "modern phraseology" — that tells the tale! Is it then that "the rapture" betrays the tainted source beyond a doubt? What a blinding preoccupation must have possessed the mind which drew such an inference! It is true that in the Dictionary of Dr. S. Johnson, and even in that of the much lauded Richardson, "rapture" is wholly absent in the sense before us. Webster, and Worcester also ignore it. It is an inexcusable blank. For it is not a modern "phraseology",

but employed as in this case two or three centuries ago by well known authors of choice expression.

An early use of the word “rapture” for actual removal out of the present scene by power is by Shakespeare (Pericles, Act II, sc. 1, near the end). This however applies, not to the Lord for heaven, but to the sea, “the rapture of the sea.” As there is no other expression for the idea in our tongue, we cannot afford to lose it. But in fact it did not become obsolete. On the contrary it is employed, and in its scriptural application to divine power catching up to heaven, by men of celebrity for their language. John Milton, who, whatever the splendour of his style in prose and verse, is not one to be relied on for soundness in the faith, or decent respect for prelates however pious, did believe that “Thou, the eternal and shortly-expected King, shalt open the clouds to judge the several kingdoms of the world,” and of course to reward so sober, wise, and religious a commonwealth as that of England! But no reference of his to heavenly hope do I know; and hence he had no need of such a word. But in the same literal sense he does use its kindred “rapt” in Paradise Lost, III, 522, “Rapt in a chariot drawn by fiery steeds,” and in Paradise Regained, II, 39, 40, “For whither is he gone, what accident hath rapt him from us?” Nor is he by any means the only old English poet who so wrote.

But let us pass to the graver roll of divines, which any can verify without trouble. Bishop Joseph Hall in the most popular of his writings, “The Contemplations,” so entitles Elijah’s translation to heaven, ‘‘The Rapture of Elijah” (Hall’s Works, II, p. 80, Oxford, 1837). A second is Dr. Thos. Jackson, Dean of Peterborough, born after Bishop Hall but deceased before him; in whose second

folio (p.1068) we read of the “taking up” of Enoch and Elijah, yet in the Table of the third it is their “rapture” (ed. 1673). A third and later witness is the still more celebrated Bishop Jeremy Taylor, who in vol. VI. 548 of his Whole Works, a new ed. 1828, uses “rapture” twice over for Paul caught up or rapt up; and he has the credit of being considered one of the refiners of the English language.

From the Episcopalians of that early day I turn to Nonconformists, not so far back but by no means modern; Matthew Henry’s Exposition of the O. and N. Test. VI2 on the scripture before us, “At, or immediately before, this rapture into the clouds, those who are alive will undergo a mighty change,” etc.

The last that we need is the respectable Dr. John Guyse, who wrote the Practical Expositor (i.e. of the N. T. in three quarto vols.). The Second ed. of 1761 now lies before me. In his paraphrase of 1 Thess. 4:17, he says of the dead saints raised, “and we with them shall be carried up by a divine rapture,” etc. These quotations are the more seasonable, as whether Anglicans or Dissenters they were little conversant with the blessed hope. Nor was anyone more uninstructed than Dr. G. For in the Lord’s call he hears only “an awful summons,” and he confounds the glorified saints when caught up with the sheep or blessed of all the nations (Matt. 25:34). Like all the theologians and their Oxford critic, Prof. Jowett, he, with even more evident blundering, makes the apostle entreat them by “the awful coming” of the Lord to the final judgment at the last day, and by their hope of being then gathered with us to meet the Lord in the air. That is, he makes Paul treat of the same subject in his true comfort and in the falsehood he

refuted! Yet even Dr. G. did not go so far as a highly respected Bp. of Carlisle (an Oxford double first), who translated ἐνέστηκεν will immediately come. Dr. G. was more grammatical; but all err who deny it to mean that the day of the Lord “is present.”

It is no question of omniscience in man, but of the inspired truth God was pleased to give. The confusion, not merely among Christians little conversant with prophetic scripture, but in those who fully look for the Lord to return in His kingdom and fulfil the predicted times of refreshing for the earth, is deplorable. Take, as an instance out of multitudes, the words of the late Dean Alford in his Prolegomena on 1 Thessalonians, Sect. II. 6, 4th ed. p. 46. “Their attention had been so much drawn to one subject — his preaching had been so full of one great matter, and from the necessity of the case, so scanty on many others which he desired to lay forth to them, that he already feared lest their Christian faith should be a distorted and unhealthy faith. And in some measure, Timotheus had found it so. They were beginning to be restless in expectation of the day of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:11 ff.), — neglectful of that pure, and sober, and temperate walk, which is alone the fit preparation for that day (1 Thess. 4:3 ff.; 1 Thess. 5:1-9), — distressed about the state of the dead in Christ, who they supposed had lost the precious opportunity of standing before Him at His coming (1 Thess. 4:13 ff.).”

Here the mistake corrected in the First Epistle is mixed up with the error which the Second dispels. They are quite distinct. The first was not restlessness in expecting the day of the Lord, but was unintelligent sorrow over departed brethren, because they were supposed by death to lose their place in the train of His glory. This

gave occasion to the fresh revelation in 1 Thess. 4 of the Lord's causing the dead in Christ to rise first, while it is also shown that both dead and living saints are to be caught up together into the air to meet the Lord; and thus shall we ever be with the Lord. After the removal of their needless grief, disturbing alarm befell the saints by the unfounded rumour that the day of the Lord was actually there, in all probability confounded with their sore trials and persecution from their worldly countrymen and the unbelieving Jews, embittered by envy against the gospel and all who had received it. This the apostle clears away by setting before them the true nature of that day, which will display their enemies as the objects of retributive punishment, and Himself glorified in His saints and marvelled at in all that believed. He next beseeches them, by their bright hope of His presence and their gathering together to Him, not to be shaken quickly from their mind, nor yet troubled by this false report; and then he proceeds to prove that there must be the apostasy first, and the man of sin revealed, not before the Lord comes to receive His own, but before they come with Him from heaven to accomplish that tremendous day (2 Thess. 2).

Again, what misconception of the hope as a whole can be more profound than to represent that the later epistles gradually modify the earlier "expectation of His almost immediate coming" (Sect. iv. 8, p. 49)? "9. And in this, the earliest of those Epistles, I do find exactly that which I might expect on this head. While every word and every detail respecting the Lord's coming is a perpetual inheritance for the Church, — while we continue to comfort one another with the glorious and heart-stirring sentences which he utters to us in the word of the Lord,

— no candid eye can help seeing in the Epistle, how the uncertainty of ‘the day and hour’ has tinged all these passages with a hue of near anticipation: how natural it was, that the Thessalonians receiving this Epistle, should have allowed that anticipation to be brought even yet closer, and have imagined the day to be actually already present. 10. It will be seen by the above remarks how very far I am from conceding their point to those who hold that the belief, of which this Epistle is the strongest expression, was an idle fancy, or does not befit the present age, as well as it did that one. It is God’s purpose respecting us, that we should ever be left in this uncertainty, looking for and hasting unto the day of the Lord, which may be upon us at any time before we are aware of it.” etc.

Thus then the rapture of the saints is not a mere catching up into the air in a moment, to come down again with the Lord the next, which seems to be the strange, hasty, and narrow conclusion of some men; but even Matt. 13 might correct them. For the saints are transferred from earth to heaven to be for ever with the Lord, as the wheat from the field into the barn. No doubt it is the harvest season, and after the darnel are collected by the reaping angels into bundles for the purpose of burning them. It is Christ’s presence who calls and assembles the saints to Himself above. The consummation of the age is not a point of time, but a period which consists of successive events highly important, distinct, and even contrasted; for after the rapture beyond controversy the darnel are consigned to the furnace and burnt; and then do the righteous shine out, not on the earth, but as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, the heavenly region of the kingdom of God.

Antichrist is not destroyed till then, whereas before it the marriage of the Lamb is celebrated above. Other scriptures of more formal and comprehensive prophecy, as the Revelation, enable us to see the interval, and to learn the momentous aims which it subserves for the divine ways of both judgment and mercy, almost quite lost in the superficial and confused view referred to.

Ps. 110, so often and boldly urged for Christ's rising from the Father's throne at once to take His own in the new age, leaves room for these great events which lay outside of Israel's hopes, and are here passed by in silence. The notion (Five Letters p. 58) that for a time the "saints in their risen bodies will be in the midst of those who remain unchanged: a terrible sight bursting suddenly as in a moment upon the slumbering world: — the Lord over them in the air in His glory, and raised saints near and around them"! is a dream worthy of the Shepherd of the Pseudo-Hermas, and beneath even the Pseudo-Barnabas.

Not less suicidal is the notion that after Christ has received the wheat and executed final sentence on the darnel in Christendom, the lawless one "was still existent," and "undismayed by all he had witnessed," instead of being annulled by the appearing of the Lord's presence (Thoughts on the Apocalypse, 1st ed. 298). But what destroys the entire scheme is the admission (in the page before, 297) that the saints "are recognised in the commencement of this chapter [Rev. 19] as being above with the Lord in the glory." This is indeed quite true; but how does it consist with the systematic effort to jumble all up in a single act at the moment of His presence? It is not for me to defend his spurious idea in the same pages, "that the moment when the Lord terminates the

history of Christendom, and takes His saints to meet Him in the air is the moment when He also gives His final blow to Babylon." To Babylon! Why, this is another absurd contradiction of his and almost every one else's fundamental principle, that the vials like the preceding series of judgments are God's activity, before Christ comes judicially; and great Babylon came in remembrance before God to give her His cup of wrath in the most extreme form before the Lord with all His saints left heaven to deal with the Beast and the False Prophet, etc.

Now this is the staunch champion of the school implacably hostile to allowing any but one act of coming. For on Rev. 19:11-14 he concedes (in Thoughts, 299) that the saints have joined Him, and fall into the train of His glory. Yet he knew, as do his followers, that the Lord must have come into the air to receive them, before they could thus follow Him out of heaven to execute judgment on the most blasphemous and daring of all his enemies.

"Magna est veritas et praevalebit." Who before could anticipate such an acknowledgement from B. W. N.? For he thus acknowledged the principle, without having learnt that the only true time for the rapture is at the close of Rev. 3 and before the scenes of Rev. 4, 5. But even he was compelled by the force of scripture to confess that Rev. 19:14, to say nothing of the preceding vision of the heavenly bridals, compels the admission of Christ's having come for His saints before He appears, and they with Him, manifested together in glory. Granted the great truth of His coming for the saints in sovereign grace before they follow Him from heaven for His overwhelming judgments on the earth, the interval

is quite secondary; but this too can only be learnt satisfactorily from scripture. Surely acrimony might be well spared in searching into such a detail, though of no small interest and importance.

The criticism then, in order to deny the “rapture,” evinces not only a captious spirit but real ignorance. “Rapture” in the usage required is a word familiar to English Christians from earlier days, and gives no ground of offence save to an evil eye.

Need it to be pointed out that “the modern doctrine,” if of any weight, assumes that the rapture of the saints by Christ to the Father’s house is not the doctrine of God? But this is the question for revelation to decide. We on the contrary here join issue, being assured that no other conviction truly answers to the inspired testimony, only let scripture be fully taken into account, and adequate room left for what it speaks about Jews and Greeks, and the church of God, as the apostle says. The failure to distinguish Christ’s coming, or Presence for the Christian (for the phrase bears a generic sense), from that later aspect of it which is specified as “the day,” throws even careful minds into confusion, and creates sure collision with scripture. Where for instance is the force of the apostle’s appeal in 2 Thess. 2:1, 2, when they are mixed up? Distinguish them, and chaos is reduced to divine order, and the argument is seen in all its cogency without strain or effort.

Take this illustration from a still more solemn subject, though not strict but sufficient to help, if the enemy were seeking to destroy faith’s confidence by the terror of the great white throne. We beseech you, brethren, for the sake of (or by) the known grace of Christ and the life

eternal and the everlasting redemption we have in Him, that ye be not soon shaken in (or from) your mind, nor troubled, either by spirit, or word, or letter as by us, as that the eternal judgment will bring perdition on you. That awful doom is to be at the close, long after you have been caught up to heaven; and it will fall on the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and fornicators and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars. Their part will not be in a new heaven and a new earth, but in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone; this is the second death.

1 He also disclaimed all knowledge of this “Second” edition, like most of the elder brethren also, being already provided with the first. This it is well to state, as an effort was made to show that people were inconsistent in complaining later of what was in circulation long before. The fact is that an active teacher of the system (W.B.D.) acknowledged just before it was exposed, that it had been fully canvassed in their large meeting for eight years before, and that the party were fully made up in it. He too with N.’s chief associates renounced it in print.

2 Of course it is known that Henry only left MSS. for the latter half of the N.T., and that D. Mayo completed the Epistles to the Thessalonians. But this only confirms the fact that “rapture” was commonly known in that day. instead of being a modern phrase due to Irvingite vagary.

The Lord's Second Coming and Kingdom

1 His Coming A Proper, Personal One

“This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11) The Lord had Himself promised the same thing. “I go to prepare a place for you..... I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” (John 14) That the Son of man will literally return, and be revealed, is also clear from Luke 12:35-46, Luke 17:22, 37, Luke 18:1-8, Luke 19:11-27, Luke 21:27-36. The last is the more important, because it shows the fallacy of such as suppose Matt. 24:30, Mark 13:26, to have been fulfilled in the siege of Jerusalem under Titus. Past and present disasters, “until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled,” are fully described already in Luke 21:20-24. Next follows the closing scene — distress of nations with perplexity; and men see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. “This generation” (i.e., the present unbelieving race of the Jews) lasts till then; it shall not pass away till all be fulfilled. For “the world to come,” grace will convert “a generation to come.” (Ps. 102:18) In a word, death, the outpouring of the Spirit, and the destruction of Jerusalem, are all distinct things from the advent of the Lord Jesus. He is coming, and quickly. (Rev. 12:7-20.)

2 His Coming Pre-Millennial.

“He shall send Jesus Christ... whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution (i.e., restoring of all

things which God hath spoken of by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:20, 21) Jesus is still in heaven, and that blissful period is not yet commenced: His mission and those times upon earth are to run on together Romans 8:19-23 teaches that creation must groan till the sons of God are manifested. But their manifestation depends on that of Christ. (Col. 3; Col. 4; 1 John 3:3.) Therefore, the predicted blessing of creation — which is one main feature of the millennium — is to be when Christ and the Church appear in glory; not before. Nay, "ourselves also which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption; to wit, the remedy of our body." And, confessedly, the redemption of the body, or resurrection, awaits His doming. That is, there is no relief to a groaning creation, or to a groaning Church, till Christ comes; in other words, there can be no millennium till then. Again, Israel is now blinded in part, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." (Rom. 11:25, 26) Here again we learn that the coming of the Saviour is to accomplish the salvation of all Israel, which is another characteristic of the millennium. With Jeremiah 30:7, and Daniel 12:1, we may compare Zechariah 12; Zechariah 13; Zechariah 14; they will be found to afford fresh proofs. Zechariah 14:2, 8 announces that the Lord is to come for the deliverance of the Jews when they are in the deepest trouble; that His feet shall stand upon the same spot He had touched before His ascension — upon the mount of Olives, which is to be cloven in twain; that all the saints shall come with the Lord, and that, after this, living waters shall go out of Jerusalem, and the Lord shall be

King over all the earth. Is not this the millennium? It is preceded by the Lord's coming. Another witness is to be found in such scriptures as 2 Thessalonians 2; 2 Peter 2; 2 Peter 3; Jude; 1 John 2; where evil is shown to have been introduced within the bosom of Christian profession from the days of the apostles, and that it is to spread, ripen, and be terminated only by the judgment which the Lord shall execute when He returns. Not the Church, but Christ is to destroy the Antichrist, and this by His personal appearing. His presence gathers the Church above; its Shining forth or epiphany destroys the Lawless One here below. (2 Thess. 2:1-8) Compare with this Isaiah 11:4, to which the allusion is evident. The reign of blessedness on earth ensues: "When thy judgments are in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." Matthew 13 is to the same effect: the Son of man, by His angels, clears the field. 1 Corinthians 15:23-28, and 2 Tim. 4:1, are very distinct in connecting Christ's appearing with His kingdom, not with the end, and the end (not with His appearing to reign, but) with the surrender of the kingdom to God the Father. In this kingdom the risen saints reign with Him; they rise to meet Him at His coming, preparatory to His reign. (2 Tim. 2:12; Rom. 8:17) Revelation 19; Revelation 20 distinctly prove that Christ and His saints come from heaven to destroy the beast and the false prophet, with their adherents, and then to establish His kingdom on the earth for a thousand years, previously to the judgment of the great white throne, and the new heavens and earth.

3 His Coming Two-Fold; 1, For, And 2, With His Saints.

1. For His saints: John 14:3; 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 1:10; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Phil. 3:20; Rev. 3:10, 11.

2. With His saints: Zech. 14:5; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 1:10; Jude 14; Rev. 17:14; Rev. 19:14.

It may be well to notice here that Rev. 4-19, gives us a divine description of the Church's position in heaven — symbolized by twenty-four crowned elders — after Christ has come for them, and before He comes with them. From the moment they are caught up to meet Him in the air, they are ever with the Lord! with Him in the Father's house; with Him when the successive judgments (under the figures of seals, trumpets, and vials) are falling on the earth; with Him when the marriage supper of the Lamb is celebrated above; with Him when He comes from heaven to war with His civil and religious enemies; with Him when we reign together on the earth for a thousand years; and with Him in the subsequent eternal state. "So shall we over be with the Lord."

4 His Coming And Kingdom Our Proximate Object Of Hope, And A Grand Motive Of Holiness, Patience, And Faithful Service.

Luke 12:35, 36; John 14:3; John 21:22; Rom. 13:11, 12; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Cor. 11:26; 1 Cor. 15:23, 58; Phil. 1:9, 10; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:4, 5; 1 Thess. 1:3, 10; 1 Thess. 2:12, 19; 1 Thess. 3:13; 1 Thess. 4:13; 1 Thess. 5:1-6, 23, 24; 2 Thess. 1:7, 10; 2 Thess. 2:1-14; 2 Thess. 3:5; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8, 18; Titus 2:12, 13; Heb. 9:28; 10:37; James 5:7-9; 1 Peter 1:5, 13;

2 Peter 3:11-14; 1 John 2:28; 1 John: 3:2, 3; Jude 14, 21, 24; Rev. 3:11; Rev. 22:7, 12, 17, 20.

5 The Resurrection Of The Just Different In Source, Character, Time, And, Issues, From That Of The Unjust.

Luke 14:14; Luke 20:35, 36; John 5:28, 29; John 6; Rom. 8:11, 23; 1 Cor. 6:14; 1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 4:14; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; Phil. 3:11, 20, 21; Heb. 11:35; Rev. 20:5, 6.

W. Kelly.

Oh, what a bright and blessed world Rev. 11:15.

This groaning earth of ours will be, Rom. 8:21.

When from its throne the tempter hurl’d, Rev. 20:3.

Shall leave it all, O Lord, to thee. Zech. 14:9.

But brighter far that world above, Rev. 21:10, 11.

Where we, as we are known, shall know; 1 Cor. 13:12.

And, in the sweet embrace of love, John 17:23.

Reign o’er this ransomed earth below. Rev. 21:24.

IF THIS TRACT SHOULD FALL INTO THE HANDS OF ANY THAT ARE SAYING, WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

THEY WILL FIND THE ANSWER IN Acts 16:31, AND Acts 26:18.

Behold He Cometh with Clouds

“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.” (Revelation 1:7.)

In Colossians we have the association of the saints with Christ very fully wrought out. (Col. 1 and Col. 2.) He is my life, and I am one with Him. Thus, the moment I find Christ my Saviour is dead to the world, I become dead to the world also. I find not only my treasure there, but the very religion of the world judged, because Christ was cast out by the world’s religion. When He comes with clouds, every eye shall see Him. But this will not be the case when He comes to fetch His Church. God is gathering the friends of Christ around the Name of Christ now. The Church is a body which is called while Christ is not seen, and the Christian having his portion in Him now, is hidden with Him. “Your life is hid with Christ in God.”

In this verse, then, it is not the Lord coming to meet His own and gather them to Himself in the air; but, “every eye shall see him... and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” When the Lord comes to meet His Church, it will be far different. God has joined us to the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, according to all the efficacy of His death and resurrection. As far as the spirit is concerned this is true now, and will be true of the body itself when Christ comes. The resurrection of Christ calls me to live thoroughly unto God, as the death of Christ makes me as much dead in principle to the world as if I were already dead. In practice, alas! we have to

own sad falling short. Still, says the apostle, “Your life is hid.” It is the life of Christ you have in you. As long as Christ is hidden, you are hidden also.

But the time is coming when that will no longer be the case. “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” (Colossians 3:4.) When Christ comes to receive the Church, no eye will see Him but those whom Christ comes for. When the world sees Christ, it will be when He comes in glory, bringing His saints with Him — revealed from heaven with the angels of His power, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God (the Gentiles), and on them that obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (the Jews). If the world were to see Christ coming alone in glory before the Church is caught up to Him, it would not be true that, “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” When Christ is hidden, you are hidden; when Christ appears, you will appear.

The world will never see Christ without the Church. It will not see Christ coming to receive the Church, because then they would have seen Him without the Church; whereas, the very first moment of His appearing is to be the moment of our appearing with Him. And this does not merely rest upon a word; it is the doctrine of the whole passage; and the same thing is shown and confirmed by other proofs throughout the New Testament. No person can ever go contrary to truth without getting into the very trouble he is seeking to escape.

In Christ’s death we are dead to the world; in His resurrection we are risen, and are therefore to have our

hearts set upon heavenly things before we see them. And more than that. Christ is not always to be hidden: He is about to be manifested; and when He is manifested, we shall be manifested also, along with Him. Christ and the Church must have been together before they are manifested to the world, if they are to appear together. In Revelation 19, we have this manifestation, where we are told (verse 11 -14), “I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse; and He that sat on him was called Faithful and True… and the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.”

The horse is the emblem of power; the white horse of prosperous, victorious power. It is the Lord Jesus Christ coming in judgment, which will be the time when He comes in the clouds of heaven. These armies that are seen following Him out of heaven, clothed in fine linen, are not angels. This very chapter says that the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And the remarkable thing is this: that when angels are described in Rev. 15 as being “clothed in pure and white linen,” a different word is used. It is the heavenly saints who are thus spoken of in Rev. 19 as the armies of heaven. They were in heaven, therefore, before the way was opened for Christ to come out in judgment; and they follow Him from heaven when He comes. I doubt not that angels are in His train also, as appears from other texts; but they do not seem spoken of here.

There are two most important and different stages of the Lord’s second coming. There is the coming of Christ to receive His people to Himself, and that is what the Church ought always to be waiting for; and there is Christ’s coming to judge the world, when He has already

taken up the heavenly saints, and wickedness thereafter comes to its head. Then, suddenly, the heavens will open, and the Lord Jesus Christ will come and the Church with Him, appearing together in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Is it asked, how? Israel was not told how they were to be delivered out of Egypt. The Lord was going to deliver them, but He did not explain it before it came to pass.

And the Lord is going to bring the church to heaven by the coming of Christ. After that, the Lord Jesus Christ will come and judge the wickedness of the world, and then the Church will come with Him.

The Second Coming of Christ

F. E. RACE 3 & 4 London House Yard, Paternoster Row, E.C. LONDON.

Before the Saviour went to the cross, He left as a parting promise to the disciples these words of love — “Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:1-3). Thus, the Christian hope is, not the spread of the knowledge of the Lord throughout the world, nor is it our own departure by death to be with Christ, but it is His return to receive us unto Himself, that we may be with Him, the Son, in the Father’s house. Blessed, heavenly hope!

Accordingly, when the apostles on Olivet looked after their ascended Lord, “two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10, 11). Well they knew that it was a real personal departure of their Master; just as certainly will His return be real and personal. Jesus shall come again from heaven. Incredulity may deny it; but not even incredulity will assert that it is a secondary matter. It will change at once the face of the church, the world, and all things. Is this secondary?

Hence, in Acts 3:19-21, Peter calls on the Jews to repent and be converted, in order to the blotting out of their sins; so that seasons of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord, and He might send forth Jesus that was fore-appointed to them, whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of the holy prophets since the world began. Though the day of Pentecost was fully come, and the Holy Ghost given in unprecedented power, and never had the world beheld such unselfish love among thousands of believers as at that moment, yet the apostle shows that the full blessing of Israel and of the earth depends on the future coming of Christ from heaven. It is His mission, not that of the Spirit, to restore all things according to the prophetic word, though no doubt the Spirit will be at the same time poured out upon all flesh. Further, Christ will be sent, according to these testimonies, not for the destruction, but for the restitution of all things. And this exactly agrees with the vision in Revelation 19, 20, where Christ is represented as coming from heaven, reigning with His risen saints, and, when this glorious kingdom closes, and the earth and heaven are fled away, only then judging the dead before the great white throne.

The Gospels the Acts, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse, all converge on the same point. Not death, nor the destruction of Jerusalem, is the revealed hope, but the return of Jesus. The Christian, the Church has the Holy Ghost, and has to wait for Christ.

Those who put off His coming find their prototype in the evil servant of Matthew 24:48. And what our Lord said unto the early disciples He says unto all, “watch”: and this in view, not of death, but of His own coming, the

conqueror of death (Mark 13:33-37). For, in truth, it is only the Lord who is the Bridegroom; and our calling, as set forth in the parable of the virgins (Matt. 25), is to go forth to meet Him. Such was the uniform expectation formed by our Lord's own teaching. Its moral bearing we find in Luke 12:35 and seq.; and this as the constant hope of the heart - sure He is coming, not sure when, but ever looking out for Him from day to day. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants."

Need I dwell on the righteous wisdom of God in this? It was the Word who was made flesh, not the Spirit; it was here that Jesus suffered for sins, and by the grace of God tasted death for every one. He is glorified in heaven, but as truly as Jehovah lives, all the earth shall be filled with His glory, and not merely hear the message of His grace. Hence the counsel of God (Eph. 1:10) is to gather up again all things in Christ, the things that are in heaven and the things that are on earth. The Holy Ghost is, meanwhile, a witness only, and not the accomplisher; He is the seal of the redemption which Christ has effected by His blood, and the earnest of the inheritance which we shall share with Christ at His coming.

Hence, from Romans 8 we learn that the creation itself, ruined by the sin of the first Adam, is destined to be set free by the victory of the last Adam. Meanwhile it groans, and so do we, albeit heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; and none the less because we have the firstfruits of the Spirit - ”even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” Our souls already have redemption in Christ, the forgiveness of sins; our bodies wait for redemption when He comes again; and when we are manifested with Him (Col. 3:4), the very creation around, if it be necessarily incapable of profiting like us by grace, shall be set free from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

But though we find the coming of Christ bound up with the walk, the joys, the sorrows, the worship, the service, and the hopes of the saints throughout the Epistles of Paul (as in Rom. 13:12; 1 Cor. 1:7, 8; 1 Cor. 3:13; 1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; 1 Cor. 11:26; 1 Cor. 15:23-55; 2 Cor. 5; Phil. 1:10, 11, 16; Phil. 3:20, 21; Phil. 4:5; 1 Tim. 6:14, 15; 2 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; Heb. 10:25, 37), yet is it in the two Epistles to the Thessalonians that we have the subject most fully developed. Is the coming of Christ too high a theme, too abstruse, for the young and uninstructed? 1 Thess. 1 on the contrary, proves that it should blend into the work from our conversion. “Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven.” Again, if there are sorrows in serving the saints, and Satan’s hindrances too, what is the labourer’s crown of rejoicing? Some present reward or memorial? Nay, “Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming” (1 Thess. 2:19)?

Moreover, if an apostle prayed for the saints, he desired their growing exercise in love, that they might be confirmed unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints (1 Thess. 3). How near such a prayer brings that day, casting its light upon the present walk and its responsibilities! Then, again, were they grieving as if any brethren deceased from among them might miss their part in the coming of Christ, and in being caught up to meet Him on high? 1 Thessalonians 4 fully dispels the dark shade of unbelief, and shows that the true hope is not the separate state of bliss above,* but association with Christ when He comes again: for the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we, the living, which remain, shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. As to the world, rejecting the only Deliverer from wrath, its portion must be the day of the Lord coming as a thief by night (1 Thess. 5). “The day” is the manifestation of Christ’s coming in judgment; and as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth (Luke 21). But Christians are sons of light and day, and that day shall not overtake them as a thief. Accordingly he prays, not only that the God of peace Himself might sanctify them wholly, but that their whole spirit and soul and body might be preserved without blame in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 23).

*The intermediate state remains a clear scriptural truth, and its character as sweet as it is sure, for such as sleep in Christ till the resurrection. (See Luke 23:43; Acts 7:59; 2 Cor. 5:8; and Phil. 1:21-23.

2 Thess. sets the soul right touching fears for the living saints, as the First Epistle had corrected the error as to

the dead. The Lord's revelation from heaven will be retributive - rest for His saints, and tribulation for their troublers (2 Thess. 1). Why, then, be afraid of the false rumour, whatever the fictitious authority claimed for it, that the day of the Lord was come with its terrors and snares? He beseeches them, therefore, by the coming of the Lord, which is to gather the saints to the Lord above, not to be alarmed by the notion that His day was present. For, in truth, that day could not come till the evil was thoroughly ripe and manifest, with which judgment is to deal (2 Thess. 2). Finally, in 2 Thess. 3 the apostle prays the Lord to direct their hearts into the love of God and the patience of Christ. How blessed the thought that if we are waiting for His return, we have communion with His patience! We wait with Him, if we wait for Him.

It need hardly be added, that the Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude do but confirm, enlarge, and enforce the same doctrine, interweaving it also into the practical life of every day. See James 5:7-9; 1 Peter 1:7, 13; 1 Peter 2:12; 1 Peter 4:5, 7; 1 Peter 5:1, 4; 2 Peter 1:19; 2 Peter 3; 1 John 2:28; 1 John 3:2, 3; Jude 14, 24.

The Revelation impresses upon the whole its most emphatic seal. In the introduction (Rev. 1:7) we read, "Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen." How suitable to visions of judgment! Equally in keeping is the conclusion (Rev. 22:17): "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, come." Such is the expression of the heart from the individual saint and from the church. What else indeed could the Bride say in answer to Him who announces

Himself as the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star? Observe, too, that the Spirit, the divine Comforter who dwells in her, sanctions and leads the call to the Bridegroom. If, you, dear reader, have heard the quickening voice of the Saviour, take up the same. You may have followed Jesus only yesterday or to-day; nevertheless, fear not: “Let him that heareth say, Come.” But if you have never known His voice, listen now, ere it be too late, to these gracious words: Let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Are you deeply conscious of your wants, your misery, your sins - are you athirst? If so, you cannot say to Him, Come; but you may yourself come to Him and welcome. Yea, if most of all you feel your lack of feeling, if you only desire from Him what you want, and can get nowhere else, “whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

“He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” (Rev. 22:20). It follows from this, the true hope of the Christian, that the expectation of seeing the world gradually filled with blessing, or even the semblance of it through the profession of the gospel, before the return of Jesus, is altogether unwarranted. He will have the glory of reducing all opposing powers, and of ushering in at His second advent that acceptable year of Jehovah which He proclaimed at His first coming. But the day of vengeance, which in His humiliation was left out (cp. Luke 4:19, 20 with Isaiah 61:1-3), will be the immediate effect of His appearing again, followed by His reign of peace and glory. See Isaiah 11:4-9; 17, 18, 24 - 27, 30, 32, 35, 60 - 66; Jeremiah 31, 32; Ezekiel 36 - 47. Daniel is very explicit on this head: “Thou sawest,” says the

prophet to the king, “till a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them; and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.” The divine interpretation (vv. 44, 45) need leave no doubt as to the meaning: “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.” Other Scriptures, too, furnish more light, especially Matt. 21:42-44: “Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”

Thus, if it be clear that Christ is the stone, it is equally clear that at His first coming He was the despised and rejected stone. He is now become the head of the

corner, glorified at God's right hand. He will by and by return in judicial power; and as surely as those who stumbled at His humiliation have been broken, so, when He descends in judgment, shall His adversaries be ground to powder. When He first came, far from falling on the Roman Empire (or iron power of Nebuchadnezzar's image), the representative of the empire crucified Him; but when He returns in glory, He will execute judgment upon that empire in its final state of division into separate kingdoms. It is only after this destructive blow that "the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." Daniel 7, 11, 12; Revelation 17, 19, 20 corroborate this and supply further detail. But the general truth is as distinct as it is practically momentous. Christendom, far from progressing in good or purging out evil, is to end in a widespread apostasy, like Judaism since the law, like mankind at large before and since the flood. (Cp. Matt. 13:30; Luke 17:26-30; Rom. 11; 1 Thess. 5; 2 Thess. 1, 2; 2 Tim. 3; 1 John 2, 2 Peter 2, 3; Jude). After the Lord, at His coming, has judged the professing Christian body as well as the Jews and the Gentiles (Matt. 24, 25), He will cause the days of heaven to dawn upon the earth, His bride being manifested with Him on high, and Israel the ransomed of the Lord below, His earthly centre with the Gentiles abundantly blessed around them. The Lord will hasten it in His time.

Babylon and the Beast - Rev. 17

There are two forms of evil and rebellion against God which the Holy Spirit brings before us in this chapter, two figures more prominent than the rest, instruments of iniquity in the world since redemption, which the enemy has used and will yet use against God and His Christ. The first, as we clearly see, is the harlot or "great whore that sitteth upon many waters;" the second is what is called "the beast." Now there need not be any uncertainty as to either in the mind of a true-hearted believer. God has been pleased to give us distinct marks by which we may discern and be sure of His mind.

It is not to be admitted that the intimations of prophecy are equivocal until they are accomplished. On the other hand there are prophecies unquestionably fulfilled which are still far from being plain. The difficulty therefore depends on other conditions than the question of whether they be already fulfilled or not. Take, for instance, the seventy weeks of Daniel. It will not be disputed by any intelligent mind that at any rate sixty-nine of those weeks have been accomplished. No doubt there has been, and there is, a good deal of debate as to the seventieth week; but there are difficulties about the previous sixty-nine weeks no less than about the last. In fact, it would be easy enough to prove that the obscurity which overhangs the last week is considerably less than that which still rests for many Christians on the previous parts of that short but most striking prophecy, as for instance on the starting point of them all.

The fact is certain that people very commonly make difficulties for themselves in the word of God. Constantly

too that which is regarded as the chief or only adequate means of enlightenment, if it be a mistake, complicates the whole matter, and darkens the subject instead of ensuring clearness. The true key of all prophecy is the very same that applies to all the Bible; it is Christ Himself. Were there greater singleness of eye in introducing the Lord Jesus into prophetic scripture in His real relation in each case, I am persuaded there would be incomparably more spiritual intelligence and communion, more of that happy and united conviction which is the fruit of faith and of the Spirit's own teaching, than exists at present. It is clear however that this is but a particular case of the hindrance everywhere. The temptation for students of the Bible is to leave Christ out for canons of exegesis and I know not what; the triumph of faith is to bring Christ in. So it will be found in this particular case.

Thus in the present case the woman is a totally different symbol from the beast, but both the woman and the beast are only understood when we compare them with the man Christ Jesus. He too appears in scripture, and sometimes symbolically. For instance, in this very book the Lord Jesus is introduced in some prophetic parts. Take Rev. 12 as an instance, where He is viewed as the male of might or man-child, as He is called in our version. For man the true moral glory is dependence on God and obedience, the very qualities of the spirit and walk of Jesus here below. He came to do God's will, and lived, as He says, on account of the Father, perfect man, though infinitely more than man — complete contrast of him who, only man, sought to be as God in independence of will, and sunk into the slavery of Satan. Clearly therefore it is in relation to the Lord Jesus that

we have another subject there described as the woman of whom He is born, who can therefore be none other than Israel. (Rom. 9:5) She is not in the relation of wife to Him like the church, but of mother. No matter what number of men may say the contrary, the word of God is clear and decisive on the momentous difference. People are the more apt to confound the two, because the constant tendency throughout Christendom is to mix the relationships of the Jew and the Christian together, in standing and in walk, in doctrine and in hope.

In this case, however (Rev. 17), a corrupt woman is seen; as in Rev. 21 the bride, the Lamb's wife. I the more freely speak of it, because there are outward signs which place them in contrast, or lead us of themselves to compare the two women. One outward sign referred to is that the Spirit of God introduces the two visions with striking similarity. "And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters." Then in chapter 21:9 we read, "And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." Who can deny that these two verses have a stronger analogy than any others in the book? You can find nothing that so answers (it is true, in the way of contrast), for chapters 17 and 21 in this respect suggest each other. We never hear of one of the seven angels coming to show any other object; nor do we elsewhere hear of another object introduced with, "Come hither, and I will show thee" — this or that. Why so? Because,

as is evident, the woman in chapter 17 is the earthly counterpart of the bride in chapter 21.

If the holy city, new Jerusalem of the later chapter, be the bride the Lamb's wife, or the glorified church, it naturally indicates that the great city of the earlier chapter is the antichurch, that corrupt evil body which professes to be the church, puts herself forward with supreme claims, and takes the highest ground in the Lord's name. But there is this fatal brand on her: Babylon seeks the earth; her communion is not with Christ. She courts and lavishes her guilty favours on the kings of the earth. She is the channel neither of blessing nor of glory for the dwellers on the earth, but only makes them drunk with the wine of her fornication. Can any traits be conceived more aptly descriptive of her who claims to be the representative of Christ, not in grace and suffering, but for her own pride and advantage on earth? We shall see other features less obvious but equally characteristic. What I am now stating lies on the surface of the scripture; and any one who reads the word of God as it is intended to be read — not merely a verse here or there and now or again — will not be disappointed. The connections of scripture should be looked into, as that which is given us to be read as a whole with faith and diligence, relying on God's goodness and wisdom, whose Spirit will lead us into all the truth.

Thus then the woman of chapter 17 is unmistakably the earthly contrast of the heavenly bride; a religious system, but a counterfeit, claiming to be the spouse of Christ, but only vile and corrupt in His sight, expressly pointed out by the revealing Spirit, in order to guard His people from being in any way carried away by her

seductions or overmuch surprised by her persecutions. We have therefore the prophet brought in presence of this system in the vision. There was as yet only the mystery of lawlessness at work. Although the time was not yet come for the display of the fact, the apostle was permitted to see Babylon in the vision. “Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore.” God gives us next the stamp that is written upon her, and, more than this, the execution that will follow in due time. For she is one “with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.” Intellectual men, even those that might seem opposed, have often looked at this corrupt religious system with a considerable measure of satisfaction. They have admired the way in which she softened the barbarism of past times, and pruned away much of the asperity of savage tribes, whether of the heathen in earlier days or of men in the middle ages. But when the Spirit of God brings the prophet into his due place to regard this woman, we find only a wilderness. Babylon is seen where all was barren as far as divine enjoyment was concerned. No springs of living water were found there. “He carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness.” Whatever may have been the civilizing effects of Babylon in the world, the Spirit of God sees in her only an object of divine judgment. It is so that she is pointed out to the prophet.

“And I saw a woman,” says he, “sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.” Here we have the other symbol. It is not one that pretended to be the spouse of the Lord, whilst really the basest of prostitutes. A “beast” is used

for an imperial power in Scripture, but this with force indeed, but without intelligence or conscience, in plain contrast with Him who is called the “Lamb,” the Lord Jesus viewed as the holy Sufferer; the same too who, in contrast with the beasts, will introduce the kingdom as the glorious Son of man. Jesus will hold the kingdom and openly administer it to the glory of God. This is its object as far as He is concerned — “that every knee should bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Not so the beasts. Whatever the powers so characterised may appear in the history of man, whatever may be their sphere or dignity, whatever the spread of art and science under any of them, whatever the nominal profession too of truth gathered from the Jews in former days, or from Christianity at the present time, — God represents them as “beasts.” The reason is obvious. The essential difference between a beast and a man is, that the beast has no understanding of God, and is incapable of it, being only bent on its wants, or natural instincts: but there is no link of relationship with God in the conscience. Not so with man. He may be faithless; and so much the worse for him. He may reject the knowledge of the true God. He may be spiritually what Nebuchadnezzar became physically; that is to say, he may have a beast’s heart given to him. Of course this was a miraculous judgment that was executed on the arrogant Chaldean; but it is morally applicable to every man who abandons the testimony of God, and gives himself up to the mere passing enjoyments of the moment.

In short then the beast represents an earthly power which owns not God, and has no thought beyond its own

enjoyment, will, or passions. This was what stamped the beasts from the beginning. They were the powers that God raised up in His sovereign action when Israel became faithless. God then permitted the most cruel enemies of Israel to become world-kingdoms. There was Babylon first; there was Medo-Persia secondly; there was Greece or Macedonia thirdly; and, last of all there was the Roman empire. Imperial Rome had a most special place as well as ancient Babylon. For the Babylonian, being the first power that God owned, became typical of the last power in its judgment. In fact however the last empire had historically a most striking place in the providence of God. It was that power which in its servants or officials was guilty of the rejection and crucifixion of the Lord of glory. The Roman empire therefore had the most serious responsibility, little as they felt it; and you must remember, that in the government of God there is nothing forgotten. Who will not prove this true when he stands before the judgment-seat of Christ? There is nothing that can be hid. You will give an account of everything. Not that this should produce the smallest alarm in a child of God; but it is a solemn consideration. “We shall be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ.” It does not matter as to this whether a person be a believer or an unbeliever: all done by the body will be made manifest.

On a similar principle in the government of the world, nothing is forgotten before God, — least of all the fact that an imperial power in this world which was set for just government rose up in its blind, guilty, folly, and allowed any reasons or excuses whatsoever to sanction the death of the Lord Jesus. And this the Roman empire did, though its representative in Judea well knew how

wrong He was to suffer it. Under pressure of the people set on by the priests he did it, as a matter of public policy perhaps; certainly of expediency for himself as Caesar's friend, or to avoid possible trouble. It is often if not almost always so that the greatest crimes are winked at in this world, as far as its governmental authorities are concerned.

But there is another state of things in Babylon. For there is a great difference between the woman and the man, in the world of nature, now corrupted, not with a beast's heart only without conscience before God but even viewed as a beast. The empires ought to have served God like the Son of man, but in point of fact they were symbolically but beasts in pride of force and will without God. The woman (having the profession of being espoused to Christ, but really setting up to be mistress of all before the marriage to the deep dishonour of the future absent Bridegroom) has quite another position and guilt. She accordingly is seen in the vision "sitting upon the scarlet coloured beast full of names of blasphemy." She pretends to guide the beast or empire. This is the way in which the Spirit portrays her here.

It is plain that the time in John's day was not yet come historically for all this. When the vision was given, the believers were still persecuted by the empire, as he himself was an instance. John was "in the isle called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus." He was there no doubt as a sufferer, or, as he says, "a companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus." Hence it is plain that the world-power was a persecutor at that time rather than the woman. The vile harlot did not yet stand forth in her full-blown profligacy or her meretricious splendour. Even

the Roman empire as it was then was not yet developed according to the form exhibited in the vision; for certainly neither had all the heads been yet realised, nor did the decem-regal division begin for long after in any sense. But all is carried forward in the power of the Spirit from first to last, when that which took the place of being the bride of Christ should rest on the Roman empire and seek to be its guide, no doubt directing badly, selfishly, and sinfully, according to her corruption; but still the picture drawn is that of the woman “sitting upon the scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.” What a profanation of Christ’s name falsely professed and abused to subserve the merest ambition and covetousness of man’s dark heart!

Here let us for a few moments delay, because the question might be raised why the beast should be taken as the Roman empire. My answer is, that in all the visions of the imperial powers, in all the prophecies of Old or New Testament, you never find more than the fourth beast or Roman empire until the Lord Jesus introduces a new and everlasting kingdom, — until He brings in His own reign over all nations, tribes, and tongues of the world. We shall show how the difficulty of its actual disappearance from the world is met in this very chapter. The Roman empire has gone through various phases, and undergone extraordinary changes. Its course is not yet exhausted. All prophecy that treats of its close speaks of its existence just before it is extinguished by the Lord when He appears in glory. This very chapter proves not merely that all was open to God from first to last, but that He has made known to us in His word beforehand those singular revolutions that

were afterwards to become facts. Some of these have been realised already; others remain to be verified shortly. But that this is the Roman empire is plain from the fact that it is always thus the fourth kingdom is described. A beast with seven heads and ten horns, the last empire before the Son of man takes the kingdom in power and glory, is the way in which Daniel 7 sets it out symbolically on the first occasion in which it was brought before any. There, closing the successive imperial powers, Rome appears, and is described yet more minutely than here.

On the other hand it is granted that there are features introduced into the description of St. John not found in the older prophecy. God does not introduce the subject without fresh reason and fresh light; but that it is the same imperial power, with added relationships as especially to the harlot, cannot be doubted in my judgment by any one subject to the written word. But the simplest and surest proof of all lies in the plain fact that, from first to last, we have four empires of the world, and only four, the last of which is destroyed by divine judgment, and followed immediately by the display of God's kingdom when Christ appears in power and glory. It must be quite evident, save to Romanists, or others almost equally ignorant or visionary, that the kingdom so described is not yet established in the world. I say "in the world;" for it is not a question of heaven. Glory on high we have also revealed to us in Christ the head of the church: of this the New Testament speaks in the clearest possible manner. But it is plain that these world-powers have the earth for their theatre; and, further, that what displaces the last of them is a kingdom that God will establish by judgment executed

on the quick in this world. A very great comfort it is to look onward to the certainty that God has not given up the earth for ever into the hands of the adversary — the certainty that Satan's plans shall be overthrown when they seem most ripe — the certainty that, when the evil becomes intolerable, God will interfere, and this by that Man whom He has ordained to judge the quick and the dead, the Lord Jesus. These truths are taught in both the Testaments. For the present occasion Daniel 2, 7 may suffice to prove what has been just affirmed. I only refer passingly to clench the proof of what is meant by the beast here.

I say no more then of the beast than that it is beyond doubt the Roman empire: in what stage of its existence, and at what particular time will appear as we go on.

Next, the woman is described as "arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls." It is not the bride arrayed in fine linen, white and clean; it is the gaudy splendour of the world to attract the flesh, and this very distinctly in royal, yea, imperial colours, so as to found a primary claim of supremacy for her ecclesiastical pretensions; it is false glory, natural enough in the world as it is and adapted to its lusts, but altogether contrary to the express object of the Lord Jesus in having His spouse in this world. The bride of Christ was intended to be His epistle, and is called by faith to manifest Him here below among men, the constant witness of His glory, character, ways, and heavenly place. Hence she must expect at present to share His rejection and sufferings in this world. But this woman who usurps the name seeks nothing but fleshly pleasure and worldly importance, all that is naturally coveted and prized in the earth. This too and worse she

ministers to others; for she has “a golden cup in her hand, full of abomination, and filthiness of her fornication.” How awful when religion with the highest pretensions to sanctity only sanctions man in the lowest, guiltiest inclinations of a nature fallen from God and subject to Satan! Further, we are told that “upon her forehead was a name written.” The first word is most significant — “Mystery.” “Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.”

Such a blazon on her forehead from the Spirit teaches us that here it is in no way a question of a heathen city with any amount of political influence. Its real heathenism, or rather its ungodly antagonism to God’s people now fallen, may very well be couched under “Babylon the great;” for such was Babylon of old to the ancient people. But “Mystery” goes deeper, and shows the need of spiritual discernment according to the divine revelation vouchsafed to us, in order to detect the true character of this gigantic yet subtle imposture. Neither pagan Rome nor modern commerce, nor a future city rising on the Euphrates, can possibly answer to such a designation. It well suits Rome nominally Christian. Her fall therefore has an interest and joy for heaven which attaches to no other judgment.

I may just observe by the way that “the great city,” as far as the bride of the Lamb is concerned, is excluded by all persons who profess to give the best reading according to the most ancient authorities for the word of God. And this is very interesting to us, because it is not a question merely of what prophetic students prefer. They might be liable perhaps to the thought of bias; but critics whom I could easily name if this were the place for it, who had not the slightest prepossession in favour of prophecy,

have come to the conclusion now stated on the ground of nothing but clear and full external evidence. In short the way they read Rev. 21:10 is “showed me,” not that great city, the holy Jerusalem, but “the holy city Jerusalem.” It is not a question of greatness for her even when glorified, but of holiness; whereas what Babylon affects and wins at cost not merely of herself but of truth, grace, and Christ Himself, is present earthly greatness. “The great harlot” herself, she is the “mother of harlots,” as we are told, “and abominations of the earth.” Thus not only is she a corrupt system, but the parent of ecclesiastical corruptions outside herself yet akin to her.

Again she is the patron of what is most offensive before God — of idolatry in every shape. It is in vain to say that there never has been idolatry under Christianity; in vain to plead that the objects adored are only images for memory, not idols. The self-same excuse the old heathen philosophers used to urge. They sought to excuse their superstition by the assertion that nobody thought the idols were the gods, but only the visible tokens that reminded them of beings above and behind them. The apology of idolaters in Christendom is exactly similar to that of the pagans. The truth is, that to have such visible tokens or signs is the denial of faith, the destruction of the principle and power in which the Christian is told to walk. He is called to “walk by faith and not by sight.” All efforts therefore to make people religious by palpable symbols of the sort is false and pernicious in principle; it is but heathenism christened. Every Christian person is bound to set his face against it. No doubt all this came in by slow degrees, with an apparent show of pious reasons: when have they been wanting for bad things?

The truth is however that we are not competent to judge in divine things; and God therefore has revealed His will that we may be subject as children. Then, when we honour Him by subjection of spirit, we find out the excellence of God's will in Christ. We learn that there is nothing arbitrary but good, yea, the best in all the Lord lays on us. Although we accept it, not because we understand it but because He says it (and we accept it therefore gladly and simple-heartedly as His authority over our souls), yet, having done so, we learn that our God and Father is infinitely wise in all He says, and as good as He is wise.

The strange woman then not only corrupts herself and others, but is the parent of all religious corruptions here below. For there is not only a widespread system of ecclesiastical evil, but one pre-eminent, and others carried away and formed according to her pattern, though without her world-wide success. Further, she introduces and sanctions idolatry on the most prolific scale, and her idolatries have this peculiarly malignant brand in God's mind, that they betray departure from known truth for lies better loved. It may be presumed that every one here is aware that "abomination" is used for idol, according to language familiar to every reader of the Old Testament. The same style is found in Matthew, who cites the prophets, and in the Revelation, which habitually adopts Hebrew phraseology. And when the prophet saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, he wondered with great admiration — not of course that anything heathen should be opposed to Jesus, or should attack the servants of the Lord: there was no such great matter for surprise in that. Heathen persecution was

becoming an old story, as was Jewish instigation through hatred of the gospel. John himself, experiencing at that time pagan opposition, could hardly wonder if it grew hotter. But that what would bear the name of Jesus, however falsely — what would arrogate the place and title of God's church — that this body should become the greatest engine of persecution and tyranny the world ever saw, turning the power of the empire especially against the saints and witnesses of Jesus, did fill him with amazement beyond measure.

I am aware of the usual pleas of Romanist theologians. But "God is not mocked." The constant self-defence is that the church never persecutes; it is the civil power that punishes delinquents. But God looks at those who are really guilty — not at the mere hand which does the deed, but at the mind and will which morally and under the penalty of damnation compels it. Be it the civil power that hangs, stabs, or burns — the instrument is of small moment: His eye is on the true culprit, the more it covers its insatiable appetite for the blood of heretics under a sanctimonious cloak, and perverts the name of the meek and crucified Saviour into a sanction of unheard of cruelties, sometimes against men ignorant of truth and given over to folly, but far more frequently against saints of whom the world is not worthy, the choicest of God's children here below. It is the woman therefore, not the beast, that is here charged with being "drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus."

Then comes the angel's explanation; and this we shall find gives fresh information of the most important kind. It is always thus in the interpretations of scripture. Man's explanations are merely founded on the thing to

be explained; God out of His fulness loves to give us more, and of even deepening importance. So here we are told “the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.”

“The beast that thou sawest was and is not” — a striking and singular fact. The Roman empire, unlike all the other previous beasts, must cease to exist and then rise again. It was, and is not, “and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit.” It was to reappear with a diabolical character in the sight of God for its last phase. Thus the last of the imperial powers should have a history altogether different from its predecessors. After having flourished and sunk into decay and death, it should revive before its final and unexampled destruction at the appearing of the Lord Jesus. Now there is no maxim among men more settled than that the powers of the world are in this just like men. They begin and advance till they reach their height; then they decline till they vanish. But you may without fail reckon that the maxims of men are untrustworthy where they touch divine things. It is not in the power of man to discover or enunciate the truth. In this case illustration and illustrated are alike. Man having lived and died is to rise again — not merely his spirit, but concrete man; spirit and soul and body will reappear. So must the Roman empire. I am not now speaking about other nations, though it is far from being confined to one; but the Roman empire is here singled out for the reason already pointed out, that it has a character in God’s eye because of the rejection and judicial murder of the Son of God.

The Roman empire is not done with. It may have died and passed away, speaking now symbolically. The beast may have come to an end long since. But scripture

declares that the beast, which was and is not, “shall ascend” — yea, dreadful to say — “out of the bottomless pit.” Even when it rose up against the Son of God, it was not said then to have ascended out of the abyss. The empire is yet to be clothed with a still more distinctively diabolical character on its final reappearance than it ever had of old. It “shall ascend out of the bottomless pit and go into perdition; and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and shall be present.”

You observe the change in the latter words. It has the amplest warrant. There is no Biblical scholar now that would presume to contest the better reading or its version. I am putting forward no peculiar view, but the best representation of the undoubted word of the Holy Spirit in the passage. All classes, Catholic or Protestant, Lutheran or Reformed, Established or Nonconformist, if only acquainted with the authorities for the word of God here, will admit that what has just been given is indubitably true. It is impossible for intelligent men to stigmatize this critical correction as the peculiarity of any school whatever. It is a question now of fact, sure in itself and confessed by all competent men, many of whom never stopped to consider the difference of meaning which results from the emendation demanded by excellent authorities of every kind, and consequently no bad witnesses, inasmuch as they had and could have no object in what they introduced. As it stands in the common text, the phrase looks a sort of riddle; for what is the meaning of the proposition that the beast was, is not, and yet is? From the correct text the darkness

vanishes at once. Can one hesitate which should be regarded as the voice of the Holy Spirit? Internal evidence there is as conclusively in favour of the critical change, as is external testimony. The sense that is elicited from καὶ πάρεσται is simple and highly important; the only possible version of the vulgarly received καίπερ ἐστίν offers no just sense whatever, but a certain mystification which none would defend save prejudiced men who confound mist with mystery, and see scarce anything with certainty and clearness in the Bible.

There is no enigma then in what the Spirit really wrote. He expressly tells us that universal wonder will be excited among men when they see the beast once more which had been and then ceased to exist. When it reappears, they are filled with astonishment. Just as John wondered greatly at the persecution carried on by her who bore the Lord's name ever so basely, so the world will marvel when the long departed empire of Rome lifts its head once more.

Our own day has seen serious steps toward that consummation, or at least the way paved for it. Not at all is it meant that anything at present existing indicates that the beast has ascended from the abyss, or that it can till the saints now living on earth (with those dead before them) are caught up changed into the glorious likeness of Christ. On the contrary, I would rather seek to guard all the children of God from being carried away by a hue and cry about this person or that kingdom. Still we have seen events in the providential history of the world of no ordinary magnitude and of strange character. But nothing has been yet seen that answers to this kingdom ascending out of the bottomless pit

according to the language of prophecy. I am far from saying that the Sardinian or Piedmontese progress, through overthrowing their southern adversary and swallowing up the lesser duchies and taking possession of the Papal dominions, can be fairly so interpreted. But it is impossible to avoid seeing that these extensive and profound changes in raising Italy to a great and united kingdom are not more fatal to the temporal sovereignty of the Pope than they clear the ground for the revival of the empire with Rome for its capital. In short the state of things so rapidly brought about in Italy and even Rome seems to my mind no small step towards a far deeper and still graver assumption which God will not permit till a day that is not yet arrived. Let us not therefore in any way indulge the dream that we are yet in presence of this most solemn reappearance of the Roman empire; but one can scarce shut one's eyes to the fact that certain steps or stages, which must necessarily have preceded it in the wisdom of God, have recently been taken, and that not a few things are in train towards that which remains to be done.

Nevertheless the turning-point can be shown to be in no way a fact as yet. There is nothing in the least degree therefore that would warrant any one to point to what is now in course of formation as if the beast were being actually formed. The chief antecedent condition does not exist.

"Here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings." In this statement the Spirit of God deigns to give a mark of another kind for determining the woman. We have already considered what may be styled the spiritual mark as contrasted with

the bride of the Lamb. Here we are in presence of what may be called the geographical mark. For the woman is said to sit on seven mountains. Who in the world could doubt where the seven-hilled city is? Still less could it have been doubted in the time of St. John. There was but one such city, and that one rose up before every person's mind instinctively. It was Rome, and none other.

Further, there is what may be called the political mark added in the end of the chapter. "The woman which thou sawest is the great city which reigneth (or hath kingdom) over the kings of the earth." There was only one city which had reigned over kings. There can be no question therefore that Rome exclusively is the city intended here by the Spirit of God. This is so true that a great many learned persons of the Roman Catholic communion have acknowledged the fact, even some of their most celebrated controversialists. Probably there are many here who have heard of the famous Bishop of Meaux, J. B. Bossuet, as others have heard of Cardinals Baronius and Bellarmin. These officials, of high distinction in the Romish system, acknowledge Rome to be intended. They have their own way of endeavouring to conciliate the fact admitted with their tenacious maintenance of Rome as the holy see. With this we need not concern ourselves. What we have to consider is not their way of reconciling their consciences, but their acknowledgement as far as it goes of the truth in the chapter. We have nothing to do with judging them; we can leave them in the hands of God. It is enough for me simply to use the concession, which has its importance in this place, coming as it does from those who have opposed to it the strongest possible interest if the reference were only carried out to the full. Let us

beware of imputing bad motives — love of power, greed of money, pride of position in the world, or the like. These, I say, are questions for God to judge. I am only affirming now, that all the keenest prejudices of celebrated Romish ecclesiastics must assuredly be against acknowledging Rome as the city meant here; and yet, in spite of all, they have been obliged to own the fact, however they may seek to explain it away by limiting it to its ancient pagan phase.

It is certain therefore from the spiritual contrast with the bride, from the geographical place of the seven mountains, and from the special, that is supreme, relationship to the kings of the earth, that Rome and no other is the city aimed at by the woman Babylon in Rev. 17.

But we must distinguish between “the woman” and “the harlot.” The woman is the city that is said to have sovereignty over the kings of the earth. The reason is manifest. Rome did not wait for her governing power till she became an ecclesiastical system. We see how perfectly the truth hangs together. It is not said, “the whore which reigneth over the kings of the earth,” but “the woman” that does so. Beyond controversy her supreme authority was quite distinct from her assuming an ecclesiastical character. The latter was a change long subsequent. In virtue of its religious character, alas! false or corrupt, it is called a whore or harlot;1 but “the woman” is in relation rather to her place as a certain system of power or authority in the earth, just as Tyre or Jerusalem are often each compared to a woman in Old Testament prophecies, with which we are all familiar.

But there is a great deal more. “There are seven kings,” says the Spirit of God: “five are fallen; the one is, and the other is not yet come.” It is hard to doubt that these heads or kings here brought before us refer to the various forms of power which succeeded each other in Rome. Other beasts were simply said to have one head. The Macedonian might become four heads, and these evidently concurrent, not successive; but in Rome we hear of seven heads, and these from the language of the interpreter not concurrent but successive. The figure refers to the complete variety of political power that should characterise that empire. “Five,” it is said, “were fallen.” These were the previous kinds of power in Rome. “One is:” the sixth head was then exercising its rule. Thus the five fallen heads pointed to kings, consuls, decemvirs, military tribunes, dictators, or the like, which had been in Rome before but had now yielded to the emperor. Although there was a shadow of consuls still kept up, as is notorious, yet the imperial head was universally known to be then in force. This is the one that “now is,” as we are told. But it is added that another was coming. “The other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.”

Here I still stand to what I hold to be an important though negative principle in looking at the prophetic word: to understand it you do not require history. In general indeed the students of history applied to the interpretation of the prophets least understand prophecy. After all a conjectural opinion as to the meaning of these heads is no such great matter; nor does it really help in the interpretation of the chapter. Supposing the simple Christian believe that the five forms of power fell before the existing imperial one,

what of importance can history add? He is not able to explain the details; he knows not the successive forms of power — what has he lost? Supposing he did name them accurately, what has he gained? He is assured on the word of God that there were five, though he may not know what their histories or their characters were. He does know what was of great importance — that a sixth form existed, the imperial line of the Caesars, as they are called and as every body knew in John's day. Then he knows further that there was to be a seventh. What the seventh head would be is not here described; save that when he came, he must continue a short space. And what should we gather from this? That further minutiae are of no importance to the believer.

Whatever is of real value and for His glory God explains. Whatever is of no account in this point of view God passes by with the slightest notice or none. And so it is with these different heads of power. They are none of them explained. We are told the few words we have seen as to the seventh: no more than this was of consequence; and therefore the Lord gives us this fact alone in the case. "And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven." Thus there was to be a most curious compound character in the eighth head. He would be, on the one hand, of the seven; on the other, he would be an eighth. This seems, to my thinking, to be explained by what we find in another part of the book: the wounded head of the beast was to live. The imperial power, as it was wounded to death, so it was to appear again. When it revived, it would be an eighth; but it was one of the seven, because there had been such a form of power in Rome once before.

Hence I do not admit that there is in general anything so difficult to understand in these symbols. The information given is plain enough if we are content with the word of God. It is when we leave the simplicity of scripture that we fall into the by-path of speculation. For indeed we are in a wilderness-world, and where to turn we know not. But God has a way, though the vulture's eye sees it not; and in His word He has been pleased to reveal it, even Christ; and our wisdom is to hold fast to the way which grace has thus given us. Do we not need a way, if we are going through the wilderness? That way God alone can make known to us, or keep us in. But the way for us in Christ He has fully revealed.

As this is of immense importance everywhere, so is it, be assured, even in studying prophecy, just as much as anywhere else. To go from scripture to history, in order to find the explanation of prophecy, is invariably an error. It may not always work out its worst effects, because he that wanders into history for this purpose may otherwise by faith keep fast hold of the word of God; and so far he will be preserved from evil. But the tendency of looking into man's account of the world to find the explanation of God's mind in prophecy is to abandon light for darkness.

Let me ask a question. How can history explain prophecy? It is evident that before history can be applied to the elucidation of prophecy, you must understand what the prophecy means; and when you know what it means, for what do you want history? Is it to ascertain that God knew or spoke the truth? You have already what God gave it for, and ought not, if a believer, to take the ground of an infidel. No doubt what you discover in history, as far as it is true, must exactly fall

in with prophecy. And this may be interesting, — nothing more; but it must be evident to every one who reflects that, if we wish to be kept from fumbling in the dark, we must understand a prophecy before we can bring it into juxta-position with the particular event we regard as its fulfilment.

For instance, take the beast before us. Supposing it is the question with me to whom or to what the beast applies here, how can history decide this? Am I to ransack all the annals of all times and all nations first? Or am I not to weigh the prophecy with prayer that I may know of what God is speaking? One man says, perhaps it is the pope; another affirms Napoleon Bonaparte or his nephew. How am I to decide? First let me seek to understand the scriptures about the beast with their context, and when I do so by the grace of God in my measure, this is what God meant me to get without going farther and faring probably worse.

The truth is, that when God's mind is seized in scripture, it will be found incomparably larger than questions of popery or politics. He is occupied with the glory of Christ in heaven; if on earth, with Israel as the centre when the kingdom is established by judgments on the Gentiles who now are allowed to rule exceptionally during the Lo-ammi state of the Jews. Hence what is described here is irreconcilable with men's thoughts. Take once more as an example the pope. The papacy may come in for a certain analogy, but is in no full sense the beast. It is not certainly for me to apologise for the papal power: none can justly insinuate that I sympathize with that monstrous imposture in any way. But the word of God ought to be dearer than all controversial objects; and although some may be keen enough Protestants,

nothing justifies one in departing from the word of God, nor can any end consecrate an error.

The endeavour to find out the hardest things that can be found in the Bible, and to apply them blindly towards an object that you justly censure, is serious moral wrong. Whatever then the demerits of the papacy, the apocalyptic beast from the sea is really a quite different evil altogether, being the imperial power of the west in its last phase. It will be hardly disputed that the pope is an extremely diminished power now: is this honestly the lot of the little horn of Daniel 7? Judged by an imperial standard, there is not much resemblance between the two, as in my opinion there never was. The papacy never was anything politically, or at least territorially, but an inconsiderable power; whereas the beast here described is regarded as a commanding empire in the earth, and this of course Roman. But it clearly was when the Roman empire sunk into nonentity, weakened by the Eastern rent and its own corruption, and afterwards extinguished by the barbarian hordes, that the papacy sprang up into a temporal authority no less than an universal episcopate. So far is the papacy from really answering to the beast, that it has only come in during the non-existence of the beast. For the beast that was is not, according to St. John. Such is the true place and time of that strange incubus. Indeed the papacy is far more connected with the whore than with the beast, though I do not deny a sort of partial anticipation also. For I am not disposed to differ from the great and excellent men who attached the solemn description of Babylon to the see of Rome during the latter part of the middle ages, and at the time of the Reformation. To my mind Luther and others who so used it were justified in

the main. They were right in fixing the divine condemnation of Babylon on Rome, and this not merely as “the woman” but as “the whore,” which involves other features of guilt as already pointed out.

But the beast is the imperial power of Rome, and here in its last open apostacy and rebellion against God. The other powers had disappeared as empires. The beast is the only one that will reappear imperially before final judgment, after having passed through these different states. “The beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.” The last holder of that power, the last head, will display, I presume, the resurrection of the empire without and against God by Satanic energy, and in this condition it is doomed to perish for ever under the judgment of God.

“And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings.” This is another most material point for understanding the chapter. “And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.” Now if we look back upon ancient and mediaeval European history, what do we find? First of all the Roman beast unbroken, without any division whatsoever into separate kingdoms. There was a breach that gradually widened after the setting up of Constantinople, as it was overtly occasioned by that rival metropolis. There were sovereigns who divided between them the Roman empire for a season, as we know, when that empire began to decline; but in the days of its comparative solidity and world-wide grandeur (as you are aware, at any rate during the scriptural account of the Roman empire), it was an unbroken power wielded by one emperor. In the days of the Caesars it was invariably so.

There might be a difference, as we know there was in history, between the Augustus and the Caesar; but I am speaking now of the emperor; and I say there was but one emperor during the days of the Caesars. Such was the earliest state. Passing over the changes or modifications that took place until the barbarians broke up the Roman empire, we find all changed when the empire was gone. “The beast that was” ceased to be, the new condition being briefly told in the words, “and is not.”

What was found then? The various fragments of the Roman empire were gradually settled into separate kingdoms. I am willing now to meet our historical friends as much as possible, and will not raise questions about “ten” by contending for nine or eleven. Let us suppose there were exactly ten in round numbers. If ten, we have ten horns or kings of the middle ages, but no such thing as the empire or the beast; that is, no corporate bond existed for these ten kings — no single power held a suzeraineté over them all, so as to direct their united forces, and make them all to be parts of the great Roman empire. Such a state of things had not begun to be. But, mark, in the time which the prophet contemplates there will be this exactly. “The beast that was and is not shall ascend,” that is, the old corporate bond of an emperor to control and lead all that once formed the beast, or properly Roman part of the empire, in short the west or western powers. The east appears not in the beast, as here looked at, for reasons that need not be entered into now. It is the strictly Roman part of the empire. The gold, the silver, and the brass are not spoken of here, but only the iron and clay, if we may speak in the language of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision.

Here then is a new state of things — ten horns as well as the beast; not the beast alone as in ancient days, nor ten horns alone as in the middle ages, but the beast and the ten horns. You who desire to be under history as the rule for interpreting prophecy, do you not hear history? Can it be intelligently said that such a state of things has ever yet been? This is the state, I feel no hesitation in affirming, that will be. St. John shows us most clearly what we are to expect for the future of this age, and more particularly in the west. Naturally this must be of so much more solemn interest to us, inasmuch as our country forms a part of it. The continental powers with ourselves, the western powers, compose the material of the future ten horns or kingdoms. The countries of Europe, which boast of themselves as the flower of civilization at the present time, are destined to be redistributed into ten kingdoms when the beast rises up from the abyss; that is, when an imperial power is allowed with Rome as the centre to become Satan's leader of the west. Such will be the beast, a Roman emperor with his satellite kings. When this future empire becomes established again, it will not be such an absorbing power as to blot out separate nationalities. There will be the combination of an imperial authority with each power acknowledged in its own quasi-independent state. I grant that there may be only a sham in such subordinate kings: still there has been usually no lack of vapour in the earth, and the future in question will be a day of shams. The grand point however will be this, that the chief who governs all will govern as firmly with iron hand as if the separate kingdoms belonged to himself exclusively. Such is the state of things described here.

It is not imagination: the word of God is perfectly plain about all. “These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.” And they “receive power as kings one hour with the beast.” They have their kingly authority for one and the same time with the beast; not after nor before the beast, but contemporaneously and in association with him. How comes this to pass? It is explained a little afterwards. “God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will.” It is not their own. National independence would refuse such servility. Is there anything for which a kingdom would be more ashamed of itself than to be merely the vassal of a grinding active power? But here they are absolutely subservient: it is the common lot of all the western powers that they for the first time in Europe do the bidding of one ruler. Who can say that such a state of things was ever known in the west? Under the Caesars there was no room for it, as there were no such divided kingdoms. Since the day that the German barbarians broke up the empire, since the Goths, etc., (our forefathers, as you know,) set up separate nationalities throughout the west, independence has been the ruling feature of all these little kingdoms. They have each had a will of its own; and all have fought most determinedly to have their own way. They have valued above all things their right to be governed as they liked.

A total change will pass over the west. When the redistribution comes (which will be as usual out of a revolutionary state; and a man must be rather blind not to see tokens of the storm brewing, not in our own country only but in every country where free thought and discussion have prepared the way); when all respect for what is ancient and has been in honour shall have

passed away; when men are seized with a passion for destroying everything that used to exercise influence and hold in check; when the demon of revolution has acquired throughout the west full force, and broken up all that still survives, this is to be the shape it will take. There will be a dividing afresh into ten separate kingdoms of no great size; but what gives them importance is, that all will be under the central power which is here called “the beast.” It is not of course a mere kingly power, which is styled a “horn” in the language of prophecy. The beast is the overruling corporate bond under which these horns range themselves as constituents and sinews of its strength. Accordingly there will be a novel unity unexampled in Europe or elsewhere. “They will have one mind, and give their power and strength unto the beast.” And what use does he make of it? To what end does the beast lead the horns? “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them (for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings) and they that are with him, called, and chosen, and faithful.”

In the midst of such a dreary future, what a comfort that we shall be with Him then! You, if you love the Lord, will be with Him. Whoever you may be, if you are Christ’s, you will come with Christ in that day. He will appear from heaven, and so will you in glory. It will not then be a question of gathering His people to Himself. Not a hint of such a removal is given in this context. The faithful are already with Him. They had been therefore caught up to Him before. How this could be we know from other parts of scripture; but I do not enter into them now. Keeping myself to the passage that lies before me, I say that it is quite plain that the faithful, chosen, and called

will be then with Christ. Further, these are not angels but saints. Angels are never said to be “called,” nor are they ever said to be “faithful.” It is not a question of the dealings of grace for an angel. The angels who are kept of God are holy no doubt, and, if holy, are “chosen” or elect. Such is the language of scripture about them. But an angel never is or could be said to be either “faithful” or “called.” What is the meaning of “calling”? When man fell and went away from God, “calling” was the means grace used for bringing him to God by the faith of a Saviour of the world. This is not and never can be the history of an angel; it is only open to man. For he only of all fallen beings is called by grace — man when he calls on the name of the Lord Jesus — man visited in the infinite mercy of God, when His grace has shone upon him from on high, and brought him to Himself by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Such then shall be with the Lamb when the beast challenges the conflict which ends not in his perdition only, but in the ruin of the kings and their armies from these very lands. “But the Lamb shall overcome them (for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings).” It is no question of human resources in that day: the Lord shall be exalted, and we shall reign with Him.

Observe another thing. “The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.” This beyond controversy distinguishes between the whore and all other religious systems; for where do you find anything corresponding to this save with “the whore?” No doubt there are many religious systems bad enough. I am far from meaning that Romanism is the only corruption of Christianity. But is there no tangible difference? Others may influence for

ill in their own land; but the dreadful plague-spot of Rome is that she claiming to be the universal mother and mistress is the corrupter of every land. Her claim of ecumenical dominion is the thing that points her out as the city of confusion, which answers to the Holy Spirit's warnings in this chapter. Thus the very boast of universality with corruption and idolatry determines at once what she is. Babylon is the harlot of the western kings, the most corrupting influence religiously of all the world. Hence "the waters, where the whore sitteth, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues." There may be, I repeat, grievous departure from Christ elsewhere; still this is a mere party, or at most a national blunder in religion; but, as for Babylon, she is according to scripture the common nuisance of all nations and tribes and tongues. The result will be that her lovers will all turn on her. The ten horns — those that she most of all sought to win and hold — will hate her in the end.

Let me mention at this point a fact in illustration which, as all may not have noticed it, it is as well to name now. A remarkable change has even now taken place over the nations of the earth. They are not getting better, but the form of their evil is changing. The last Ecumenical Council held at Rome is the only one which neither had nor invited crowned heads to send representatives. The time is not yet come for the ten horns to receive authority as kings for one and the same hour with the beast. But there are practically no Catholic powers at the beck of Babylon. They are no longer her vassals, if they are not yet the minions of the beast. This is another serious state. In that council the pope could count on no civil supporters, unless perhaps some petty ones which would have only made the absence of the great powers

conspicuous. Hence the invitations were exclusively to Romish ecclesiastics. No representative of Austria, Bavaria, Belgium, France, Italy, etc. was there. Even Spain and Portugal sent no plenipotentiaries to declare their adhesion to the pope: those that always had proved most submissive were for one reason or another passed by. By Babylon's own confession the western powers though called Catholic could no longer be trusted. For the first time since they formed part of Christendom they were not called to an Ecumenical Council — none but ecclesiastics. It is not that the time is come for the horns to take their place with the beast and to devour Babylon; but certainly there seems to be somewhat of a preparation for it in so striking a sign of her actual mistrust in her old paramours.

"The ten horns that thou sawest, AND the beast," etc. It is not "upon the beast," as in the common text, — an unquestionably superior reading, which no critic would think of defending. The true text runs, "The ten horns.... and the beast." And this is of importance. Here one regrets that the strength of mere Protestant prejudice tends to make men false to scripture. Is it not disgraceful for any one, be he Catholic or Protestant, to keep up an error in what professes to be the word of God? Why should a Christian have an interest but in the truth? If we accept the best authorities, "upon the beast" must be rejected as unquestionably erroneous; if we are not swayed by the feeblest possible testimony, we cannot evade the overwhelming evidence that the true reading is "the ten horns.... and the beast." And why, think you, should any one be so anxious to perpetuate the blunder of "the ten horns upon the beast?" Because the true reading is fatal to the old delusion that the

beast is the pope — a delusion completely refuted by "the ten horns.... and the beast," unless one can credit the pope with destroying his own city. It is too hard a saying even for that fanciful school that the pope should turn out so fierce a foe of his own capital. Yet the words are certain, "the ten horns.... and the beast, these shall hate the whore."

On the other hand it cannot be denied to be perfectly intelligible that the Roman empire with all the ten subject kingdoms in its sphere will burn with implacable fury against ecclesiastical Rome, the old object of their deepest, superstitious, and passionate devotion; as I believe they will. We see that the power which has possessed itself of the papal temporalities is naturally by no means palatable to the Pope; as it also has shown but little scruple in taking his goods, we could not expect love or respect between the two parties. We know that the kingdom of Italy that is growing up has enriched itself very considerably by the spoils of the "church" so called. When the day comes for the beast and the ten horns the spoliation of Babylon will be complete. The beast will first enrich himself and his followers, and then destroy her. All that ecclesiastical Rome has — earthly power, wealth, grandeur, rank, — will seem but lawful spoil for them.

It will be thus seen how important the various reading is in ver. 16; and when we speak of a "various reading" here, it is not meant that any want of certainty exists. There are often various readings which have no real value. No man ought to adopt a reading lightly or for a fancy. My own sympathy is strongly with the man who is averse to change; but there are some various readings so amply supported and certain in themselves that to

hold out against them would be high treason to the word of God. The authority for “and the beast” is so preponderant that nothing but stubbornness can account for any man rejecting it, unless there be gross ignorance also.

Hence there cannot be the smallest doubt that “the ten horns.... and the beast” are to join against Babylon. This makes the meaning of the chapter substantially plain. After the closest links of religious attachment, we see the turning of the tide at the end. It is the day when the beast will no longer permit Rome in any way to guide the temporal powers, when the civil power, become proud of its imperialism, will turn and rend the harlot who was once the object of the most debasing affection and honour. But the greater the false love then shown to Rome, so much the more by and by will be the hatred with which the beast will turn and destroy what had been so extravagantly loved and honoured. “These shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.” They execute God’s destructive judgment in His providence. Such is the explanation: “God hath put in their hearts to do his will.”

More I need not add tonight, considering the lateness of the hour. But the subject is commended to your prayerful attention; for the Lord would have you study not only His revealed will but His word, that you may judge rightly of what is working now by seeing the end disclosed with divine clearness and certainty. You will thus also prove by experience that the prophetic word is most practical, “whereunto ye do well to take heed as unto a lamp that shineth in a dark place.” Instead of giving it up as precarious or unintelligible, you will learn

increasingly how definite and interesting and important is every word for every child of God. May the present occasion stimulate you to read with confidence in His grace, honouring the word of Him who will strengthen and refresh you thereby for His service!

Appendix.

Romanist Confession As To Babylon.

It may interest the reader if I present him with copious extracts from two singularly intelligent writers of the Romish communion, both priests, one Spanish and the other French, who paid homage to the truth of our chapter far beyond the partial acknowledgment of those referred to in the lecture.

The first in order of time is from the famous Venida del Mesias en gloria y magestad of Juan Jos. Ben-Ezra (the nom de plume), or rather Emanuel Lacunza (his real name).

“Two chief things we have here to ascertain: first, who the woman seated on the beast is; secondly, what times are spoken of in the prophecy.

“As to the first, the doctors all agree that the woman here spoken of is the city of Rome, in other times the capital of the greatest empire in the world, and now the capital and centre of unity of the true Christian church. On this first point, which is not called in question, there is no occasion to tarry. In respect to the second, we find only two opinions. The first maintains that the prophecy was wholly accomplished in past ages in idolatrous and pagan Rome. The second confesses that till this day it has not been fully accomplished; and affirms that it will

be accomplished in the times of Antichrist in another Rome yet future, and very much changed from the present.

“If we attentively consider these two opinions, and the obscure and embarrassed way in which their authors explain themselves, it is not very difficult to make out the pious end which they propose, and the true cause of their embarrassment. This point is the most delicate and critical which can be imagined. On the one hand the prophecy is terrible in all its circumstances: both the crimes of the woman, which are clearly related, and the chastisement denounced upon them, are innumerable. On the other hand, the respect, the love, the tenderness, the good conceit and estimation in which this very woman has been held ever since she abolished her idolatry, makes it incredible and improbable that of her should be spoken or in her should ever be verified such crimes and such a chastisement. In so critical a situation which side can we take? The truth of the prophecy must be sacred; for no one doubts its authenticity. But it likewise seems necessary to save the honour of the great queen, and to calm all her fears. As she is not ignorant of that which is expressed in the scriptures of truth, and which might or should lay her under great apprehensions, it has appeared becoming in her faithful subjects to deliver her entirely from this anxiety. Therefore have they said to her; some, that she had nothing to fear, the prophecy having been accomplished many ages ago upon pagan and idolatrous Rome, against which it is spoken; others, who have not been able to enter into an idea so repugnant to the text, have said to her, that she ought not to be afraid, because the prophecy is visibly directed to other times yet to come,

and will not be verified upon the present Rome, upon Christian Rome, upon Rome the head of the church of Christ, but upon another Rome infinitely different, composed then of idolaters who shall have become masters of it, having driven out the Pontiff, and with him all his court and all Christians. In this Rome, thus regarded, will be verified the crimes and the punishments announced in this prophecy. Let us shortly examine these two opinions, or those two consolations, comparing them with the text of the prophecy.... The greatest crime of which the woman is accused is fornication, and, to shut the door against all equivocation, the accomplices of this metaphorical fornication are named, to wit, the kings of the earth; and as the kings with the harlot, so she with them lived deliciously.

"We ask then how this crime can be true of ancient Rome; which, according to all accounts given in history, was so far from this infamy, that on the contrary she even regarded all the kings of the earth with a sovereign contempt, nor was there any in the known world whom she did not humble and cast down under feet. Many times were they seen to enter by the triumphal gate loaded with chains, and to pass out at another to be beheaded or imprisoned. With what propriety then or appearance of truth can ancient Rome be accused of a metaphorical fornication with the kings of the earth?.... The second difficulty of this opinion grows out of the chastisement announced upon the harlot, which, if attention be given, will certainly appear not yet to have been verified. The expressions which St. John makes use of are all the most vivid, telling of a full and eternal extermination: consider them. Rev. 18:21-23: 'And a

mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.' Either this is all exaggeration, full of impropriety and falsehood, or it is not yet fulfilled and will be fulfilled in its time to a very tittle as it is written. Besides this, the whole context of the prophecy from the sixteenth chapter ought to be considered; where, after having spoken of the last plague in the seven vials, which the seven angels poured out upon the earth, in which is filled up the wrath of God, he proceeds immediately to say: 'And great Babylon came in remembrance before God to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.'.....

To all this ought to be added another very important reflection. If, as the author of this opinion alleges, the prophecy be wholly intended against the ancient idolatrous and iniquitous Rome, if on her be threatened the terrible chastisement whereof so much is spoken, when was that chastisement accomplished? They answer that it was accomplished when Alaric with his terrible army took it, sacked it, burned it, and almost entirely destroyed it. But in the first place it is certain that the evils which Alaric's army brought on Rome were not so

great as those inflicted by the ancient Gauls, or those she suffered in the civil wars, or in the time of Nero, as we are assured by contemporary authors, and declared by Fleury, Miller, etc. Above all, they were not so great as those which are here clearly announced in the prophecy which speaks of total ruin and eternal extermination. Secondly, in the time of Alaric (that is, in the fifth century of the Christian era), what Rome did this barbarous prince sack? what Rome did he almost entirely burn and destroy? Was it Rome the idolatrous, Rome the iniquitous, Rome the adulteress and harlot for her idolatry? Certainly not, for at that time there was no such Rome. The only Rome which then existed and which continues till this day was wholly Christian, had already cast all her idols from her,2 and consequently no longer deserved the name of adulteress and harlot; already adored the true God and His only Son Jesus Christ; was already full of churches in which holy offices were celebrated; for history tells us that Alaric commanded his soldiers not to touch the public buildings nor the temples. It was already Rome the penitent, Christian, and holy. This being so, does it appear to you credible that upon this woman, now Christian, penitent, and holy, should be accomplished the terrible chastisement denounced against the wicked adulteress?....

"Considering the grave difficulties which the former opinion underlies, almost all the doctors have judged that it is not ancient Rome which is spoken of in the prophecy, but another Rome yet future, in which will be verified all the crimes as well as the terrible chastisement here denounced against her. And when is all this to happen? It is to happen, they say, and with

good reason, in the days of Antichrist. But to reconcile this ingenuous confession with the honour and consolation of the sacerdotal city (to save which is the aim of both opinions), they make certain suppositions, and lay them as the basis on which their whole edifice may rest. These are as follows. First, the Roman empire is to endure until the end of the world. Secondly, that empire which now is (and for so many years has been) so dismembered that hardly a relic of it is to be seen, shall, toward the last time, recover its ancient greatness, magnificence, and splendour. Thirdly, the heads of that empire in those last times shall become, not only infidel and iniquitous, but even professed idolaters. Fourthly, they shall without much difficulty make themselves masters of Rome, establish in it anew the court of the Roman empire; and thereupon Rome shall resume that grandeur, wealth, profusion, majesty, and glory, which it displayed in ages past, as, e.g., in the time of Augustus. Fifthly, that impious race shall root out from Rome the Christian priesthood, and likewise all the faithful who will not renounce their faith: whereby Rome, being free from that great hindrance, will set up anew the worship of idols, and return to be as idolatrous as before.

These positions being all assumed, and as such requiring no proof, it is truly most easy to conclude whatever you affirm, and to affirm whatever you please. It is easy to conclude that, although the prophecy certainly speaks against a future Rome, yet not in any way against a Christian Rome, the latter, as incapable of these crimes, being likewise not obnoxious to those threatenings and punishments. By this ingenuity the truth of the prophecy is saved, the honour of the great queen is saved, and she remains comforted, quiet and

secure, without anything to disturb her peace or interfere with her repose, because the very heavy indignation of the spouse neither is nor can be measured out for her but for her enemies only. Those enemies, or this new Rome thus viewed (continues the explanation), shall doubtless commit new and greater crimes than the ancient Rome; shall return to be proud, haughty, unjust, and cruel; shall again shed Christian blood, and be drunk with it; and these crimes shall draw down on this city, now infidel, the whole burden of the anger and indignation of Almighty God.....

Is this mode of treating the subject, followed by the greater part of the doctors, also the most prudent in this other point of view; that it aims at not grieving our sovereign and common mother before the time? But this is the very reason why the pure truth ought with all humility and reverence to be spoken. For this very reason ought her true sons and faithful subjects to seek to afflict her and rejoice to see her afflicted, not because she is made sorry, but because she sorrowed to repentance.... Through the foreshowing of the danger, refuge may be sought and perdition escaped; but if by sparing sorrow the impression is given that there is no such danger, ruin will be inevitable, and, so much the greater, as it has been the less apprehended. It is very easy to remark the strange and singular conduct pursued in the treatment of this subject; I mean the great liberality with which many things are taken for granted which do not appear from revelation, and the very great economy with which others are withheld on which revelation is most explicit. No one tells us, for example, what is meant by the woman sitting on a scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy,

having seven heads and ten horns. Though the mystery be so great, novel, and strange, that St. John himself confesses he wondered with a great wonder at the sight of the woman in that state, yet they suppose it to signify no more than the figure by alliance between idolatrous Rome and Antichrist. One should think the beloved disciple had no cause for such admiration. What marvel that an idolatrous and iniquitous city should favour and help Antichrist!....

We are not ignorant that many unrighteous men, out of hatred to the Roman church, have misused in a most monstrous and impudent way this passage of scripture. But what thing is there so true and so holy which they cannot abuse? Wicked children, in what they have said of Rome under the head of this prophecy, have uttered injuries, calumnies, and invectives, and have mingled some one truth or another with endless fables. But what has all this to do, or what can it have to do, with the present subject? Because some have obscured certain truths by mingling them with errors and fables, ought we therefore not to give our diligence to set forth these very truths in their clearness and purity? Ought we therefore to deny them wholly, and pass entirely to the other extreme? Are we therefore prevented from taking a middle path equally wide of fatal error and mischievous flattery? What we say of the crimes of this woman, we say necessarily of her punishment also. Rome, not idolatrous but Christian, not the head of the Roman empire but the head of Christendom, and centre of unity of the true church of the living God, may very well (without ceasing from this dignity), at some time or other, incur this guilt, and before God be held guilty of fornication with the kings of the earth, and amenable to

all its consequences. And in this there is no inconsistency, however much her defenders may shake the head. And this same Rome, in that same state, may receive on herself the horrible chastisement spoken of in the prophecy; nor is it necessary thereto that she previously be taken by the infidels, that she should return to become the court of the infidel Roman empire arisen from the grave with new and greater grandeur, nor that the new emperors should root out of her the Christian religion and reconstitute idolatry." (Tomo i. par. ii. fen. iii. § 14. Londres, 1826.)

I do not cite this as entirely agreeing with Lacunza's impressions, and of course not at all with his insensibility to the real and most grievous idolatry which has characterized Rome for so many centuries in the worship of the Virgin, saints, angels, and the host. This is clearly her characteristic to faith as blasphemy will characterize the beast. But Babylon is the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth, instead of preserving her purity as the church, a chaste virgin espoused to one man even Christ. She who made herself drunk with the blood of the saints has guiltily courted the kings of the earth to the full, and has intoxicated therewith herself on the earth (not the heavenly-minded) with the wine of her fornication, for her golden cup is full of abominations, that is, of idols. Lacunza therefore deceived himself in overlooking much that is past and present in Rome; and he seems to me, however morally right in the main, less right prophetically than the doctors who see an apostate future for Rome, and judgment first providential, then finally and directly divine. But the description of Babylon as a whole is essentially idolatrous and so distinguished from the

blaspheming beast, with which, strange to say, the most zealous Papists and Protestants alike confound her.

The second priest I summon is le père Lambert, whose Exposition de Prédictions et des Promesses faites à l'Eglise appeared in Paris in 1806. But I need not cite words which more feebly convey arguments mostly given already from Lacunza, save perhaps that Lambert regards the evil which would justify the prophecy in so depicting Rome as more in the distant future. Substantially however his chapter 18 (tome ii. pp. 327-347) coincides, as far as it goes, with the great Spanish work, and is even fuller in combating the reasoning of Bossuet. Both insist that the awful destruction of Rev. 17 awaits Christian Rome. "I demand now" (says Lambert, near the close of the chapter and after citing the end of Rev. 18 and the beginning of chap. 19), "is there any one hardy enough to declare, contrary to the most unquestionable monuments of history, that the woes predicted by John for great Babylon are fallen on pagan Rome? or rather is it not a constant truth and generally recognised as such, that Rome has experienced nothing of the kind, either whilst it worshipped idols or since it embraced Christianity? Alaric took it and carried off part of its riches in the first years of the fifth century; Genseric did the same toward the middle of that century. Under Charles V., that perverse faithless prince, and on other occasions also it experienced similar losses. But besides that it was Christian then and for a long time since; it has never been either destroyed or reduced to ashes.... There is then no middle ground: either one must boldly give the lie to the Apocalyptic oracle on the terrible catastrophe reserved for Rome, or accept in good faith that its

threats look to Rome Christian, and that their execution belongs to a future for which we are waiting."

W.K.

1 The Bishop of Meaux again and again reasons on "the harlot" as a decisive proof that Babylon is not an ecclesiastical body but a mere profane city of the world. He insists that "adulteress" must have been the designation of guilt in that case rather than "whore." (Oeuvres de Messire Jacques-Benigne Bossuet, (e., tome second, pp. 60-63, 310-312, 4to. Paris, 1743.) This is not fairly met by the allegation that the Spirit sometimes interchanges the terms "fornication" and "adultery" in the Revelation as elsewhere, though such an interchange does occur. For here, as Bossuet argues, the usage is too constant to be unintentional. The fact is however that, while Israel in the Old Testament stood in the relation of the married wife to Jehovah, it is not so with the church of God in the New Testament. There she is represented as in a certain sense the bride, but in truth espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ rather than as yet wedded. And this is necessarily and undeniably the image in this Apocalyptic prophecy, where beyond a doubt the marriage supper of the Lamb does not take place till after the destruction of Babylon, when the blessed bridal of the church is celebrated in heaven. The consummation is most fittingly when all are complete who go to make up the church. It is after the Lord shall have translated to heaven all who have been baptized by the Spirit into that one body, some fallen asleep, others alive and remaining till He come to change both into the likeness of His own glory. Thus the reasoning of the clever prelate rests on a premise which is the exact reverse of the truth; and all that is sound in it tells

powerfully against his own aim. For when it is seen that the church while on earth is supposed to be espoused but not yet married, her corrupt counterpart, to be accurate, ought to be set forth as a harlot, not as an adulteress. The reference therefore in the great whore is precisely to a spurious church, and cannot but be fixed on Rome not pagan but ecclesiastical, on Rome professedly Christian.

2 This seems too strong, as we know that the heathen faction in Rome was strong enough during Alaric's siege to alarm men by the pretence that their troubles came because of neglecting the old religion, so much so that sacrifices were offered to the gods in the capital and elsewhere, Pope Innocent himself consenting to it! See Zosim. H. R. v. 14.