Notes on the Revelation

William Kelly

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Preface

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Some, who know that my volume of Lectures on the Revelation is still in demand and in print, may wonder that I should write another and a smaller book on the same subject. But the aim now in hand is to provide a compact help for those who dislike anything like controversy or even lengthy discussion on questions raised by men of learning. Not a line is taken from the larger book, of which I have not read a word while writing the present little volume, which will be found to furnish views not a little clearer, more accurate, and more mature.

The reader may be assured that the amended text here translated rests on the best authority of ancient date, using internal evidence to decide where the oldest MSS. and Versions differ. Let one instance show how human frailty may mislead: the Received Text, Elzevirs' second edition of 1633, like the first, had λαῳ (people) for ναῳ (temple) in Revelation 3:12. The Dutch printers who claimed an exorbitant value for their Greek Testament had not a single manuscript or ancient version to support their preposterous reading. They had probably adopted it from R. Stephens' fourth edition of 1561; for he had given the right word — ναῳ — in his three previous issues of 1546, 1549, and 1550. Who had misled Stephens at last? Not Beza, as far as I know; for after giving ναῳ rightly in his first edition of 1559, he printed λαῳ in 1565 and in 1582, but corrected himself in 1588 and in 1598. It was probably a misprint, but it influenced not a few because of his reputation as a

scholar and a divine. He makes no comment either when he went wrong or when he got right. But the misreading spread beyond Stephens, Beza, or the Elzevirs.

As to the application of the prophecy, it may be well to say here that I do not doubt God intended to help His children by what is generally called the Protestant interpretation, but taking the Trumpets as following the Seals, not as concurrent which appears to me nothing but confusion. Yet the scheme fails when it is made complete and exclusive. I cannot but admire the wisdom and goodness of God in granting a vague reference to that protracted history from the prophet's day (nowhere clearer than in foreshadowing the Saracenic and the Turkish Woes of Revelation 9); while the full and minute bearing awaits the crisis at the consummation of the age. It is no real objection that this attributes a twofold force to the bulk of the Apocalypse. Why not, if its internal contents point to this conclusion? That the book has a depth beyond all other prophecies is apparent to such as have adequately studied it. But does not such a prophecy as the Lord's in the earlier verses of Matthew 24 present a similar instance? For they assuredly did apply to the Christian disciples in the land and elsewhere, as they will again to the godly Jewish remnant before this age ends.

The all-important points for intelligence of the Revelation, though ordinarily overlooked, are the continuous sense of "the things which are," as distinguished from those "which are about to be after these"; the real meaning of the vision in Revelation 4, 5, before the Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls; and the right understanding of the heavens opened in Revelation 19:11, etc., after the marriage of the bride above, and

before the Lord appears with His saints for the judgment of the quick. To these keynotes may be added the deep supplement beginning with Revelation 12.

I can only pray for His blessing, already promised to him that reads, and to those that hear the words of the prophecy and keep the things written in it; for the time is near. Apart from Christ we can do nothing acceptable to God, any more than enter into His mind; for the Holy Spirit works to glorify the Lord, not the first man.

London, April 25th, 1901.

Revelation 1-4

That God should have chosen John to be His channel for the closing volume of the New Testament is worthy of our consideration, and need surprise none. His heart, filled with the love of Christ and with a deep sense of His personal glory, made him a suited vessel for the Holy Spirit's communication of his Gospel, his Epistles, and the Revelation of Jesus Christ. No doubt many Johns were on earth, not a few of them in the church of God, yet none but one was entitled to introduce himself as he does in Revelation 1:1, 4, 9; Revelation 22:8. It was not only the John who was in Patmos, but who could say, "I came to be" (ἐγενόμην) there for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. The emperor who exiled him dreamt ma of the divine purpose. But could it apply to any John but one? The foundation was laid in his Gospel; and there he only appears as the disciple whom Jesus loved. It was enough: who could dispute the hand that wrote it? The Epistles suppose his Gospel already written; the fuller one allows no name but the Name above every name; yet is the tone throughout that of the beloved disciple unmistakably. To the shorter pair he prefixes "the elder" respectively to the elect lady and her children, and to Gauis the beloved. Do we need more to discern the writer? But it was due to a prophetic book, above all one so profound and lofty and far-reaching, that the name of him that wrote it should be given, yet with a simplicity and a dignity all his own, a wondrous reflex of the Lord Jesus in His servant.

Nor is it a new thing for God to set out the strongest contrasts by the same inspired writer The apostle Peter,

who opened the door of the kingdom for the Jews, was chosen to open it for the Gentiles also (Acts 2, 10). Again, he who was the apostle of the uncircumcision called the Jewish believers at length to go forth to Jesus without the camp bearing His reproach. So too the devoted witness of the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ was, in God's mind if not in man's, the most fitting medium for revealing the judgments of God coming on the earth. In this lay the moral reason; that Christ, if rejected as the gift of God's grace and hence the object of faith, is His executor of judgment (John 5:21-29). If men despise the fourfold testimony (there also pointed out) which God gave to His Son, what can be so imperative? The decline, the corruption, and the apostasy of Christendom only make the judicial intervention of God indispensable, in order to clear away rebellious lawlessness, and to establish His kingdom in righteousness, power, and glory. Now that the truth was about to be set at naught as the law had been before in Israel, John was, more than any other, the one left on earth, a suffering exile, to make known the solemn vision of God avenging the injured rights of His own Son, the Son of Man; and this, first by providential inflictions, and at last by Jesus, the Word of God, Himself coming in the personal execution of judgment.

Hence, although there are striking contrasts in form, subject, and issues between the Gospel of John and the Revelation, the person of the Lord Jesus is pre-eminently kept before us in both as the object of God's care and honour. Therefore, even those who could little cuter into the scope of its prophetic visions have gathered unspeakable comfort from 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 faithful, with ever so little light but under hardship, have found exceeding nourishment and help in the Apocalypse? Men of mere learning too often have made it as dry as an old almanac.

It is not the Father made known in and by the Son, but the "revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him." Even in that Gospel, which is so fragrant with His divine love, we have the frequent, not to say constant, admonition of the remarkable position which Christ takes. He is carefully regarded as the sent One who lived on account of the Father, as in the Gospel man on earth, so in the Revelation man most truly wherever He may be seen, whether in heaven or on earth, yet in both as truly God, the Eternal. The book is Jesus Christ's revelation, "which God gave to him."

In the Gospel (John 5:26) it is said the Father gave the Son 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 the eternal life which was with the Father before the worlds were. Nevertheless, having become man in divine grace, He speaks according to the lowly position which He entered here. In glory it is just the same, as we see in the book before us. "Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him to show to his bondmen." The terms "show" here and "signified" in the clause that succeeds are used with striking propriety, when we consider the visions on the one hand and the signs and symbols on the other which characterise the book. The aim is not to bring them out

of that position, or to entitle them to the dignity of children of God. This characterises the Gospel, which 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 One, who, therefore, shows it to His “bondmen” — a term that suits those who might be in another relationship, after the church closes its history on earth, during a brief crisis of exceptional judgments.

Hence the comprehensive term is clearly employed with divine wisdom, “to show to his bondmen the things which must shortly come to pass” Remark that it is not “the things which are about to come to pass,” which is exactly right in ver. 19, where, after the past vision, the present and the future are distinguished. Here it is to show His bondmen “the things which must come to pass shortly.” If Jonah was sent with a warning of minatory character to arouse Nineveh to repent and thus escape their threatened ruin, John was to show the things which, as the guilt was intolerable, must (δεῖ) come to pass shortly. The apostasy of Christendom entails not conditional threats, but necessary and inevitable judgments. The critical facts are disclosed in which we see the church condition set aside because of its final and utter failure to shed the light of the sanctuary, till its last phase becomes so nauseous that the. Lord spues it out of His mouth. Then follow judgments on the world with strokes of ever-increasing severity, in which God was about to maintain the glory of the firstborn, whom He at length introduces personally into the world to reign.

“And he sent and signified (it) through his angel to his bondman John.” Sons of God are not contemplated as

such, but bondmen of Jesus. Again, “angel” is not without the best reason named with the revelation which God here gives. In the Gospel we read of eternal life in the Son, and this by the grace of God given to the believer; as 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. The judicial character of the Revelation calls for a quite different style of communication, and reserve replaces the intimacy of grace. The intervention of “His angel” is therefore to be thus accounted for, as in itself it was fitting.

Here we have visions in display of God’s judicial ways, visions of judgment which He would inflict on the ever-growing iniquity of man when ripe. In the Gospel John may speak, but he speaks as one who had seen, and above all heard, the Lord — one who could bear his own testimony for whatever he utters. He may speak but seldom of himself, and efface himself otherwise so effectually, that there are not wanting those who question whether after all the writer could be “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” The doubt is quite unfounded certainly; but none can charge John with putting himself forward by the manner in which he writes. So too in his Epistles, which contemplate the Christian company, or a family, or a friend, the one aim is to place the children of God in immediate communion with the Father and the Son. The inspired apostle wrote them all, no doubt, and the various members of God’s family, as well as the servants of the Lord, are owned in their place. But therein He who is God our Father manifestly instructs, comforts, and admonishes His own.

But here we meet intervention on every side. God gives a revelation of Jesus to show to His bondmen the things which must shortly come to pass; and Jesus passes it on through His angel to His bondman John; and John testifies accordingly. Thus we have all sorts of links in the chain, and we may ask why. For it is novel, especially in the New Testament. How comes this remarkable introduction of the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him, and from Him through an angel to one bondman to show the future to His other bondmen? How is it that we here miss the direct dealing with us, the immediateness of address which is our portion elsewhere? The reason, as solemn as it is instructive, is implied indeed in the analogy of the Old Testament; for God did not always address His people there. Yet 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 when the message became indirect? See the book of Daniel as the fullest proof of it. And no doubt it was really meant for the people; but God gave it to Daniel, and only so.

This opens the true meaning of the remarkable change in the Apocalypse as compared with the rest of the New Testament. When the children of Israel had hopelessly betrayed the Lord, and their departure was complete before His eyes, not only in the first rent-off portion or the ten tribes of Israel but in the remaining two, when not only Judah apostatised but even the house of David, the anointed king, the last regular link; between Jehovah and His people, then He addressed His people no more but only a chosen faithful servant as His witness. It was

a sure token that all was over for the present as to immediateness of communion between God and His people. God could no longer recognise them as His own: they were Lo-Ammi, not My-people, as He had warned before through Hosea. Applying this to the church and to our own circumstances, is it not most grave?

It is not in the least doubted that God proves Himself faithful in the worst of times. No deduction could be more false than that Daniel, his three companions, and possibly others also, were not personally as pleasant to Him as David was. Did He not look with exceeding satisfaction in His grace upon the servant who felt and answered to His own feelings about His people? It was precisely because of this 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. When all was out of course to stand faithful was a greater proof of fidelity, than to be so when things were regular. Thus grace is equal to every difficulty, and a time of ruin gives occasion for more grace.

But the solemn fact faces us that such a crisis even then came: the church of God is no longer directly addressed in the book. John stands in a position analogous to Daniel; he, not that which still bore the name of the Lord here below, becomes now the object of communications from the Lord Jesus. 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. Even where we have addresses, as we find in chapters 2 and 3, they are not immediately to the churches, but to their “angels.” It is manifest that all accentuates the same serious conclusion, the ruin of

the Christian testimony in its responsibility. This does not touch the stability of grace, or of God's faithfulness; but it tells the old and humbling story of what man is, however blessed.

Hence and thus John "testified the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ." It seems here restricted, not meaning 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. This however is not the subject of the Apocalypse, nor the sense of our text. All is here limited to that which "he saw"; which is of importance to apprehend the force of the passage, as also the character of the book. The word "and" must vanish, if we respect the best authorities; for a third description is not meant, but rather an explanation restricting the other two. But how are we to understand the word of God and the testimony of Jesus here? The answer is given by the last clause when "and" is taken away. It consists of the visions recorded in this book, "whatsoever [or all] things that he saw." John receives a new character of word and testimony, his visions; but it is none the less God's word and Christ's witness.

Accordingly the Apocalypse can be slighted only by unbelief; for it, no less than the Gospels or the Epistles, is here styled "the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ." They revealed grace; it announces judgments. What a rebuke to proud scholars and prejudiced theologians, too unspiritual to appreciate the book, and too self-complacent to learn! It is thus carefully ushered in, but in the prophetic method morally fitting for the 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 notwithstanding) to treat the Apocalypse as of less, if not doubtful, value, and of precarious authority. But no: it is stamped to John by our Lord Jesus as the word of God and His own testimony. We know that too many disputers of this age have in their folly dared to insult the book. The Judge of quick and dead more carefully authenticates it than any other in the canon of scripture. If it consists not of that which directly edifies the Christian in the privileges of grace, it urgently announces the doom of such as despise God and prefer their own ideas and will to His revelation.

Be it remarked too, that a special blessing is prefixed to the prophecy. Was it not expressly and graciously to encourage His bondmen, as well as to foreclose the cavils of unbelief? “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein.” It is even for those to hear and keep who could not read; and blessed are such. What can one think of those who all but exclude it from their liturgies? What of those who boast of their freedom from these forms, and are no less disrespectful and unbelieving? Doubt not its practical power. No one ever decried the book whom it did not morally condemn; none read or hear, and keep it without rich blessing.

The stated reason given is much to be weighed; for it is not, as men often assume, because we are to be in the predicted circumstances. As a matter of fact, the Christian, the church, does not pass through the special troubles here described. Not a word to this effect is implied, but quite a different reason is given. As the book itself lets us know that the church will be on high outside the scene of earth’s exceeding troubles and

inflicted judgments, so the motive assigned in the preface is of a strikingly holy nature, adapted to all those who walk by faith, not by sight, and free from all selfish considerations: “for the fit time [is] at hand.” It is not that the time is actually come, so that we must go through all or any of the strictly future part; but the fit time is near. 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. “For the fit time is at hand.” It is a false principle therefore that we can only be profited by that which concerns ourselves, or supposes us to be in the actual circumstances described. The words are to be heard, the things written in the book to be kept; not the seven Epistles only, but all its contents to the end of all things. Prophecy edifies those who believe God before it comes to pass. It is a proof against unbelievers when fulfilled; but its true aim and best blessing is for those who heed it before.

Then comes the salutation. Here too all is as peculiar in itself as suitable to the book on which we enter: “John to the seven churches which [are] in Asia.” The First Epistle of John is essentially for all saints in its nature and contents, as the absence of local address implies. It treats of what never passes, of eternal life not in Christ only but possessed by all the faithful, “which thing is true in him and in you.” But here local churches were no less requisite, for reasons to appear, in full variety, and so as to account for judicial extinction. This could not have been if the saints were viewed as the object of sovereign grace, as in the Epistle to the Ephesians. With solemn responsibility, as here, it is easy and plain.

Again on no other occasion do we find anything akin to this. Hitherto we read of the saints receiving an epistle in one place or another. A particular assembly, or the assemblies of a wide district like Galatia, may be addressed. Never but here is an address given to a distinct 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 is adopted. 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 also seven is the regular sign of spiritual completeness.

Who then but uninstructed or prejudiced minds can question that the Lord meant more than the actual assemblies in the province of Asia? That the letters were written and sent to literal congregations from Ephesus to Laodicea admits of no dispute. But can one doubt that these were chosen, and the addresses shaped to them, so 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 fully) of a church character? The state of things might be one of ruin, for the first church had to fear its lamp removed; it might become even gross and false, as much was in several: still an ecclesiastical profession subsisted if only for His dealing in judgment. This never appears after chap. 4. No such condition exists afterwards; thenceforth the ecclesiastical footing disappears for man’s allegiance. In short, as long as church responsibility exists here below, these addresses apply as such, and no longer. Low as we are, and bound

to humble ourselves for the actual state of ruin and scattering of the church as a divine institution, who is bold enough to deny that the Lord still owns and deals judicially at least, though this be far from all, with a church status on earth? Revelation 4 tells us much more in confirmation; but this in its own time and due place.

“To the seven churches which [are] in Asia: Grace [be] to you, and peace, from him that is, and that was, and that is to come.” It is not “from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” or any other form found in the apostolic Epistles. The salutation is from God in His own being, the ever-existing One, He who is, and who was, and who is to come. It asserts the continuity of His present being emphatically with the past and with the future. It is not “He who was, and is, and is to come,” as in Rev. 4:8, but “He who is, and who was, and who is to come.” His essential being is set in the first place, and not only that He is the God of ages or Jehovah, the name: revealed to the sons of Israel. “And from the seven Spirits that [are] before his throne.” Here again we find a description of the Holy Ghost expressly in government, and with decided difference from what meets us in the New Testament generally. The allusion is clear to Isaiah 11:2, where the sevenfold power of the Holy Ghost in government is connected with the person and for the kingdom of the Messiah. “And the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest,” etc. This is taken up here, and applied in a far larger way for purposes suitable to the Apocalyptic prophecy, which contemplates the ruin of Christendom.

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 of what was found there. This would be in effect to deprive ourselves of the Apocalypse, instead of apprehending its peculiar profit. If one identifies the Jerusalem of Isaiah with the New Jerusalem of the Revelation, or sets the Babylon of Jeremiah to exhaust the Apocalyptic Babylon, it is clear that this is just to lose the special instruction God is here giving us. Doubtless it is a main source of confusion on the scope of the Apocalypse to this day. Yet if we do not take into account the Old Testament oracles as to Babylon or Jerusalem, if we slight the instruction derived from the prophets generally, we are hardly 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 rehearsal of the Old in the New, is an almost equal error. There is a divine link in all, as the Spirit's mind had an unmistakable reference; but the Apocalypse gives an incomparably wider range, and a more profound character, and none the less because the present things are shown to be out of course, and demand to be set aside. The Apocalypse looks on things after the Holy Ghost had taken His place in the Christian and in the church on earth; above all it was after the Son had appeared, manifested God the Father, and accomplished redemption here below. Hence all the fulness of divine light which had come out in Christ's person and work, as well as by the Spirit for the church of God, is necessary to remember in order to seize the just bearing of the Apocalypse.

The seven Spirits then refer, beyond fair doubt, to the Holy Ghost acting with all variety in the way of government ("before his throne"). How different from

the truth of the same Spirit sent forth from heaven, and baptising the saints into the one body of Christ here below! But there is no just ground for thinking of created spirits or angels in this connection any more than in Rev. 5:6. Never do the seven Spirits pay worship to God; and the reason is, that they mean God's Spirit. It is only in Christianity and the church that we know God as He is — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In government, whether of Old or in Apocalyptic scenes, He is not so revealed. But it is an offence against truth to mix up Creator and creature. It is the completeness 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. It is in relation to Christ dealing ecclesiastically in Revelation 3, and again in His relation to the earth in Revelation 5; but it is always the Spirit in full variety of governmental power, rather than the same Spirit viewed in His unity as 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 thus introduced in Old Testament style and character, but applied to New Testament subjects in a far larger way; the Holy Ghost also is similarly brought before us; and so too with our Lord. "And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the prince [or, ruler] of the kings of the earth." Indeed there is nothing more remarkable, especially when we bear in mind who the writer is, than the absence here of Christ's proper relationship to the children of God. Revelation of grace is precisely what is not found in this book, if one search into the character

of its visions generally. “Jesus Christ” appears as the Faithful Witness. This clearly He was on the earth when man wholly failed. In a very different tone it was John’s topic everywhere. We may look on the Lord as gone up to heaven, where Paul loved to contemplate Him glorified; but John habitually points to Christ the eternal Word and Son as He was here below. If he speaks of Him as the Lamb above, the description is founded on His having been the rejected sufferer on earth. Next He is “the firstborn of the dead.” This too He was on earth. Satan, who had the power of death, had nothing in Him; but by the grace and for the glory of God He died, and rose victorious, the Firstborn of the dead. Again, as “the prince of the kings of the earth,” He waits to be displayed when He comes by-and-by to earth. But what He is now for us in God’s presence and does in heaven in activity of grace is exactly what we have not given us here. There is the most careful exclusion from the book of His heavenly position as Head or even our High Priest. Even the present grace which livingly connects Him with the Christian is left out.

Thus the Lord Jesus is here brought before us as Man on earth, required specially for the purpose of this prophetic book. God was announced in His own eternal being; the Holy Ghost in His varied fulness of governmental power; the Lord Jesus in that which connected Him not with heaven but with the earth, even if risen from the dead, and the coming King of kings. He is for this and perhaps other reasons put in the last place.

But when Christ is named, the voice of Christians is at once heard. This is so much the more remarkable, because it is one of the sweet exceptional ripples which

cross the ordinary current of the book at the end as well as at the beginning. It is not so when the course of the visions is fairly entered on. Before these begin Christians are heard, as the bride is after the visions close. The name of Jesus is enough to stir the heart, for those who know Him as we do, in a suited doxology. He may not be described in His relationships peculiar to us, but He who is described is the One that loves us and that we love. So we say, “To him that loveth us” (for this is the true reading and rendering, not merely that “loved” us) — “to him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins in his blood; and he made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father; to him [be] the glory and the might unto the ages of the ages.” What was a condition to Israel, and a condition they broke forthwith by their rebellion against Jehovah in idolatry, is to us an accomplished fact, and an abiding gift of grace through redemption, not the place of priests only but of kings. Even here, or anywhere else in the book, it is not said “to our Father,” however true this be in itself. All is in keeping with the aim of the Revelation “to his God and Father.” We are regarded not in the nearness of God’s children, but in conferred dignity and office. “To him be the glory and the might for ever and ever.” He is worthy.

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 relation to Him. “Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they which [οἵτινες] pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth [or, land] shall wail [or, beat their breasts] at him.” This clearly is judicial, and has nothing to do with His presence or

coming for us. But after our own delight and thanksgiving have gone forth toward Jesus, the solemn testimony to others quite suitably follows the song of praise, which had (if one may say, involuntarily, certainly of the Holy Spirit in our hearts) 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 — by those that pierced Him (i.e. the Jews). “Yea, Amen.” We have learnt to bow and bless God.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith [the] Lord God, that is, and that was, and that is to come, the Almighty.” He who is the Source and Doer of all, who communicates everything that can be made known to man, He it is who here speaks, the Lord God, the Eternal, and the Almighty putting His voucher on the book from the beginning. The words, as often elsewhere in John’s writings, purposely mix up God and Christ. But here it is the divine sanction of every word, whether in vetting aside the guilty present or in establishing the future down to the eternal state. None but the true God could speak to it; and John expressly says that Jesus is the true God. For the prophecy embraces God’s judgment of the world, of living and dead, in a regular order beyond all other books, till time melts into eternity, and all things are made new.

Then John describes himself in a manner adapted to the testimony he is called to render: “I John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus.” There is to be ample employment of symbol; but literal fact is carefully stated: the place, a bare and stern isle of

the Sporades, where the apostle was banished for the truth's sake; and also the very day when he saw the vision. How all here said harmonises with what afterwards comes out! The whole book supposes saints in tribulation, with their spiritual experience formed into the associations of the kingdom rather than those of Christ's body the church, as yet surely suffering on account of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus. Particular care is taken to show this to us.

Not that the full church relationship was lacking to John; but he stands here as prophet rather than apostle, a representative man for others as well as ourselves. While therefore he had all that is properly Christian, he also had special communications of another sort for saints who follow us at the end of this age, when "the tribulation" will be emphatically verified. Thus he introduces himself here as a joint partaker, not of God's promise in Christ by the gospel, but in His kingdom and patience. It is true for us all, but in special harmony with the latter-day sufferers, and not specifically with the church. The place here presented is of course a Christian's; but that is put forward which belonged to others, who should not have the same corporate standing as ourselves. Yet there is a careful guard against any supposition that he was not in the full enjoyment of his due place in Christ.

This seems to be one reason why it pleased God to give the visions of the book on the Lord's day. "I became in Spirit on the Lord's day." It is not "the day of the Lord," as has been strangely fancied, but expressed by a wholly different phrase, which guards from any such thought (ἐν τῃ κυριακῃ ἡμέρᾳ). It is the characteristic day of the Christian, the birthday of his distinctive blessing, as it

assuredly ought to be an especial joy of his heart, because it is the resurrection day of grace and new creation, not the seventh day of old creation rest and law. In the day of the Lord no churches are recognised on earth, nor is the Lord in any such relation as here appears. It opens in Revelation 19:11. The Greek phrase in the two cases wholly differs. “The Lord’s day,” like “the Lord’s Supper,” is unique; “the day of the Lord” is always expressed differently, often as it occurs in both Old Testament and New.

On that day the inspired writer John came under the power of the Holy Spirit 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, no doubt, 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 into the visions of the future, there must be a retrospective glance. Therefore in these preliminary chapters our Lord is seen as Son of Man judging in the midst of the seven lamps. God only discloses the distinct future when the existing object of His care is done with. In the Spirit John 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. Yet first of all we should recognise the fact that it was on the Lord’s day; and next that, before he was shown what lay before, he must turn to the voice behind him and learn what the Lord judged of that which bore His name on the earth. But how new to John “a great voice as of a trumpet” from the Lord Jesus! How different from the good Shepherd’s voice he and the other sheep heard and knew! A loud voice as of a trumpet summoned attention imperatively:

compare Exodus 19:19. So it will for another end in that day (Isa. 27:13; Matt. 24:31). In the normal state of the church it would have been incongruous.

Omit the spurious opening clause, and read after it, “saying, What thou seest, write.” The reference of the voice behind is exclusively to the seven assemblies. When the proper prophecy is about to begin, the first voice which he heard as of a trumpet says, “Come up hither.” There is no question then of a voice behind: he goes upward, given to look into the future. But there must first be a retrospective notice, in which the Lord pronounces His judgment on that which bore the name of Christendom here below. “What thou seest, write in a book, and send [it] to the seven churches; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, 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 lamps [or, lampstands].” These were responsible light-bearers, not the stands alone of course but their lamps, viewed according to God’s mind about them constituted in divine righteousness. Therefore were they “golden.” It is a great principle, and remarkably characterises John’s writings So the standard for the Christian is not in anywise the law (it was so for the Jew); for us it is Christ Himself, and cannot without the utmost loss be anything else. “He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk” — how? Like an Israelite? Not so; for the Christian ought to remember that he is a heavenly man (1 Cor. 15:48), not a man of dust like Adam. He “ought himself also so to walk even as he (Christ) walked.” The Christian is not under law but under grace; and this, not for salvation only, but for

present walk (Rom. 6). If he have the blessing in faith, he cannot evade the responsibility in practice.

Thus it is with the seven golden lamps. All must be and was measured according to God's mind, and the place in which He set the assemblies. Consistency with Him as God revealed in Christ is their rule. Hence it is they appear as "golden" damps. They had from God divine righteousness as their character; but they come under moral judgment as to their ways. How many saints there are who in their personal walk are pious and vigilant, and yet entirely overlook that their corporate responsibility to the Lord is no less obligatory! Here the question is about that public testimony to His word and name. For John saw "in the midst of the [seven] lamps one son-of-man like, clothed with a garment down to the foot." The one seen was like a son of man. Christ was not like, but truly, "the Son of Man." Yet this phrase says more than the inspired text. Like "the" Son of Man might enfeeble or deny the truth. One like a son of man was seen at a glance. That He was the Son of Man became soon plain enough; but here as everywhere we must adhere to scripture.

There is not now the sign of activity; the robe was not tucked up for gracious service with girded loins. The Son of Man is seen clad in the flowing garb of dignity reaching to the feet, and He is "girt about the breasts with a golden girdle." Divine righteousness girds Him at the breasts in dignity as judge, not at the loins for strenuous work of grace. But He is Ancient of days as well as Son of Man. "And his head and his hairs [were] white as white wool, as snow; and his eyes as a flame of fire; and his feet like fine brass, as if they glowed in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters, and

having in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth a sharp two-edged sword going forth; and his countenance as the sun shineth in its power.” His eyes indicated scathing and consuming judgment; His feet, inflexible and unsparing firmness in it; His voice bespoke resistless majesty. Subordinate rulers ecclesiastical were in His right hand of power; out of His mouth went forth the word that judged with unerring decision on both sides, and His countenance with supreme authority and might shine forth as the great light that rules the day.

Do even the children of God believe that these are the characteristics of Christ walking in the midst of the churches? How many a saint, jealous and self-judging as to his personal ways before God, excuses his ecclesiastical associations as of no real living moment! He might know with entire assurance that the worship, the ministry, and the general state are wholly at issue with God’s word; but he has been taught to regard all these as necessary evils, which he has to bear. How opposed to this laxity is the responsibility which the Lord here enforces! For what means His eyes as a flame of fire? What His feet as if they glowed in a furnace? What a sharp two-edged sword going forth out of His mouth? Is He not at war with the loose or latitudinarian?

Hence we have to remark that Christ is seen, not as Head, nor as Priest, nor Advocate, but in a judicial point of view. He is spoken of as Son of Man; and, as we know, this is the aspect in which it is given Him to execute every kind of judgment, as is expressly so taught in John’s own Gospel. He is judging the lamps set to shed light in a world of darkness, and this at the very time the light grew dim and precarious, if not at first expiring.

Yet with this another feature betrays John, suiting him as the writer strikingly. He that is seen as Son of Man is 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 another, though even there the Ancient of days came, indicating their oneness (7). 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. Let me ask, Whose style does this identification of nature fall in with but the writer’s that we are now reading? Does it not convince more than ever, not so much similarity of phrase which might be imitated? Morally speaking Jesus must execute judgment; but John does not lose sight of His divine glory, even where the subject is not grace; but judgment, with the kingdom to follow everywhere anticipated.

A threefold glory of Christ appears: what is personal in the robe, girdle, and hair; what is relative in His eyes, feet, and voice; and finally, what is official in His right hand, mouth, and countenance. But there is more also. For it is said, “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last.” It was no similitude of mere man, but the Lord. 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.” He deigned not only to become man, but as willingly to die, cost what it might, as His death did everything to blot out the evil and prepare for all blessing. The phrase is the strongest way of putting the matter. It is not merely that He died: this

is not quite what He says here, though it is said elsewhere, and very truly. He says that He “became” dead. This forcibly implies His own willingness to die, as indeed He became what did not belong to Him personally, and what seemed extraordinarily incongruous with the glorious person as already described. Is it not conveyed in the peculiarity of the phrase? So careful is the Holy Ghost to watch over the dignity of Christ even in that which told out the depths of His humiliation. “And, behold, I am living unto the ages of the ages.” He is the vanquisher of death, and of him who had its power. We must leave out the word “Amen,” which here, being spurious, only and evidently mars the sense.

Let it suffice once for all to say that the text adopted rests on the basis of the ancient and best authorities. There is positive evidence of a convincing and satisfactory kind for the insertions, omissions, or changes throughout. Do not imagine that in this there is arbitrary innovation. The real innovators were those who departed by slip or by will from the very words of the Spirit. Arbitrariness now would be in maintaining what has insufficient authority against that which is as certain as can be. Error surely is not in seeking the oldest and best supported text, but in allowing tradition to tie us to comparatively modern and certainly to mistaken, if not corrupted, readings. We are bound in everything to yield to the highest authority, with the context to help us in deciding where the best manuscripts differ as they do. So in the next words our Lord really says, “And I have the keys of death and of hades”; and who but He could say them? Not so runs the common text; but that is the true order. No one goes to

Hades before he dies, Death being in relation to the body, Hades to the separate spirit. How truly Christ died and lived, that He might be Lord of both dead and living!

“Write therefore [improperly omitted] the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and what is1 about to take place after these.” This gives us, as is familiar to most Christian readers, the general 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. Short as the account is, one can hardly exaggerate its importance in itself and for all that follows; for it is the Lord revealed as assuming formally a judicial character. “The things which are” express not merely the then present, but the prolonged condition set forth in the addresses to the seven churches. The expression is striking; because, while applying to the existing seven assemblies, it naturally conveys (when the epistles to them are adequately understood) that the churches were somehow to exist continuously. A formal prophecy would have falsified the church’s hope as a constant and vital reality. Divine wisdom gave such an extension to “the things which are” as should bear on the successive states of the church as long as it should be here on earth. We can see now why it was. Possibly, when the epistles were sent out in the days of John, no particular emphasis might be laid on “the things that are”; the saints would naturally be absorbed in the call on themselves. But inasmuch as analogous states have since gone on to the present, the immense force such a phrase when duly weighed carries in itself becomes evident. Nothing would then be allowed to weaken

waiting for Christ as our proximate hope; but if He tarried, it is an abiding appeal as long as the church abides here below.

Singular to say, an effort has been revived which never ought to have been made to explain its force, especially in the light of what goes before and of what follows. The Greek, except in very careless style, cannot bear "and what they signify"; for this would require τίνα (or ἅτία) instead of ἅ, thus giving a different force to the second ἃ from the first and third. N.T. phraseology allows no such laxity; and the context, being dislocated thereby, totally forbids it. Others seek to attain the same result by the plea that εἰσὶν may practically mean "signify" here, as sometimes elsewhere. But there is no analogy here with any such cases; and for the plain and conclusive reason, that in none of them is there a distinction compared with the past and the future. The only sound and satisfactory rendering, therefore, is that adopted in the A. and R. versions, and indeed in almost all others, modern as well as ancient. There is necessarily a closer connection with "the things which thou hast seen," in which was the vision of the Son of Man judging in the midst of the golden lamps; but to "the things that are" belongs its own distinct importance as conveyed in the seven epistles, and by its peculiarity lending itself to the continuous existence of the present state.

"What is about to take place after these" is the exact translation of the next phrase. Even "afterward" would be here equivocal. "After these things" gives the true sense required, as it is the closely literal rendering. Not another instance in the Revelation can bear the vague "hereafter," or even "afterward" which is meant in John 13:7. Here again the context fixes the precision of its

general usage, and forbids the looser application, which might be, where no line of distinction is drawn between past and present. The beginning of Rev. 4 confirms fully the exact rendering “after these things.” The strictly future division of the book cannot begin whilst a church condition exists.

A little more follows. “The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest on my right hand, and the seven golden lamps: the seven stars are angels of the seven churches; and the seven lamps are seven churches.” As the lamps symbolise churches, so do the stars their angels. Surely “the mystery” prepares us for views of the subordinate lights or angels, and of the lamps or churches far beyond the letter of then existing facts. What “mystery” was there in the historical facts of these seven churches in proconsular Asia? It seems inconceivable that such a word should be employed here if no more had been intended than the actual circumstances. But if these “seven” were selected for this prophetic book to represent in divine wisdom successive phases of the existing church state, however protracted, the propriety of the term becomes apparent Thus, too, is explained the application of “the stars,” well known in the ancient prophecy of Daniel, but due here to the extraordinary and abnormal state of the Christian testimony and a state of decline and approaching ruin; for the last of them indicates no revival or recovery, but the Lord spueing it out of His mouth.

In each letter the Lord addresses “the angel.” Who and what is he? The regular charges of elder) and deacons are passed over in silence; nor are the gifts of the ascended Christ in evidence. But a new title at issue

with the sanctioned order hitherto would be a strange thing on our Lord's part, when on man's a decline had set in. We never hear of "angel" as an official title in the ordinary arrangements of the New Testament. "The angel" is a term for the leader that suits chaps. 2 and 3 of such a prophetic book as the Revelation, just as literal angels are in keeping with the book of Daniel. Does it mean what we commonly call an angelic being? Not here surely, where "angels of the churches" are spoken of. If we hear of the angel of fire, and even of the angel of Jesus Christ, as of Jehovah elsewhere, there is no difficulty, though all these be outside the thoughts and language of the Epistles. But it is very new to hear of the angel of this or that assembly. Again, we can understand an angel employed, a spiritual messenger from on high, as the means of communication between the Lord and His servant John; but how harsh to suppose that His servant John writes a letter from Christ to a literal angel! This is one of the clear difficulties in which those are involved who suppose angelic beings to be here meant. The nature of the case precludes it.

As "angel" is used in the sense of a representative, so in reference to the assemblies the Lord here avails Himself of this general idea. A messenger or moral representative of each assembly is implied. "Angel" was used of a human representative. For instance, when John the Baptist sent two of his disciples, there was a representation of his mind by these men when they gave the message of him who sent them (Luke 7:24). The representative force appears also in Acts 12:15 (only here it was of a spiritual character); and so in Matthew 18:10. But it assumes a different shape when it was a question of assemblies. They were His chief lights,

representing each the assembly, and so became His medium in judging its state according to the divine standard.

If therefore we look at the abstract nature of the angel of the church, what is taught by the term? Presumably this, that the Lord had in view not necessarily an elder, nor a teacher, but one who might be either or both; but before His mind he truly represented, and was in a special way bound up with the responsibility of, the state of the assembly. Whoever that might be was meant by the angel of the church. The state of Christianity, or rather of the churches, made this reserve suitable morally. The Lord adopts it in judging, rather than the ordinary medium of either the gifts or the local charges. It is the prophetic character of the book, the critical condition of the churches, which accounts not only for the angel representatives, but for the separate view of the churches. For the unity of the body of Christ is a wholly distinct truth, and stands on the basis of divine counsels now and for ever made good by and in Christ the Head. “The seven churches” have their own moral bearing as introducing God’s future dealings with the world when they vanish from the scene. All effort, from this special aim, to set aside unity, and to supplant it by independency, is as unintelligent as it is vain and evil. To deduce from the stars and the candlesticks new officials and congregational independency would be to overthrow the nature of ministry and the unity of the church, as already taught wherever the Holy Spirit reveals either truth. But what does man’s will not essay? “The things that are” abide still, though going on from danger at the beginning to utter rejection at the last: a strange time

and state to organise the church anew, and an unheard of function.

Revelation 2

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden lamps.” Here we are 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 one may 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, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden lamps.” The position, both ministerial and ecclesiastical, is ruled by His relationship to the angels (i.e. those that morally represented the assemblies to His eye), and to the churches in view. The “star” is that which acted on the assembly — the vessel of light from the Lord to bear on the condition of the assembly. If that light were ineffectual, if evil mixed with it, the state of the assembly would partake of it; if bright, the assembly would be elevated morally thereby. In Him who held the seven stars in His right hand, and walked in the midst of the seven golden lamps, we have Christ not merely holding fast those ideal representatives, but also judicially interested in the assemblies themselves. In short, it is Christ in His fullest but most general ministerial and ecclesiastical aspect according to the governmental tenor of the book.

The state of the church in Ephesus has the same generality. “I know thy works, and [thy] labour, and patience (or, endurance), and that thou canst not bear evil [men]; and thou didst try those that call themselves apostles, and they are not, and thou didst find them liars.” There was some faithfulness, and this 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. One can understand that then naturally Satan would endeavour to furnish instruments nothing loath 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” so far acted upon the church for good. When such assumption was essayed, they were one in trying and refusing those who set up to be what they were not.

But much more is here. Persistent faithfulness and devotedness still characterised them at Ephesus. “And thou hast patience, and didst bear for my name, and hast not wearied. But I have against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love.” This is the Lords complaint against them. It is plain that here as ever is the first departure, the general but sure 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 cherished object of their soul and life. Was it not thus when the Epistle to the Ephesians was written by Paul? Had they now left their first love? Was it with them as once when Christ was all, and flesh only evil in their eyes? Alas! the failure in this respect. They had here relaxed, not in their works: these went on diligently.

There were works, and labour, and endurance. But where now the work of faith? Where the labour of love? Where the endurance of hope? The power that had produced the mighty results was no longer active, nor could be. The effect continued; the spring was gone. They had relaxed in their first love. It was all over with them, unless they judged themselves, and in the power of the Holy Ghost gave to Christ His place.

“Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I am coming to thee,2 and will remove thy lamp out of its place, except thou repent.” Whether it be Christ as He is represented or the description of the church’s state, whether the fault that is charged home or the remedy proposed, whether the judgment threatened or the promise 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. Yet how solemn to hear the gracious Lord, as His present judgment of the actual state of the assembly in Ephesus, threaten this choice church which Paul planted with the removal of its lamp! Such a sentence does not mean that individual saints lose the portion of grace, but that the assembly forfeits its public place of light-bearer, because of its unjudged condition. Even then the Lord, however grieved, does not fail to note its hatred, shared with Himself, of allowing and glossing over iniquity, as the next words show. “But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans,3 which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches: to him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of [my] God.” Here again all

is large and comprehensive. What can be wider than this promise?

In the letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna, a totally different state of things appears. It is essentially a special case instead of the general one first seen. After declension from apostolic purity, above all from first love, the Lord was pleased to afflict; He allowed all sorts of trial to befall His people by letting loose the power of Satan working by Gentile persecutors. “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the First and the Last, who became dead and lived: I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of those that call themselves Jews, and they are not, but a synagogue of Satan.” It is not now a trial by false claimants. A new evil appears. As long as true apostles were on earth, Satan was never able to get Judaism recognised in the church of God. The council in Jerusalem expressly exempted the Gentiles from being put under the yoke of law. And the apostle of uncircumcision showed on his own ground that it was really to annul Christ, and 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; but for a rule of life it is not so apparent, yet 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 as Jews ought to know (though they do not), it is evident that for a Christian to abandon that for this tends to apostasy. The early fathers thus Judaised; and the leaven has gone on working ever since. To take the position of a Jew virtually 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 crying up of works comes to) forming a distinct party. It is not merely Satan struggling to get in Judaism by individuals, but, as He says here, “the blasphemy” (railing or calumny) “of those that 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 pretension. They set up to be more righteous and holy than the rest, whom they denounced as antinomian because these stood in the true grace of God. They were themselves corrupters of the gospel and destroyers of living Christianity without knowing it. Deceived by Satan, they were his zealous instruments, so much the more actively deceiving others, because perhaps earnest and honest after the flesh.

The patristic party, those commonly called “the Fathers,” seem the leaders in the evil here referred to. They had the awful ignominy of systematically Judaising the church. They also exercised this influence in all ages, and even over the Puritans. Here, if one mistake not, their formation as a system is stigmatised by the Lord Jesus. Sometimes offensive against Himself, always ignorant of His work and heavenly relations, they were blindly opposed to faith in God’s sovereign grace. Their character is plain. They dragged down the Christian from his true heavenly associations to that of a spurious Jew. What is still more the significant point for John, they lost even the truth of a real life given to us in Christ. Thus whether it be the depraving of souls or forming a catholic body after an earthly mould, or

whether it be depriving them of known life in Christ (at least as far as false doctrine could go), and hence failing to walk as He walked, to pat them under Jewish ordinances, the Fathers, as a class, fully earned the distinction here assigned by the Lord.

When things were 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 time. Such is the great fact found among the ante-Nicene Fathers. Here the Lord seems to notice its working at the same time that God was in a measure using for good those faithful during the heathen persecutions. Even then Satan was not idle in forming his synagogue "of those that say they are Jews, and are not." On the other hand, Christ said in view of the sufferer, "Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have a tribulation of ten days." The trial was not unlimited: the Lord defined the term of their endurance. "Become faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches; he that overcometh shall in no wise be hurt of the second death." They might experience the first; they should be untouched by that death which follows and is final. It is a question of faith in God. Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum" comes a very different message. This too is special. "These things saith he which hath the sharp two-edged sword; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest." It may be a very

serious thing where our position is. They were dwelling "where Satan's throne [is]." How came this? One can understand their passing through the sense of his wiles; but to dwell where he reigns is fearfully significant. Did they like to be near a throne, although it were the throne of Satan — to have a standing there? Did they love the glitter of the world's power, and relish its favour, alien from God as it is?

The condition supposed comes out clearly in such a writer of that day as Eusebius, who regarded the change brought in by Constantine as the fulfilment of the glowing vision of the Kingdom in the prophets. Thenceforth it was the church reigning on earth. They claimed the delusion of which the Corinthians were disabused. The church now taking the place of the world made it to be worldliness sanctioned in principle. So he says in his Life of Constantine (iii. 15), "It looked like the very image of the kingdom of Christ, and was altogether more like a dream than a reality." Yes, this at least is true. It was the dream of that day and since; it had no reality for the mind of Christ.

Yet the Lord owns whatever is good. "And thou holdest fast my name, and didst not deny my faith." It is notable, and was no small mercy, that, after the great persecutions, when Christendom and even Christians had been seduced into accepting the patronage of the world, there remained faithfulness in refusing all efforts to deny the deity of Christ. Under the same Constantine, who cast 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 Nicaea, and the faith of the Trinity was publicly established. Christians needed no such

bulwark, but Christendom did. Thus the creed commonly called Nicene,4 which had for its object the assertion of Christ's consubstantial deity, was then published. Is it not fair to believe that this state of things is referred to here? "Even in those days wherein [was] Antipas my faithful witness, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." What a solemn conjunction, that there should be close proximity to Satan's throne without, yet withal the mercy of God still maintaining the fundamental faith of Christ's own personal glory!

"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there [men] holding 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 proud and perhaps profitable profession. The framers of this were such as held the doctrine of Balaam. Simultaneously with this of course 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 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." No one doubts that all this is figuratively expressed; but the drift is plain enough where the conscience is not blunted. If the same evils exist, and that which would keep the church as a chaste virgin espoused to Christ is gone, no wonder that these warnings are misunderstood. Worldliness had got in, as it still remains, and, alas! is palliated most by those who owe their professional status to its corrupt and corrupting influence. The unbelief which let in the mischief keeps it in, decrying the true application of the two edged sword now as then. 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. But none the less did they fatally compromise Christ by alliance with the world, followed by practical return to the circle, out of which grace had taken the saints in order to union with Christ in glory.

"So hast thou also [men] holding the doctrine of Nicolaitans in like manner." To the angel of the church in Ephesus the Lord had denounced "the deeds of the Nicolaitans"; but now the iniquity in question (antinomianism, we conceive) had become a. doctrine; so that it seems compared with the iniquitous doctrine of the Balaamites. "Repent therefore; 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 now appears. Alas! the state of those that bore His own name was such that He was obliged to deal thus sternly with them. Enemies were within. But His coming here as to the Ephesian angel does not mean His personal presence, but His judicial visitation while unseen.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches: to him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the hidden manna." When the church was snared by the bait of public glory, the encouragement to faith was the hidden manna. Let there be at least individual, even if here unvalued, faithfulness to the Lord Jesus. Some saints might be true to His name, though it was not the time when they were led or forced

into the position of a remnant. There was not yet the fidelity that came out from the public body, corrupt as it was. Energy of faith failed for, this; but individual fidelity to Christ was not lacking; where this was, “to him,” says the Lord, “will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which none knoweth save the receiver.” To the true heart His approval is enough, nearer and dearer than any triumph before the universe.

Then follows the last of these four churches, but the first where the call to hear is changed. “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write.” One 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, he that hath his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet [are] 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 are like fine brass.” “I know thy works, and the love, and the faith, and the service, and thy patience, and thy last works [to be] more than the first.” There was here and there 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. One does not surely speak of superstition, either as to Mary or the church when each was made a sort of bona Dea, but of the fruit of looking to Christ however simply.

“But I have against thee, that thou sufferest the woman (perhaps ‘thy wife’) Jezebel.” This was a new kind of evil altogether. It is not clericalism now, nor persons holding

the doctrine of Nicolaitans or that of Balaam, but a formed state as the symbol of a woman regularly represents. Examine the use of woman symbolically, and this will be found true. The man is the agent who goes forward; the woman is the state of things (here most evil) produced. Hence Jezebel is the appropriate symbol now, as Balaam was just before. The activity was in the clergy, who brought in base compromise with the world, and sold the honour of Christ for silver and gold, for ease and dignity. The worst, Jezebel, came later. Such was the public state of things produced in the middle ages, and tolerated under the shelter of the Lord's name, the corruption of former things, and the beginning of new which should go on till the Lord come in person.

"She that 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 discipline beyond error. Is not this exactly what Romanism professes" Does it not then stand in the place of Jezebel? "And teachest and seducest my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols." All was the fruit of falling from grace long before; but far greater is the maturity now. "And I gave her space that she should repent; and she will not repent of her fornication. Behold, I cast her into a bed, and those that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of her works. And I will kill her children with death." Jezebel was a mother indeed: a holy mother, said the deceivers and deceived. What judged the Lord? what said those who preferred to die rather than commit adultery with her? This flagrant church-world corruption

became now a settled institution. It was no mere transient cloud of error, but a body in the highest worldly position, a queen who also pretended to the highest spiritual power as a prophetess so-called, now permanently settled in Christendom, giving birth to a distinct progeny of profane lawlessness — “her children.” Yet remark the distinction drawn between “my servants,” however misled, and Jezebel’s children. The Lord does not confound the pious who groaned and suffered and the proud that were exalted and persecuted. But sit a queen as she may, the Lord knows how to deal with her and her lovers, and will not spare. “And all the churches shall know that I am he that searcheth reins and hearts: and I will give to you, each one, according to your works.”

“But to you I say, the rest (or, remnant) in Thyatira.” The new fact is here plain. For thus we must read the text and render it, leaving out “and unto.” The common text which gives rise to the current versions spoils the sense. It is to “the rest,” or the remnant, in Thyatira, “as many as have not this doctrine,” that the Lord thus turns. 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. There and then they are a witnessing body more or less in spirit, apart from that which set up in grievous pretension but in profoundly wicked communion with Jezebel; so the Lord judged and stigmatised what man called “our mother, the holy catholic church.” To this remnant He says, “As many as have not known this doctrine, which knew not the depths of Satan, as they say, I cast upon you none other burden but that which ye have 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. Can one reasonably doubt that those commonly called the Waldenses and Albigenses, and others perhaps of similar character, are in view here? They were simple and ardent, but with no considerable amount of knowledge, if measured by a fuller and richer testimony which the Lord afterwards raised up. None can judge fairly of them by the abuse and misrepresentation of their enemies.

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 authority over the nations.” This wicked Jezebel not only persecuted the true saints of God, but sought universal supremacy — a world-wide dominion over soul and body and all things. The Lord bids them in effect to have nothing to do with her, and He will give the true authority when He takes it Himself. Let them abide in the place of patience, even though tribulation arise, as there must be if any are content to endure for Christ’s sake now. “And he shall rule them with iron rod, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers; as I also received of my Father. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.” The faithful will share Christ’s authority 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 means, not association with Christ in His reign over the earth, but yet more in that which is proper to Him above the world altogether. The heavenly hope of being with Christ before the day breaks is promised, as well as part in His world-kingdom. Only those who watch for Him shall see

the Morning Star. All the world must see the Sun of righteousness when He shines forth in His day.

Here the 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 here formed. The public state of the church now requires the change. The Lord thenceforth puts the promise first, and this because it is vain to expect the church as a whole to receive it. The address is to the overcomer, who is therefore put before the call to hear. In the three previous churches, as all may notice, the call to hear is first, because the Lord is still dealing with the general conscience of the church. This is given up now. A remnant only overcome, and the promise is for them. The Lord henceforth takes notice of these in His call; as for others, it is all over with their fidelity.

Accordingly, if Thyatira were not made the beginning, as perhaps in strictness might have been best, the division of the next chapter (3) seems not to be unhappy at this point. For there is a marked turning-point with the last three churches. The ground of such a thought lies in the fact that the introduction to Sardis indicates the Lord beginning a new state of things. The ancient ecclesiastical or catholic phase of the church terminates with Thyatira: nevertheless Thyatira has also the peculiar trait that, though the close of the public state of the church, it is the beginning of those conditions which go on till the Lord’s coming. It is therefore transitional. Thyatira, it is hard to doubt, contains within it the mystic representative of Romanism. This can scarce be denied to Jezebel; whilst “the remnant” represents those who, without being Protestants, form a witnessing company apart from Popery before the Reformation. The

beginning of the third chapter introduces formally what may be called the Protestant phase of things, after the film stand for God's word.

Thus we have had the general condition of declension; next the early persecution from the heathen; then the power of the world patronising the church; finally, besides the remnant which in simplicity resisted the evil, we have Romanism, which alone, by the mention of Christ's personal coming, is supposed to go on to the end. The churches before do not continue. But Thyatira first represents that which abides. This applies also to the churches which follow.

Revelation 3

"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, but with a marked difference. 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 rather than in that precise order. Hence it is not said here that He held in His right hand the seven stars and walked in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: this was ecclesiastical strictly. But here He "has" the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. He changes not, but does not describe Himself as before. Yet all power, all governing energy, is in His hands, and the seven stars, that is to say, all the instrumental lights by which He acts on souls here below. Let them not look to the world — to the powers that be. "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

Such was Protestantism after the impulse of the Reformation passed. How sad but true! The decline was sure if slow. They did lean on the world; and what can the issue of this be for those who are not of the world, as Christ is not?

“Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die: for I have not found thy works completed before my God” Hence what judges the actual state is this, that they have the testimony of God’s word much more fully shall those who had sunk into the mere ecclesiastical formalism of the middle ages. There the word of God had been overlaid and kept away, because the priests and the gospel can never go together in unison. 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. One speaks not of individual clergymen, but of clericalism wherever found, Catholic or denominational, nationalist or dissenting. Earthly priests are its extreme expression.

But the Protestant principle is a different one. People may not be true to their principles, and often are not. Has not every one, say they, the right of private judgment? God’s rights were thus easily forgotten. Yet one of the grandest points fought for at the Reformation, and gained for Protestantism, whatever might be its defects, was this; — that man has fairly, freely, and openly the Bible. God’s word is there to deal with human conscience. Men often speak of justification by faith; but even Luther himself hardly got thoroughly clear as to the truth of it. If, on the one hand, Romanists are miserably deluded, Protestants, on the other, do not

understand the righteousness of God 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. Had Luther settled peace in his soul, as the state in which he walked, We have many of us heard what conflicts he had, not merely at the beginning of his career, but to the end. Nor do we mean conflicts about the church or its leaders, 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. These amply prove how far he was from the calm enjoyment of the holy deliverance of the gospel; but it is an error to impute them to any other cause than a lack of clear knowledge of grace. In such a state all sorts of things may trouble the man, however able or honoured he may be, who cannot without a question rest on the Lord. Assuredly 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 behind in the understanding both of the church and of the gospel.

In 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 in result; because, while the Bible was freely read, scarce any one thought of forming all upon it or of being regulated by it only. Nothing is more common among Protestants than to admit a thing to be certain and true because it is in the word of God, without any serious intention or thought of acting upon it. Is not this a humbling fact? Romanists are in general too ignorant to know what is or is not in

the Bible; for except the common-places of controversy with Protestants, they know little of its contents. Tell them that this or that, however momentous, is found there, and they look amazed. They rarely know it as a whole, having never read it save (?) under the eye of the directing priest, their confessor. The Protestant can read the Bible at liberty, which is a real and precious boon; but for this very reason the Protestant incurs no light responsibility.

“I have not found thy works completed before my God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heardest, and keep [it], and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come [on thee] as a thief.” It is a sweeping intimation of the 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 fall back on the world to deliver themselves from the power of the pope or the ecclesiastic. 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. The church in danger because the tithes are assailed! Why, such wealth is real poverty, and the evident shame of an early lapse into Judaism. What would the apostles have thought of a claim so earthly and opposed to the true and heavenly separateness of Christ’s body!

Let none infer that in saying, this one feels little for saints. Nor is it doubted that it is a great Sin to wipe off all public recognition of God in the world. But leaning on the world has let in the world; and if the godly complain of accrediting unbelievers as the faithful, their leaders are quick to stifle conscience with the cry, We must not judge! But this is not a true judgment of charity which

spares no pains to own every saint and to warn that we may win to God sinners. The false start has led to far worse than in earlier days. Impossible to believe that the unblushing worldliness one sees in the modern combination of Dissenters with Papists and sceptics springs from just, holy, or unselfish motives. It is rather to be imputed to the latitudinarian spirit of infidelity, which admits also of a buckling to superstition. Doubtless the infidels hope to gain the day, as the superstitious are no less confident in their hopes. The truth is that the devil will have the upper hand to the destruction of them both, and then find that the Lord will appear in His day for personal judgment of all adversaries, and the rebuke of all unbelief.

The angel of the church in Sardis is warned that if he should not watch, the Lord will come on him unexpectedly as a thief. It is not at all so that His coming is spoken of for His own. These wait for Him in bright hope, without fear for themselves of His thief-like surprise. How can it be such for those who in faith and love look and long for Him? His coming is their joy; and they watch more than watchman for the dawn. The figure of the thief is therefore employed for the sleeping world or worldly-minded souls. Compare 1 Thessalonians 5 with 1 Thessalonians 4; also Matthew 24:43 and Revelation 16:15. If people walk with the worldly in divine things, it is not only that the unrenewed are in danger of being deceived, but that believers lose the joy of their own relationship. The world is attracted by the good words and fair speeches which deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. So solemnly does this language suppose that the assembly at Sardis had passed out of the practical attitude of

waiting for the Lord who waits for them. It is an easy transition to pass into great dread of Him as a judge. They had slipped into the world, and share its fears and anxieties. They little knew or had lost the sense of Christ's peace left with them. Such souls lack the joy of His coming for them to receive to Himself those whom He loves. The unwelcome visitation of a thief would be incongruous if they were enjoying the blessed hope according to His own word, that He comes quickly.

"Thou hast a few names in Sardis which defiled not their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, because they are worthy." This is said without the enfeebling "even" of the common text, and they are cheered before the promise repeats it. Where the scriptures are read freely, we may look for some real good even in untoward associations. This has been always the case. Precious souls are there, and our happy service is to help them, if we can, to a better knowledge of His grace, — not, of course, to make light of their worldly ways, yet in love to feel for them as the Lord fully does. "He that overcometh, he5 shall be clothed in white garments; 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

In the next place stands a great contrast. "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 one shall shut; and shutteth, and no one shall open." Every word of Christ's presentation of Himself differs from that given in Rev. 1. This marks generally the change in the chapter, and especially the part before us. The address to Sardis also,

although allusive to that of Ephesus, is nevertheless clearly meant to stand distinguished from it. It is a recommencement, and so far analogous with that to Ephesus; but the manner in which the Lord is presented is not the same. His having the seven Spirits of God is distinct from the first and normal picture. But where is anything here similar to the description of the Lord Jesus given before? It is a new state of things; and in the details of Philadelphia there is far more evidence of it.

The descriptions of the second chapter generally repeat what was found in the vision John had at first seen. The one exception is in Thyatira, where He is described as the Son of God; and this marks the fact of a transition, the beginning of a changed condition. It is a church state in responsibility though not in true power, being an ecclesiastical body which presents horrors to the Lord's eyes, but not without a remnant dear to Him. This at the same time goes down to the end, and brings in distinctly the Lord's coming. For, be it observed, the personal coming of the Lord is not introduced in any of the first three; from Thyatira it is, because the condition sketched out goes on till then. It was not so with Ephesus, with Smyrna, or with Pergamum: the only semblance of it is in threats of present visitation. To Thyatira, or at least the remnant there, it is given personally, and to Sardis judicially. But Philadelphia has it in all grace, as a bright and proximate hope.

Indeed to the angel of the church in Philadelphia is prominently brought out the Lord in His moral glory, what He is, not merely what He has. It is now Christ Himself, and this as One that faith discovers in the beauty of holiness, not dependent on the vision of glory seen before, but Christ as He genuinely is in Himself,

“he that is holy, he that is true.” But He is also seen according to the largeness of His glory. Absorbed with Him and resting in His love, the heart delights in all that is His. Faith sees that the Holy and the True is the same that has the key of David. Old Testament prophecy, or dispensational truth, can be freely introduced now. It is “he that openeth and no one shall shut; and shutteth, and no one shall open.” His control is guaranteed. “I know thy works: behold I have set before thee an opened door, and none can shut it: for thou hast little strength.” There is perfect liberty now, liberty for worship and service, for every one that would serve the Lord. They are supposed not to be marked by such mighty doings as were before. If Sardis did great exploits, Philadelphia knew nothing of the sort. Are we content to be littler to be of no esteem in the world? never to set up for anything that men wonder at or admire?

Notoriety is not true of Philadelphia, which is rather formed by faith of a rejected Christ. We know of what small account He was to the world; so it is with the saints in Philadelphia. Has this fellowship with Him no price in His eyes? “Thou hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name” Jesus was marked by valuing His Father’s word and loving His Father’s name, the only One that could also 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 the Philadelphian saints are distinguished by the same living in the dependence of faith. In their measure each could say with the apostle, “For me to live is Christ.” To some it might appear a small thing not to deny Christ’s name; but is anything more precious to the Lord? Once it was a

question of not denying His faith, as was found in Pergamum; but here it is Himself as revealed. What He is is the main point. Orthodoxy, if ever so real, does not suffice, but His person, though absent on high, and the glory due to Him in our souls.

“Behold, I make [or, give] of the synagogue of Satan, that say they are Jews, and they are not, but lie.” Is not this the revival of that dreadful scourge that had afflicted the early church (as in 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 sank into the minds of men, a considerable portion being rejected by Protestantism; but now, when God brings out this fresh witnessing, there rises a counter-testimony? Satan revives the old Judaising spirit, at the very time that God reasserts the true principle of Christian brotherhood, and, above all, makes Christ Himself to be all to His own. Here we have for our instruction the fact, that the synagogue of Satan, 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 has this character; and the system is in no way confined to this country but holds equally abroad, as in Germany, America, and elsewhere. In fact it is a fair show in the flesh 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 any real measure of heavenly light. In order to defend themselves on a religious footing, men fall back on a system of ordinances and of the law. This seems meant by the synagogue of Satan here. They claim

sacerdotalism and practise ritualism, both irreconcilable with Christianity.

But the Lord will compel the recognition of His own testimony and witnesses. We do not say when, where, or how; but as surely as He lives will the Lord vindicate the truth He has given as it were back again for His name. Only let us bear in mind that the favour and power vanish when the witnesses lose sight of Christ and preach themselves. May we have grace to merge ourselves truly in Him! “Behold, I will cause them to come and do homage before thy feet, and to know that I loved thee.”

Nor is this all. As we know, there is a perilous time awaiting the world, the hour not exactly of tribulation but “of temptation.” This hour of trial, it seems, falls within the Apocalyptic future, or “the things which are about to be after these things.” It is not merely the time of horrors when Satan in a rage is expelled from on high, and when the Beast, energised by him, rises to his full height of persecuting power, but the previous period of trouble and seduction. “The hour of temptation” is a term larger than the “great tribulation” of Revelation 7, and still more so 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 didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of the trial (or, temptation) which is about to come on all the habitable world, to try them that dwell on the earth”? In vain men try to escape. The hour of temptation must come on all the inhabited world. Perhaps some remember when people used to flee to Canada, in order to escape “the great tribulation,” which they expected to fall on the old

empire of the Beast revived. But the scheme was a mistake, their flight foolish. The hour of temptation will catch men, no matter where they may hide; for it is about to come on the whole habitable world, “to try them that dwell on the earth.” How blessed to be here a sojourner, whose living associations are with Christ in heaven!

Who then can escape? Those who at Christ’s call are to be caught up to heaven. They will not be in that hour. It is not merely that they will not be in the mace but they will he kept “out of the hour,” of the coming temptation. What a full and bright exemption! Such is the strength of the promise and its blessedness, that the Lord promises His own to be kept even out of its time. The simple and sure way to keep any from the hour is to take them altogether out of the scene. The Irvingites used to talk about the Lord having a little Zoar. How poor and earthly its comparison! It is not, however, a question of geography, or of a distant and secret place of shelter, but of complete removal from the period filled by the temptation coming on all the habitable world. This is worthily secured by translating them to heaven before the time of the world-trial arrives; and this the promise before us imports. The godly remnant of Jews, on the other hand, having to do with a special and fiery but circumscribed tribulation in Jerusalem, 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. How readily errors for the church tale a Jewish shape!

“6I come quickly!” There is not a word about His coming as a thief now, but with joy. The Lord will have revived the true hope of His return; there are those who now

wait thus for Christ, and this epistle seems emphatically to apply to such. “I come quickly!” In principle it is true for all that are really faithful. Happy they for whom Christ is all! What association with Himself in glory He promises! Lot it be ours now in faith and patience, yea keeping the word of Christ’s patience. “Hold fast what thou hast, that no one take thy crown.” It is a great grace never to go back from known truth; and none can be so exposed as those who have received much, and of a high order. Watch and pray. “He that overcometh, him 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, the new Jerusalem, that cometh down out of the heaven from my God, and my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.” He will be as much marked by power in the day of glory, as by contentedly dependent weakness in God’s present ways of grace. He suffers with Christ and waits for Him, if not with Him. To be a pillar in the temple of My God is as truly a figure for the day of glory as the synagogue of Satan is a figure now. For literally there is no temple in the new Jerusalem. It is the one of little strength now made manifestly strong in that day and in God’s blessed presence. And thus it is with each promise associating us with Christ in all the scenes of bliss.

There remains the last epistle to the angel of the church in Laodicea; and on this but a few words may suffice. “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.” The church in its responsibility on earth was to be set aside, most of all at the last, for being an unfaithful witness. The Laodicean

picture is, of course, most distinct, but seems to be largely the result of dislike and contempt for the testimony that the Lord had previously raised up. If people despise the grace and truth valued by those who truly wait for the Lord, they are in danger of falling into the awful condition here set forth. Certainly here Christ is no longer the loved and satisfying object of the heart; nor is there any such sense of His person as leads into waiting for Him; still less can there be glorying in weakness that the power of Christ may rest on one. There is the desire to be great, to be esteemed of men, "rich, and increased in goods, and in need of nothing." We find here a state therefore, that leaves ample room for man's thoughts and ways.

Hence the Lord introduces Himself to them as the Amen; all security lies in the Christ of God. He only is "the faithful and true witness." This is exactly what the church ought to have been but was not; and therefore He has to take that place Himself. It was so before when He was here below in grace; now He must resume it in judicial power rend glory, than which one can hardly conceive a greater rebuke for the condition of those whose obligation was to be faithful and true witnesses Besides He is "the beginning of the creation of God." This sets aside the first man altogether, and most justly, for Laodicea is the glorification of man and of his resources in the church. He begins that new work, which God delights in as according to His nature.

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would that thou wert cold or hot. Thus, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spue thee out of my mouth." Being neutral in principle and practice, they were half-hearted toward Christ. Nor is

any place more likely to generate neutrality than an outwardly true position, if self-judgment be not maintained with godly sincerity. The more one stands in the forefront of the battle, with the responsible testimony of God, the more His grace and truth are in letter brought out before others, if there be not also walk according to the light, sooner or later comes a lapse back into neutrality, if not active enmity. For heart and conscience are not animated and governed by the power of God's Spirit through living faith in Christ. Indifference to all that is good must follow; and the only kind of zeal, if zeal can so exist, will be for what is of the first man, worldly, and bad.

This is Laodiceanism. So repulsive does the Master declare it to be, that one need not wonder that most are unwilling for it to be their lot, or that it can be, as it is, the last recorded phase before the church is traced no more on earth. People vainly dream of progress, and flatter themselves. "Thus because thou art neither cold nor hot, I am about to spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and am grown rich, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and the miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold purified by fire." They wanted everything that was characteristic of Christianity: "gold" or divine righteousness in Christ, "that thou mayest be rich"; "and white garments," or the righteousnesses of saints, "that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness may not be manifested; and eyesalve to anoint shine eyes, that thou mayest see." They had lost the perception of what God values. All was dark as to truth, and uncertain as to moral judgment. Holy separateness and savour were

gone. “As many as I dearly love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking: if any one 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 His pitiful way to meet their every want “He that overcometh, I will give him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.”

The utmost promised in the word that closes the epistle goes not beyond reigning with Him. It is not anything special. For every one that has part in the first resurrection reigns with Christ, as even shall the Jewish sufferers under earlier enemies, or later under the Beast. It is a mistake therefore to suppose that it is a singular distinction. For all amounts to this, that the Lord will hold, after all, to His own truth in spite of unfaithfulness. There may be individual reality, even where the surroundings are miserably untoward. But all that are born of God and are Christ’s share the kingdom.

Such is 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 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 only the historical notice of the Asiatic churches then primarily addressed. That John wrote to these seven churches is indisputable; but that no more was meant ought not to be assumed. “The things that are” is an unusual and suggestive expression. The septenary number in itself is significant, and its division into three and four. Again,

the order of their contents, as well as their nature severally, points to a continuative inference. There are depicted successive phases of strikingly varied ecclesiastical states, as objects of the Lord's judgment from the threat on the first till the spuing out of the last. Further it is plain, if certain phases do not abide, that at a given point in their course the language implies that the latter ones continue up to Christ's coming. From Thyatira inclusively those also that follow, as they successively arise, go on together till then.

Thus one gathers from the internal evidence that the three earlier churches are severed in character from the rest; for though all are alike typical and successive from the apostle's day, only the last four are used as fore-shadows of the successive states to continue up to the Lord's advent. The promises to the overcomers in Thyatira, the threat to the worldly-minded in Sardis, the comforting assurance to those that keep the word of Christ's patience in Philadelphia, and the closing sentence to the angel of the church in Laodicea are clear enough to indicate far more than any past application. "The things that are" in other words are not yet closed; they have not become the things that were Who is bold enough to suppose that the predicted hour of universal temptation is past, or that faithful souls have been somehow kept out of it? Will it be said that the last stage is reached for the church on earth? that Christ has already and definitely spued its final representative out of His mouth? If it be so, ought not every saint on earth to sit in sackcloth and ashes deploring the irreparable ruin? Not a hint is given of restoration when this pass is reached. The next chapter discloses what follows. It is worthy of all heed on our

part, if indeed we believe the crisis in Laodicea as well as the promise to him that overcomes in Philadelphia. There was enough in the then existing state of Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea to call forth the Lord's words; but who believes that each of the epistles to them left no room for a much more exhaustive fulfilment?

From this point we have the Spirit of God leading the prophet into the understanding of (not the church state, but) that which must follow when churches are no longer to exist. Thus it becomes a question of dealing with the world, not without testimonies from God in the midst of gradually swelling troubles; but His witnesses henceforward are of Jewish or Gentile character, never thenceforth of the church on earth. Believers we do see, of course, some of the chosen people, others of the nations; but we hear of no real church condition after the second and third chapters. The Jewish saints are expressly distinct from the Gentile: a state quite incompatible with the church, seeing that it is the essence of its nature that such distinctions within are wholly abolished. For Christ has broken down the middle wall of enclosure, having annulled the enmity in His flesh, that He might form the two in Himself into one new man, making peace, and might reconcile both in one body to God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby. Can there be a more striking proof of the way in which the patent facts of the word of God are habitually passed over than that a change so immense has been so constantly overlooked?

Revelation 4:1.

When John sent the epistles to the seven Asiatic churches, what, one may well ask, was there to fulfil the introductory chaps. 4 and 5? Those who look at the seven churches as only past have nothing to say that explains it: all is vague and jejune. Historical authorities are equally at fault. It is the grand and impressive opening of “the things which must take place after these,” that is, “after the things which are” (the sevenfold course of things ecclesiastical). The new things cannot begin till the existing things, however protracted, come to an end. The future is in contrast with the present state of things; but the world-kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ is not even announced till long after in Revelation 11:15, and even then much has to be done before it is established here below as in Revelation 20:4.

Chapters 4 and 5 therefore introduce an interval of the deepest interest, and of all importance to discriminate. From Revelation 6 preparatory dealings of God with men generally (whether Israel or the nations), and with remnants out of both, follow the existing church period, and fill the transition that intervenes before the kingdom comes for the earth in power and glory. Hence we shall find conspicuous among other dates the well-known prophetic term of Daniel under its three forms of a time, times, and a half, of forty-two months, and of twelve hundred and sixty days. But what came to pass, after the letters were despatched to the seven churches in Asia, which accounts for this glorious preliminary vision in heaven which the prophet was caught up to behold? Does it not suppose the total passing away of that church state, which we all believe still to subsist? Does

it not reveal, “after these things,” the action of God’s throne by judgments on the world, to put the Lord Jesus in possession of His long-promised inheritance of all things?

The church condition indeed 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 glory 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. We have seen this given with the most striking wisdom, so as to suit at the time of John, yet also as long as Christianity goes on, always applying 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. The churches delineated in these seven epistles are “the things that are,” a phrase which naturally lends itself to continuance. It is not prophecy; yet the letters of Christ afford, as time passes, divine light on the succeeding states Christendom assumes. Nevertheless the coming of the Lord remains thus in God’s wisdom the ever-present and constant hope of the Christian. So indeed the Lord took care to guard against misuse of His parabolic instruction.

Thus the change is immense as a whole, and the revealed details only the more disclose its true nature. There is no vision henceforth of the Son of Man in the midst of churches. No more are churches recognised when “the things which are about to take place after these” begin. Revelation 22:16 is no exception; for this

applies only in John’s day, or at most as long as the existing condition abides. It is only in the conclusory appeals of the book, and has nothing to do with the predicted things to succeed the present. Chapter 4 lets us see a quite new sight in heaven after the existing things terminate on earth.

“After these things I saw, and, behold, a door opened in the heaven, and the first voice which I heard as of a trumpet speaking with me, saying, Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must take place after these things. Immediately I became in Spirit; and, behold, a throne was set in the heaven, and upon the throne one sitting, and the sitter [was] in appearance like a stone jasper and sardius; and a rainbow round the throne in appearance like an emerald. And round the throne [were] twenty-four thrones, and upon the thrones [I saw] twenty-four elders sitting, clothed with white garments, and upon their heads golden crowns. And out of the throne proceed lightnings and voices and thunders; and seven torches of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne as a sea of glass like crystal. And in the midst of the throne and around the throne [were] four living creatures full of eyes before and behind; and the first living creature like a lion, and the second living creature like a young ox, and the third living creature having the face as of a man, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, having each one of them respectively six wings, are full of eyes round and within; and they have no intermission day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord, the Almighty God, that was and that is, and that is to come. And when the living creatures shall give glory and honour and thanksgiving

to him that sitteth upon the throne, that liveth unto the ages of the ages, the twenty-four elders shall fall before him that sitteth upon the throne, and shall do homage to him that liveth unto the ages of the ages, and shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honour and the power; because thou didst create all things, and for thy will they were, and were created."

At the epoch where the chapter first applies, the day of the Lord is not come; but a vast change previous to it has taken place, and brought strange sights before the Seer. The scene is shifted from earth to heaven. It is no longer a question of the churches: they are over, and disappear. "After these things" the prophet saw; "and, behold, a door opened in the heaven," and the first voice which he heard trumpet-like says, "Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must take place after these things" — a phrase which nowhere in the N.T. admits of the vague sense of "hereafter," least of all in this part of the Revelation, where it is in manifest contrast with "the things which are." A brief interval there may be, followed by the things which are about to take place, and must, "after these things" or the existing church status.

For such a sight immediately John became in Spirit; and, behold, a throne was set in the heaven, and upon the throne One sitting in appearance like stone of jasper and sardius. The same stones figure, especially the first, in the glories of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21), where we are helped by its crystallising character. This has induced some to imagine the diamond against all usage of the word. There is no room for such a fancy; for the aim is to show that the jasper here, like the gold — not only pure,

but “like pure glass” — is above all nature in its symbolical application. If jasper be naturally semi-opaque, gold is so wholly. Here they are emphatically translucent. As the sardius is fiery red, jasper was not to oppose but strengthen the judicial appearance of His glory who sat the central object of the scene, not on the propitiatory or mercy-seat but upon the throne. He is about to judge the world in the way of providential chastisements with increasing severity, before He sends the Firstborn Heir of all things to bring in the kingdom.

God would judge; but a rainbow round the throne, in appearance like an emerald, indicated that though about to judge unsparingly, He remembered His covenant, not with Israel yet, still less His grace to the saints, but to creation on which many blows must soon fall. For as the issue creation was about to be delivered from the thraldom under which it-as yet groans, and shall be set free from corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. The kingdom of Christ will have it in full joy and peace, before the eternal day when all things are made new in the deepest sense.

Another notable object meets his eye: round the throne are twenty-four thrones, and upon the thrones twenty-four elders7 sitting, arrayed in white garments, and upon their heads crowns of gold. Isaiah saw no such company in Isa. 6; nor did Ezekiel in his opening chapter: Ezek. 1 or at any other time; nor does Stephen hint it in Acts 7; nor Paul in 2 Corinthians 12. Daniel indeed saw thrones set up (not “cast down”); but they were empty. John here and now saw them filled with four-and-twenty elders, the chiefs of the twenty-four courses of priesthood. They exercised priestly functions in Rev. 5:8. But they are a royal priesthood also; they

wear crowns of gold and sit on thrones; and their garb is in accord. Can there be a doubt that they are the glorified saints?

Scripture, be it observed, never speaks thus of disembodied souls any more than of angels. The symbolic heads of the heavenly and royal priesthood are complete. From Revelation 4 to 19, when the kingdom comes in power and the enemies are made Christ's footstool, the number stands unchanged. From first to last are twenty-four elders: there is no addition; whereas, if the souls of saints separate from the body were meant, how many must have, from the day John saw them, been adding continually? The elders therefore represent not the unclothed who depart to be with Christ, but the full complement of those whose mortal was swallowed up by life, the saints of both O. and N. Tests. changed at Christ's coming and caught up to be with Him in the Father's house. His coming between Revelation 3 and 4 falls in precisely with the existing facts and the vision of what follows. What else accounts for the disappearance of churches? What else explains the sight of the symbolic representatives in full of the saints destined to heavenly glory, who shall accompany Christ when He comes with His holy myriads to execute judgment against all the ungodly? (See Rev. 19:14.)

Some no doubt wonder that there is no vision of the translation of the saints to heaven, save perhaps mystically in Revelation 12, as we shall see. John 14 had clearly spoken of it; 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 had revealed the different characters of the Lord's coming and of His day; and 2 Thessalonians 2 had shown their true correlation, in correction of false teachers who sought to alarm by the rumour that the day was come,

and in recall of the saints to the hope of His coming and gathering to Him above before that day of terror and judgment for the earth. Hence the sight of the twenty-four elders enthroned and crowned above must convey the clearest proof that Christ had come and taken His own to heaven ere this vision could be given.

Another consideration of no small force in confirming this remark is, that the judicial character of the Revelation excludes that wondrous act, which is one of sovereign grace, and entirely apart from vision of judgments, with parenthetic disclosures here and there of mercy in the midst of judgment. Here we find it not described but presupposed in the plainest way, and so strongly confirmed that any other hypothesis is fairly untenable.

It is not here the Father's throne, nor the throne of the God of grace. Out of it proceed lightnings and voices and thunders. This is in no way its expression while God is occupied with the gospel of His grace, or now making known to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies through the church His all-various wisdom according to an eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord. It precisely suits the transition after the saints are caught up, and the world comes under God's strokes, before the Lord shall be revealed from heaven with angels of His power in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know not God, and on those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus, on Gentiles and on Jews, no church being mentioned on earth (compare 1 Cor. 10:32).

Again the symbol of the Spirit's action agrees with the change. It is not parted tongues as of fire sitting upon

each one, in testimony to all mankind of a Saviour Lord and His work of redemption, but seven torches of fire burning before the throne, the fulness of consuming light and judgment on evil. Still less was it the Spirit descending as a dove and coming on the Lord Jesus here below. Each appearance was perfectly appropriate. So it is here for the judicial dealings of God about to take place in an apostate world.

“We have an altar,” says Hebrews 13:10 to the Christian Jews, “whereof they have no right to eat that serve the tabernacle.” But no altar is in this scene. It was no more needed by those who kind it fully, when the Jews lost it save in form: the saints were in heaven. It is made all the more striking, because the prophet did see before the throne as it were a glass sea like crystal (which glass at that time was far from like). Some have tried hard to divert this emblem from the molten sea for the priests to wash in, but in vain. For it is an allusive contrast of marked significance. Those taken to heaven and glorified wanted “the washing of water by the word” no more. It is a sea, not of water, but of glass (not the material of the vessel, but its contents). This declares that it is not purifying but fixed purity, which never could be true till the saints were all changed at Christ’s coming, as the symbol attests.

Next is seen a more difficult sign to read aright. “And in the midst of the throne and around the throne four living creatures full of eyes before and behind.” The chief creatures of earth and air (not of the sea), which were saved in Noah’s ark, furnished the forms; the lion, the young ox, the man, and the eagle. They were emblems of power, firmness, intelligence, and rapidity, though indeed Each one had six wings, that is, only short of

perfection in movement. They were the cherubim, but distinguished strikingly from the manifestations to Ezekiel, and incorporating also the seraphic qualities seen by Isaiah. They were full of eyes, not only before and bellied but round and within; their perception was complete and intrinsic; and they have no cessation day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord, the Almighty God, that was and that is and that is to come. Thus do they celebrate the Holy One, and in His O.T. names of the Lord, the Almighty God, and Jehovah; for here it is so in all strictness, rather than as we read in Rev. 1:4 and 8. "Our" God and Father is wholly absent; as even in chap. 1 the utmost approach was to Christ's God and Father. For the three preliminary chapters (however full of divine profit, yet occupied with the judgment of the churches) are but the avenue, through the things seen and the things that are, to what was about to take place after these, the proper and strict prophecy of the book.

It is to be remarked that there is dead silence as to angels in our chapter, whereas they distinctly appear in Rev. 5:2, 11, 12. This suggests what solves the difficulty often and largely felt. For the living creatures in themselves present the attributes of providential power in the execution of judgment; but the comparison of the chapters points to change in its administration from the angels who are now the agents to the redeemed who are to be. Hence in Rev. 4 the angels are merged as it were in the living creatures; in Rev. 5 they are distinguished in view of Christ's co-heirs, to whom and not to angels God will subject the inhabited earth to come (Heb. 2). The rendering of "beasts" in this case is still more unhappy than the belittling of "thrones" into "seats." It

is quite a different word in Rev. 6:8 literally, and elsewhere symbolically.

And beautiful it is to see that, as often observed, the elders sat unmoved on their thrones before the judicial display of God's glory, and the signs of His displeasure in the lightnings and voices and thunders which went forth from His throne, with all other solemn tokens of coming judgment. But when the living creatures give glory and honour and thanksgiving to Him that sits on the throne, that lives for ever and ever, the elders fall and pay homage, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honour and the power; because thou didst create all the things, and for (or, on account of) thy will they were and were created. It was not only worship, but in full spiritual intelligence. Those that are a new creation in Christ enter into God's rights as Creator; which earth's inhabitants, and especially apostate Christians, are about to dispute and deny. Their zeal is in due season and character. For God's will the whole was in being, as it was also created.

1 It is not without interest to note the singular, which puts together as a mass the future "after these things" "The things which are" we find in the plural, each of them being distinctive in a way not so applicable to the judgments on the world in the Seals, Trumpets, and Vials, which series differ not so much in kind as in growing severity, which is morally just.

2 Erasmus edited

τάχει from his faulty MS.

ταχεῖ, but the Complutensian editors, Colinaeus, and others read ταχύ, which is as right in ver. 16, as it is

here inappropriate. For there is no “quickly” in the Lord’s coming to remove the lamp, though He does come quickly to fight with the corruption of the church.

3 In the lately discovered work (at first wrongly imputed to Origen) of Hippolytus on Heresies, vii. 36, their leader is said to have taught indifference of actions and of meats. But the Bishop of Portus Romanus, like others, may draw only from what scripture implies.

4 Yet that very creed testifies to the mischief already wrought in making the church a ground of faith, instead of scripture only. For the Nicene Creed asserts, not believing in the church, but believing the church — a very different thing. Faith believes God. The church is not infallible, as it ought to be if to be believed. How true it is that “evil communications corrupt good manners”! People might own the divinity of Christ, yet set up the church in a false position.

5 The

οὕτως (“thus”) of some very ancient MSS. and versions has needlessly perplexed critics and expositors. No error is more common than the confusion of o and w in the old copies, as here for οὗτος (“he”). It is emphasised for good reason.

6 “Behold” is not warranted by the best authorities.

7 “Elders” seems a descriptive term eminently in keeping with the heavenly redeemed. For it is appropriated already in Hebrews 11 to the O.T. saints, who though they obtained witness through faith, did not receive the promise, God having foreseen, or provided, some better thing for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Here they are seen together made

perfect; and assuredly, if the term is one of dignity, due to those who eschewed the wisdom of the age for the wisdom that comes from above, those who now have the mind of Christ by the Spirit may well be so called too. They are both elders in the sense of firstfruits of Christ before the great harvest that is to follow in a day to come.

Revelation 5-8

Revelation 5

Here is shown for the first time the Lamb presented distinctly and definitely in the scene. It was not so even in Rev. 4, where we have seen the display of the judicial glory of God in His various earthly or dispensational characters, save His full millennial one, but not His special revelation now as our Father. In itself we know that Jehovah God embraces and is said of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Yet here the Holy Ghost is seen not in His unity of person and working, but in His variety of governmental activity as the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth; and the Lord Jesus is not yet discriminated as such. 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 each in the Godhead, the general or generic nature, not personal distinction.

But here in the opening verses a formal challenge is made which at once displays the glory, worth, and victory of the Lamb, the holy earth-rejected Sufferer, whose blood has bought for God those who were under sin, and indeed all creation. There is to be in consequence the full blessing of man and of the creature on God’s part; yea, saints not only delivered, but, even before the deliverance is displayed, led into full understanding of God’s mind and will. Christ is just as necessarily the wisdom of God as He is the power of God. Without Him no creature can apprehend His ways or purposes, 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 chap. iv., 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 plan and glory.

“And I saw on the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a great voice, Who [is] worthy to open the book, and to loose its seals? And no one in the heaven, or on the earth, or underneath the earth, was able to open the book or to look on it. And I wept much because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look on it. And one of the elders saith to me, Weep not: behold, the Lion that [is] of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome, to open the book and its seven seals.” What creature could open these Seals? None anywhere. But the strong angel proclaims, and the Lord Jesus comes forward to answer the proclamation. He takes up the challenge after a sufficient space to prove the impotence of all others. The comfort assured to John by the elder is thus justified; for the elders 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 book out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne. The Lamb is here described as the Root of David; at the close (22:16) He describes Himself as the Root and the Offspring of David. How great is His grace! Then they all, living creatures and elders together, fall down before the Lamb with a new song.

“And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing as slain, having seven horns and seven eyes,

which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took [it] out of the right hand of the sitter on the throne. And when he took the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall before the Lamb, having each a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy thou art to take the book, and to open its seals, because thou west slain and didst purchase to God with thy blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and madest them to our God a kingdom and priests; and they shall reign over the earth." The Lamb is marked by perfect power and wisdom, but it is in the Spirit on high as before on earth (cp. Acts 1:2). And His own sing of His shed blood.

It is striking that after this, as we are told, "And I saw and heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders: and their number was ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands, saying with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing." Here we have the angels, who are now distinctly named. How comes it that no angels appear in Rev. 4? And why have we them in Rev. 5? There is always the wisest reason in the ways of God of which scripture speaks, and we are encouraged by the Spirit to inquire humbly but trustfully. The inference it warrants 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 change of administration. Up to that point of time angels have held an 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 time we gather the title to a marked change for the world to come in those that are Christ's above.

The title of the glorified saints is thus asserted. We know for certain, as a matter of doctrine in Hebrews 2, that the inhabited world to come is to be put not under angels, but under Christ and those that are His in heavenly glory. Here 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, "Worthy art thou, because thou west slain and didst purchase." Thus we have them combined in a new fashion; and, as a consequence, the angels are now definitely distinguished. Supposing 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 Rev. 4, because the living creatures set forth the agencies of God's executory judgment. Whereas in Rev. 5, if there be a change in administration, and the angels that used to be the executors are no longer so recognised in view of the kingdom, but the power is to be in the hands of the glorified saints, it is simple enough that the angels fall back from the cherubim, being eclipsed by the heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. If previously angels were seen in the living creatures, they henceforward retire from this dignity to their own place, and therefore no longer fall under that symbol.

From this it follows that the four living creatures might be at one time angels, at another saints. The symbol sets forth, not so much the persons that are entrusted with these judgments, as the character of the attributes in action. Scripture, however, affords elements to solve the question, here by the marked absence of angels, who, as we know, are the beings 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 complete, the glorified saints are caught up, and the First-begotten is anew 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 being displayed on earth. If this be admitted, the change is accounted for in Rev. 5. The general fact is in Rev. 4; this administrative change in Rev. 5. Hence the cherubim and the elders unite to sing.

All the results are anticipated for every creature when once the note is struck (vers. 13, 14). “And every creature which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and which are on the sea and all things that [are] in them, heard I saying, To him that sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb, the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the might unto the ages of the ages. And the four living creatures said, Amen; and the elders fell down and did homage.”8 As a matter of fact, “the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19). But their presence glorified on high, before that revelation, was so momentous as to call forth by the Spirit the ascription to the ear of heaven from every creature above or below

before deliverance actually came. So the Lord said on earth, when the seventy reported the demons subject to them in His name, “I beheld Satan fallen from heaven.” All would follow duly the keynote then struck.

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. The Seals open to us God’s preparatory steps, but in this fixed order, and springing from natural causes. They were secret, and they needed to be opened. “And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as a voice of thunder, Come. And I saw; and, behold, a white horse, and he that sat upon it having a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he came forth conquering and that he might conquer. And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, Come. And another, a red horse, came forth; and to him that sat upon it, to him it was given to take peace from the earth, and that they should slay one another; and there was given to him a great sword. And when he opened the third seal, I heard the living creature saying, Come. And I saw, and, behold, a black horse, and he that sat upon it having a balance in his hand. And I heard as a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, A choenix of wheat for a denary, and three choenixes of barley for a denary; and the oil and the wine injure not. And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the fourth living creature saying, Come. And I saw, and, behold, a pale horse, and he that sat upon it, his name death, and hades followed with him; and authority was given to them over the fourth of the

earth to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and by the beasts of the earth."

Surely it is plain enough that we ought not to have here, and after the other three horses, the words "And see." They are wanting in the best text9 for all these passages. In every one of the cases the sentence ought only to be "Come." The difference comes to this, that "Come and see" would be addressed to John; whereas according to the better MSS. "Come" is addressed by the living creature to the rider upon the horse. Clearly this makes all possible difference. It is not the elders here; but one of the living creatures steps forward when the first Seal is opened, and says, Come; and at once comes forth a rider upon a white horse, etc. An elder explains as to Christ, or those that are His if liable to be misunderstood; a living creature acts from God for events in His providence. Let us inquire into the force of each Seal severally; but before we do, may we not notice the strange fancy that one of the living creatures saying "as a voice of thunder" could be a cry to the Lord Jesus to come? Not only would it be wholly incongruous with these cherubs, but quite out of harmony with the context.

"I saw, and, behold, a white horse: and he that sat upon 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 advances, and the character of his action is prosperity in conquest. Every trait shows this. It is the earliest state that the Spirit of God notices as then to be brought about in the world. A mighty conqueror shall appear here below. This has been applied to a great variety of things and persons. It has been held to mean the triumphs of the

gospel! by some Christ's coming again! by others Antichrist, and one knows not what. But we may safely gather from the first Seal that God judicially employs a conqueror who is to carry everything before him. A crown was given him. This would be the notable event among men, which is the first to happen on earth after the translation of the glorified to heaven at Christ's coming, in fact after Rev. 4 and 5. How absurd to talk of it as "victory for God's church and people"!

"And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, Come. And another came forth, a red horse; and to him that sat upon it, to him it was given to take peace from the earth, and that they should slay one another; and there was given to him a great sword." The difference is here marked. It is necessarily by bloodshed in the second Seal, which implies carnage if not civil war. The rider is not on a white horse, the symbol of victory; but mounted on another, a red horse, with a great sword, he has a commission to kill. Aggressive power which subjugates is meant by the horse in every colour; but in the first case that power seems to subject men bloodlessly. He had a bow, emblematic of distant warfare, not close or hand to hand. The measures are so successful — the name itself carries such prestige with it — that it becomes one onward career of conquest without necessarily involving slaughter. But in the second Seal the great point is that the peace of the earth is taken away, and "that they should slay one another." It may be the horror of civil warfare.

In the third Seal it is the colour of mourning. "And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, Come. And I saw, and behold, a black

horse, and he that sat upon it having a balance in his hand. And I heard as a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A choenix of wheat for a denary, and three choenixes of barley for a denary; and the oil and the wine do not injure." A black horse is not an emblem of prosperity. The price was a rate of scarcity. The ordinary price not long 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 so great a rise in the price of wheat would make a serious difference. However this may have been, the rate current in St. John's day, or rather some time after, is not a question easily settled. Naturally rates differ. The increase of civilisation and other causes tend to make it somewhat fluctuating. That it is hard to ascertain with nicety the prices at the supposed epoch is plain, from the fact that men of ability and conscience have supported every variety of opinion; but is it worth while to spend more time on the point? The colour of the horse decisively proves what the nature of the case must be. 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 but three possible ways of taking it; and each one of these has had staunch support. There is no certainty in man. 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 of old; but any one sees that the black colour is significant of gloom, especially as contrasted with white, that it is not indicative of joy or justice, but naturally of distress; and

therefore one takes this with the other points to judge of the third horse and its rider.

“And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, Come. And I saw, and, behold, a pale horse and he that sat upon him, his name death, and hades followed with him; and authority was given to him over the fourth of the earth to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.” The fourth Seal shows a pale or livid horse, the hue of dissolution. It is a mixture of God’s ordinary chastisements, falling concurrently on the earth, in the last of these four Seals to a limited extent. It is apparent that all the four are homogeneous.

It is not three and four of the seven, as with the churches; the first four Seals have a common external character. The fifth bears on God’s people in suffering to blood, and thus introduces things deeper in His eyes; and so the four living creatures, active as to ordinary affairs in providence, are now silent.

“And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those that had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held; and they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Sovereign, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on those that dwell on the earth? And there was given to them, to each one a white robe; and it was said to them that they should rest yet a little while, till both their fellow-bondmen and their brethren who were about to be killed as they too should be fulfilled.”

Under the altar are disclosed the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God, and for their testimony;

yet they cry aloud for vengeance to the Sovereign Master, and are vindicated before God, but must wait. Others, both their fellow-servants and their brethren, are about to be killed (as they were) ere that day comes. But they rest meanwhile. Many a person thinks that those in question are Christians. But if we look more closely into the passage, we may learn that this again confirms the antecedent removal of the church to heaven. Is theirs a prayer or desire according to the grace of the gospel? Reasoning is hardly needful on a point so manifest. He 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. Take Stephen's prayer, after our blessed Lord the pattern of all that is perfect. On the other hand we have similar language elsewhere: but where? In the Psalms and the Prophets. Thus we have all the evidence that can be required. The evidence of the New Testament proves 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 has been already seen? that once the glorified saints shall have passed out of the scene, God will be at work in the formation of a new testimony with its own peculiarities. It is not of course that the facts of the New Testament are obliterated, but the souls of the saints will be then led into what was revealed of old, because God is about to accomplish what was then predicted. For the time will be at hand for God to rule the earth under the Lord's direct rule. Of this the Old Testament is full, the earth

blessed under the reign of the heavens: as the N.T. views Christ as head of both. The earth, and the earthly people Israel, shall rejoice with the nations, all then enjoying the days of heaven here below. Accordingly these souls show us their condition and hopes; they pray for earthly judgments. They desire not, when suffering even to death, that their enemies should be converted, but that God would avenge their blood on them. Nothing can be simpler or surer than the inference.

The departed are told that they are not the only faithful to be given up to a violent end: others must follow later. Till then God does not appear for the accomplishment of that judgment for which they cried. They must wait therefore for the 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 in prospect, 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 had been, and their souls are seen therefore under the altar in the vision. They were renewed indeed, and understood what Israel ought to do; but they were not on the ground of Christian faith and church intelligence as we ought to be. Of course it is a vision, but a vision with weighty and plain intimations to us. If they had not the indwelling Paraclete as we have, they had the Spirit of prophecy, which is the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 19:10). Judgment yet lingers till the predicted final outpouring of man’s apostate rage, when the Lord will appear and put down all enemies for the establishing of God’s kingdom everywhere.

The next Seal lets us know that God was not indifferent meanwhile; for the sixth Seal may be regarded as a kind

of immediate consequence on the foregoing cry. “And I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth hair, and the whole moon became as blood; and the stars of the heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree shaken by a great wind casteth its untimely figs. And the heaven was removed as a book (or, scroll) rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” This furnished 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 the meaning has to be considered. We have to find out by their symbolic use elsewhere what is intended here by the changes which passed over sun, moon, stars, and the earth in the vision.. The result of course depends on our just application of scripture by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. But no one is entitled to read into this Seal the Lord’s advent without one word from God to justify it. The context also renders the notion untenable and impossible, if we hold fast what is written. It dislocates the structure of the book.

To help us we have plain language, not figures. “And the kings of the earth, and the grandees, and the chiliarchs, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman, and [every] freeman, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: because the great day of his wrath is come; and who is able to stand?” This it is well to heed, because it would be evident that if the heaven literally was removed as a scroll, and every mountain and island

moved out of its place, there could be no place to hide in. Thus to take it as other than symbolic representation would be self-contradictory. Such then is not the true force. If heaven really disappear, and the earth be moved according to the import of these terms in a pseudo-literal way, how could the various classes of terrified men truly say to the mountains, “Fall on us and hide us”? Plainly therefore the vision, like its predecessors, is symbolical. The prophet indeed beheld these objects heavenly and earthly in utter confusion; but the meaning must be sought on the ordinary principles of interpretation. It is a complete revolution of authority high and low, an unexampled convulsion of all classes of mankind, within its own sphere; the effect of which is to overturn the foundations of power and authority for 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 risen saints are taken 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 be 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 imagine the day of the Lord is come. But it is an error to confound their saying so with

God’s declaration of it. Not He but they say that the great day of the Lamb’s wrath is come.

There is no excuse for so mistaken an interpretation: it is only what these frightened men exclaim. The fact is that the great day does not arrive for a considerable space afterward, as the Revelation itself clearly proves. But men are so alarmed by this visitation that they think it must be His predicted day, and they say so. It is sure and evident that the great day of His wrath is not yet come. For a considerable time after this epoch our prophecy prepares for that day, revealing it in Rev. 14, 17, and describing it in Rev. 19. When it really comes, so infatuated are men in that day that they will fight against the Lamb; but the Lamb shall overcome them. Satan will have destroyed their dread when there is most ground for it.

Revelation 7

After this, so far is the great day of His wrath from being come that we find (in the parenthesis of chap. 7) God accomplishing mighty works of saving mercy. More signal and severe judgments impend and are to be next predicted. But in this intervening episode God tells us of a numbered complement for His seal from every tribe of Israel, and of a Gentile crowd in numbers numberless to be saved, comforted, and blessed. The first is the sealing of 144,000 out of the twelve tribes of Israel by an angel of singular authority that ascends from the sun-rising. “After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascend from the sun-rising, having the seal of the living God; and he

cried with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was given to injure the earth and the sea, saying, Injure not the earth and the sea nor the trees, till we shall have scaled the servants of our God upon their foreheads. And I heard the number of the sealed, a hundred [and] forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel: out of the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand sealed; out of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Naphthali twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand sealed." That pious men should doubt Israel as a fact here is strange, especially with a crowd of saved Gentiles immediately following. One can understand Ephraim "joined to idols" omitted, as well as Dan for similar guilt: one of the great horrors of Christendom, as this book points out. Levi and Joseph take their place.

Next there is vouchsafed to the prophet the sight of a crowd of Gentiles. "After these things I saw, and, behold, a great crowd which no one 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 great voice, saying, Salvation to our God that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb. And all the angels were standing around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell before the throne upon their faces, and did homage to God, saying, Amen: the

blessing, and the glory, and the wisdom, and the thanksgiving, and the honour, and the power, and the strength to our God, unto the ages of ages. Amen. And one out of the elders answered saying to me, These that are clothed with the white robes, who are they, and whence came they? And I said to him, My lord, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they that come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him by day and by night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, nor shall they thirst more; neither shall the sun at all strike upon them, nor any heat. 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."

Here they do not sing like the elders, but they ascribe "salvation to God" in the quality of sitting on the throne (we have seen in this book, His judicial throne), and to the Lamb. In other words, the ascription could not have been made before Rev. 4. Its tenor supposes the vast change for the risen saints to have taken place. It is not the fruit of a testimony during the past or the present. 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 distinguished from Israel; and this not now or of old, but in relation to God as He governs judicially at a future time It is not universal therefore. These Gentiles stand in manifest contrast with the sealed out of Israel; but they are no

less distinct from the elders or glorified saints. They do not even sing a (or as a) new song, like the Jewish remnant on mount Zion (Rev. 14:3); but like them they are quite distinct from the glorified saints represented by the elders. With joy they wave palms.

Here we read that one of the elders talked about the Gentile crowd, and explained who they were to the prophet, as he evidently without this would have been at fault. If the elders mean the glorified saints, these Gentiles cannot. Most assuredly they are not all the saints, because the hundred and forty-four thousand of Israel we have seen expressly distinguished from them; and so are the Jewish remnant in Rev. 14. Who are they and what? They are a crowd of Gentiles to be preserved by God's gracious power in these last days. Not a word implies that here they were glorified; there is no reason to doubt that they were still in their natural bodies. If they are said to be "before the throne," this cannot overthrow the many proofs that they are alive on the earth. Thus the woman, for instance (in Rev. 12), is also described as seen in heaven; but this is only where the prophet saw her in the vision. Why are we necessarily to gather that these Gentiles belong to heaven? The seer saw them there, but whether "before the throne" means that they are actually in heaven is another question, to be decided by the evidence as a whole.

In this case it is plain from other statements that they are not heavenly; and to it are weighty objections. First of all they are 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 future and peculiar though countless group; for it consists only of Gentiles preserved and blessed of God as coming out of “the great tribulation.”

In the millennial time there will be a great ingathering of the Gentiles; but those before us precede that day. They are saints from among the Gentiles at the great crisis, called to the knowledge of God by the preaching of the “gospel of the kingdom,” or the “everlasting gospel,” of which we hear respectively in the Gospel of Matthew and in the Revelation. The Lord Himself tells the disciples that “this gospel of the kingdom” shall be “preached in all the world for a witness unto all the nations” (or all the Gentiles); “and then shall the end come.” Is not this the very time spoken of here? It is clearly not a general summary of what God is doing now, but a description of what is yet to be, specially just before the end, when “the great tribulation” bursts out. John saw the fruit of divine grace even then in this vast crowd from among the Gentiles. The details of the description fall in with and confirm this inference. But the unparalleled tribulation is to fall on the Jews, as we are also told. This is far wider, and not so severe.

Attention has been already drawn to the fact that they are distinguished from the elders. If these represent the glorified saints, those are not the same company. If we admit that the elders represent. those caught up, the inference seems plain and certain that this Gentile throng cannot. The same body might be represented at different times by a different symbol, but hardly by two symbols at the same time, or by a symbolic and a literal description together.

Thus we may have Christians set forth by a train of virgins at one time, and by the bride at another; but the same parable carefully avoids the confusion. Such an incongruous mixture is foreign to scripture. It is not even found amongst sensible men, leaving out the word of God. The prophet tells us that one of the elders answers his own inquiry, “What are these that are clothed in white robes? and whence came they?” “These are they who come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” They are saints, though quite distinct from the elders. They are restricted to the time of “the great tribulation,” and therefore after the glorified were taken to heaven. “Therefore are they before the throne of God” is a description, not of their local place, but of their moral position; they stand in view of, and in connection with, God that sits on the throne. This, as already seen, restricts the crowd to the transition period; and they stand related to God governmentally acting, not in this day of grace.

Unmistakably, be it observed, there is nothing vague or general, as is often supposed. For the throne here differs from what it is now, as the millennial throne will differ from both. ‘I hat very aspect of the throne may he called its Apocalyptic character, to distinguish it from what went before or will come after. The elder describes it as a crowd entirely distinct from his own company, and, like the sealed of Israel, peculiar to that future day. They are saved Gentiles of that time. They are never said to be “around the throne,” still less to be enthroned themselves. Further, not only are they before the throne of God, but it is added, “and serve him day and night in his temple.” But this severs them from the bride or new

Jerusalem wherein is no temple, and no night there. They will he highly favoured in nearness to God, but on earth, though distinct from the millennial nations, as being in relation with God and the Lamb before that day. Compare the blessed of the nations in Matt. 25:34-40.

Again it is said, “He that sitteth on the throne shall” — not exactly “dwell among them,” but — “spread his tabernacle over them.” It is the gracious shelter of God’s care and goodness that is set forth. 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 enjoyment of His favour. He will vouchsafe what is more suited to their character and state — His protection. Of old God had His pillar of cloud, a defence and a canopy over the camp of Israel (though He also dwelt in their midst). Here too He graciously promises it, not to the sealed of Israel that are to know His care, but to these hitherto besotted Gentiles. It is added that “they shall not hunger any more, nor thirst any more; neither shall the sun at all fall on them, nor any heat.” Can any one question that such a solace is much more adapted to a people about to be relieved and blessed on the earth, than to men in a glorified state above? Where would be the propriety of a promise to risen men on high, that they shall hunger or thirst no 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.” We must not let traditional misapplication deprive us of other truth, of God’s mercy even in that terrible day to both the sealed out of Israel

and to these countless Gentiles for blessing on the earth, itself to be then reconciled.

Revelation 8

At length comes 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 of old and in our day. But it is clearly incorrect. The seventh Seal is necessarily after the sixth. If there is an order in the others, we need not doubt that the seventh Seal introduces seven Trumpets which follow each other in succession like the Seals. These are described from Rev. 8 and onward, and, far more evidently than the Seals, are inflictions from God. “And when he opened the seventh seal, silence took place in the heaven about half an hour.” There was a brief pause of solemn expectancy, the lull that precedes the storm about to blow, only held down by the four angels, as we were told in Rev. 7:1. “And I saw the seven angels that stand before God; and seven trumpets were given to them.” Heaven takes note of God’s ways. The silence was there, not on earth. Signal judgments impended for all creation. How strange to fancy that silence for about half an hour in heaven could prefigure the millennial rest! Yet the error naturally flows from the hypothesis entertained by not a few worthy men that the seventh Seal points to the millennial rest, and that the Trumpets go back and concurrently lead us to the same conclusion. Is it too much to say that the idea is wholly imaginative and without one solid reason for it?

Then we see the remarkable fact, even more than any already alluded to: an angel of peculiarly august character in priestly function. “And another angel came

and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, 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 objects of care to the great High Priest, however little their light or great their trial. We have the clear intimation that while the glorified are above, others will be in their natural bodies, yet accredited as saints here below. Yet it is not so much mercy and grace found of which we hear, but of judgments to fall on the wicked.

But it demands our special attention, that under the Trumpets the Lord Jesus assumes the angelic character. Angels are prominent at this juncture. 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, commonly so 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; and if any should imagine it, 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 divine person, never will He divest Himself of it. But this evidently does not prevent His assuming whatever appearance is suited to the prophetic necessity of the case; and this is just what we find here under the Trumpets. It is observable that an increasingly figurative style of language is employed. All other objects become more distant in this series of visions than before; and so

Christ Himself is seen more vaguely (i.e. not in His distinct human reality, but here angelically).

“And the smoke of the incense went up with the prayers of the saints out of the angel’s hand before God. And the angel took the censer, and filled it out of the fire of the altar, and cast [it] unto the earth; and there took place 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. Besides those we find an earthquake added. The effect among men becomes more intense. The angels are employed in providential judgments, as in providence generally. We can understand such a character of ministration, when the saints no longer witness to death as under the Seals, but are merged in the world save to God’s eye: Rome’s boast, but His horror.

“And the first sounded trumpet, and there was hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast unto the earth.” This was a violent down-pouring of displeasure from God on the earth. Hail implies this. fire, we know, is the constant symbol of God’s consuming judgment, and here even mingled with blood, i.e. destruction to life in the point of view intended. We have to consider whether it be simple physical decease, or dissolution in some special respect; and here it appears to be deprivation of life spiritual or Godward, rather than natural death.

It will be noticed in these divine visitations that the third part is regularly introduced. What is the prophetic meaning of “the third “? The answer seems given us in

Rev. 12 (i.e. the distinctively Roman or western empire). For we know that the dragon's tail is to prevail over the leaders pre-eminently in the west, casting them down, as the figure runs, from the heaven to the earth. If this be so, "the third" would convey the varied consumption of the Roman empire in the west. Of course one cannot be expected in a brief sketch to enter on a discussion of the grounds for this view, any more than for other schemes which have been set up in its place. One able writer contends for the Greek or Eastern Empire, because the Macedonian was the third of the four great empires of Dan. 2, and Dan. 7. But "the third part" is quite another thought and phrase. It is enough now to state what one believes to be the fact.

Accordingly at least the earlier Trumpets (though not these only) are a specific visitation of judgment on the properly western empire. Not only was this visited, but "the third of the trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up." This is notable. The dignitaries within that sphere were consumed, but there was also a universal interference with the prosperity of men. Any "pause of judgment" at this point is pure fancy: the word of God utterly ignores it. Of such an episode the prophet neither says nor implies the least trace. The only revealed "pause" is in verse 13, portending the still more tremendous Trumpets of woe.

"And the second angel sounded trumpet, and as 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 was destroyed" It was in this case a great earthly power, which in divine judgment deals 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 trumpet, and there fell out of the heaven a great star, burning as it were a torch, and it fell upon the third of the rivers, and upon the fountains of the waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood; and the third of the waters became wormwood; and many of the men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.” Here the fall of a great dignitary or ruler, whose influence was judicially turned to poison all the springs and channels of popular influence, comes before us. The sources and means of refreshing intercourse among men are visited by God’s embittering judgment.

“The fourth angel sounded trumpet, and the third of the sun was smitten, and the third of the moon and the third of the stars; so that the third of them should be darkened, and that the day should not appear for the third of it, and the night likewise.” The fourth sounds its warning to all the governing powers — supreme, derivative, and subordinate — which must come under God’s judgment, and all within the western empire. Learned men have sought to explain this judgment by an eclipse; and scientific men have argued for some such notion as agreeing with the phrase here employed. But this style of accommodation is quite untenable. The effect described by the prophet is far beyond any eclipse. It is symbolic presentation, and wholly beyond nature, to denote the extinction of all government within the western empire.

Even so worse is at hand, as next the eagle cries. “And I saw, and I heard an eagle flying in mid-heaven, saying with a great voice, Woe, woe, woe, to those that dwell on the earth, because 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” having slipped in inadvertently for the better reading “eagle,” through scribes who did not appreciate the symbolic style. The Woes are to fall expressly on those settled down on the earth. It is not now on the circumstances and surroundings of men, but directly on themselves. Here again notice how systematic is this book. The last three are distinguished thus from the first four.

8 The omission of “him that liveth unto the ages of the ages” is fully established, and finely illustrates how a spurious clause takes away from the truth. For as read by the best copies the homage was to the Lamb as well as to God as such. It is attested more fully than the omission of ἡμᾶς in ver. 9, though for this sufficient is given, and required by the context.

9 Yet in every instance the Sinai MS. supports the inferior copies against the Alexandrian, the Rescript of Paris, and the Porphyrian Uncial, with the better cursives, etc. The Sinaitic is often careless, especially in the Revelation.

Revelation 9-12

Revelation 9

In chapter 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, and brings us the closing scene in a general way to the end.

The first of the Woe-trumpets consists of the symbolic locusts led by the ominous Apollyon, to whom was given, as its angel, the key of the abyss. For that they are not to be understood of the literal insects is clear, if only for this reason, that these are expressly said not to feed on that which is the natural food of locusts. The well-known creature, with most portentous qualities and powers added, becomes the descriptive sign of these marauders from the abyss. They were to injure not the vegetable realm, but man expressly, and from a source not human but diabolical. It is a darkening and tormenting evil let loose from the pit on the unsealed (those of Israel who had no such favour from God), not on what they valued merely but on themselves, by instruments boasting a righteous commission from God (for they had upon their heads as crowns like gold), yet not even men in their true place, but weakly subject. For they had the hair of women, if the faces of men. They were given such power as the scorpions have; and their object for a torment of five months was the men who lacked the seal of God on their foreheads. And the envenomed sting produced such anguish that men preferred death but found it not. How graphic the picture of this scourge from the abyss!

Like horses were they prepared for war, their teeth as those of lions, their breastplates as of iron, and the sound of their wings as of chariots of many horses running unto war. Thus were combined a darkening influence from beneath to shut out heavenly light and healthful means with aggressive force of imposing character and a tormenting power as of a false prophet; “for the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail”; and these have tails like scorpions, and their power is in their tail. As their breasts were steeled against all force to pierce them, so were they led by a king who tells the tale of the enemy behind all.

“And the fifth angel sounded trumpet: and I saw a star out of the heaven fallen unto the earth, and there was given to him the key of the pit of the abyss. And he opened the pit of the abyss, and smoke went up out of the pit as the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun was darkened and the air from the smoke of the pit. And out of the smoke came forth locusts unto the earth, and to them was given power [or, authority] as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was said to them that they should not injure the grass of the earth nor any green thing nor any tree, but the men which [οἵτινες] have not the seal of God on their foreheads. And it was given to them that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months; and their torment [was] as a scorpion’s torment when it striketh a man. And in those days shall men seek death and shall in no way find it; and they shall desire to die, and death fleeth from them. And the likenesses of the locusts [were] like horses prepared for war; and upon their heads as crowns of gold, and their faces as men’s faces; and they had hair as women’s hair; and their teeth were as of

lions. And they kind breastplates as iron breastplates, and the sound of their wings [was] as the sound of chariots of many horses running unto war. And they have tails like scorpions, and stings; and their power was in their tails to injure men five months. They have a king over them, the angel of the abyss, his name in Hebrew Abaddon, and in the Greek he hath a name Apollyon [destroyer].

“One woe is past; behold, there come two woes more after these things.” Here too is a revealed “pause of judgment.”

To another remark your attention is called, that the first Woe-trumpet answers in the way of contrast to the hundred and forty-four thousand that were sealed out of Israel; as the second Woe-trumpet (namely, that of the Euphratean horsemen) answers by a similar contrast to the countless multitude out of the Gentiles. As some perhaps may consider this contrast vague and indefinite, let us endeavour to make the meaning plainer. It is expressly said that the locusts of the vision were to carry on their tormenting, scorpion-like devastations, except on those that were sealed. Here then is an allusion clearly to those whom God set apart from Israel in Revelation 7; and this is at issue with the hypothesis of parallel series of judgments; for it is under the fifth Trumpet we are told of the unsealed, whereas it is in the parenthesis of the sixth Seal that the sealing was effected.

On the other hand, in the Euphratean horsemen we see far more of aggressive and destructive power, though there is also serpent-like torment. But torment is the main characteristic of the locust Woe; the horsemen Woe

is more distinctively the onward progress of aggressive power portrayed in energetic colours. They fall on men and destroy them; and here “the third” reappears. According to the force given already, this would imply that the Woe falls on the Gentiles indeed, more particularly on the western empire, from the east Their “mouth” is characteristically prominent, and not their tails only as in the locust judgment. “And out of their mouths proceedeth fire and smoke and brimstone.” Even the tails are not compared to scorpions but to serpents having heads, not so much a tormenting stroke as deliberate Satanic purpose. Their breastplates are not as iron but of fire and jacinth and brimstone, savouring of the very lake of fire.

“And the sixth angel sounded trumpet; and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar that [is] before God, saying to the sixth angel that had the trumpet, Loose the four angels that are bound at the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed that were prepared for the hour and day and month and year, that they might kill the third of men. And the number of the armies of the cavalry [was] twice ten thousand times ten thousand: I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and those that sat upon them, having breastplates of fire and jacinth and brimstone; and the heads of the horses [were] as lions’ heads, and out of their mouths proceedeth fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three strokes were the third of men killed, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails [are] like serpents, having heads, and with them they injure. And

the rest of the men who were not killed with these strokes repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they repented not of their murders, nor of their sorceries [or, drugs], nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts."

Here a voice from the four horns of the golden altar (and how significant that it should come from thence!) summons a swift and overwhelming and destructive host from the east to slay men of the western empire. For it is not "torment" now but death, though not without Satan's power of deceit as in the preceding Woe. In their inflictions a time limit appears, first a short term followed next by a longer one. There was also a term in the preceding Woe, as indeed they are evidently allied, though with notable points of difference. Here too, as the summons came from the four horns of the altar of intercession, so it was to the four angels that were bound at the great river, which was the boundary of the eastern powers. It was sweeping indeed.

It seems that these two Woes represent what will be verified in the early doings of the Antichrist in Judea, and of the Assyrian or eastern leader. The first or the locust raid consists of a tormenting infliction. Here accordingly we have Abaddon, the destroyer, their king, who is set forth in a peculiar fashion as angel of the abyss. It is not of course the issue yet fairly formed; but we can quite comprehend that there is to 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 Woe-trumpets. First of all a tormenting Woe falls on the land, but not on those sealed out of the twelve tribes of Israel. Next the Euphratean horsemen are let loose on the western powers, overwhelming all Christendom, and in particular that west as the special object of the judgment of God. The former is emphatically torment from Satan on the reprobate Jews; as the latter is a most scathing infliction of man's aggressive energy, though not this only, from the east on the corrupt and idolatrous western world. The killing of the third of men represents, not the merely physical end, but the destruction even of all confession of relationship with the only true God. What an awful sketch of what had once received the gospel, professedly at least, and stood forth as God's church on earth! "And the rest of the men who were not killed by these strokes repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they repented not of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts." Think of such a description divinely furnished of those who were not ostensibly apostate but still keeping up the name of Christianity, before the falling away was complete, as the book has yet to tell us! For "thou shalt see greater abominations than these"; not only the unclean spirit returned to the house empty, swept, and garnished, but taking to himself seven different spirits more wicked than himself, so that the last state is worse than the first. Then shall the vilest of men be worshipped as God in the temple of God, the west no less committed to this blasphemy than the mass of the Jews. But who believes the divine report?

Revelation 10

Chapter 10 in the Trumpets answers to Rev. 7 in the Seals. It forms an important parenthesis, which comes in between the sixth and seventh Trumpets, just as the securing chapter (7) came in between the sixth and seventh Seals: so orderly is the Apocalypse. “And I saw another strong angel coming down out of the heaven, clothed with a cloud, and the rainbow [was] on his head, and his countenance as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire, and having in his hand a little open book. And he set his right foot on the sea, and the left on the earth, and cried with a loud voice as a lion roareth. And when he cried, the seven thunders uttered their own voices. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; and I heard a voice out of the heaven saying Seal the things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.”

Thus we have again the Lord in angelic appearance. As before in high-priestly function, He is the angel here with royal claim. A mighty angel comes down out of the heaven, the source of His action, clothed with a cloud, the special sign of Jehovah’s majesty (Isa. 19:1): none but He has the title to come thus clothed. Further, the rainbow is on His head. He occupies Himself with divine mercy toward the creation. It is not now a question of round the throne; here is a step taken in advance. He approaches the earth, and He asserts His indisputable claim to all creation as that which is His right. “And his face was as the sun,” with 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.” And the seven

thunders answered on Jehovah's part; the God of glory fully asserts His title. It is no sealed-up book now, but a little one and open: sea or earth are alike His. John was going to write what the thunders said, but is forbidden. The disclosures were to be sealed; but there was to be no more delay.

"And the angel whom I saw stand on the sea and on the earth lifted up his right hand unto the heaven, and swore by him that liveth unto the ages of the ages, who created the 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; but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound trumpet, the mystery of God also is finished, as he announced the glad news to his own bondmen the prophets." There was no more to be any lapse of time allowed. God would terminate the mystery of His present seeming inaction in the public government of the earth. Now He may allow the world, with slight check, to go on in its own way. Men may sin, and, as far as direct intervention is concerned, God appears not, whatever be the interferences exceptionally. But the time is coming when God will surely visit sin, and this immediately and effectually when no toleration can be for anything contrary to Himself. Such 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 shall sound trumpet as he is about to do, the mystery of God also should be completed (lit. "and was finished the," etc.). The mystery here is, not Christ and the church, but God's allowing evil to go on in its

present course with apparent impunity. Its end is now anticipated. His direct reign is at hand (Rev. 11:15).

“And the voice which I heard out of the heaven [was] again speaking with me and saying, Go, take the little book that is open in the hand of the angel that standeth on the sea and on the earth. And I went off unto the angel, saying to him to give me the little book. And he saith to me, Take and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but in thy mouth it shall be sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the hand of the angel, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my belly was made bitter. And they say [or, he saith] to me, Thou must prophesy again as to peoples and nations and tongues and kings many.” The meaning of this soon appeals more clearly. There is a kind of appendix of prophecy where he renews his course for especial reasons. It is what may be called the second volume of “the things which are about to be after these,” and begins with Rev. 12 and onward.

Meanwhile notice the evident contrast between the little book which the prophet here takes and eats, and the great book we have seen already sealed up with seven seals. It was sweet as honey to the taste that the true and all-worthy King should reign; but how bitter to the feelings that judgment unsparing should fall on the mass of the Jews, and yet more on proud Christendom, both apostate and worse. Why a little book? and why open? A little book, because it treats of a comparatively contracted sphere, already familiar in the prophets; and open, because things are no longer described in the mysterious guise in which the Seals and yet more the Trumpets arrayed them. All is going to be plain for what comes out here. Is it not the case accordingly in Rev. 11?

The language is ordinary, with figures rather than symbols.

Revelation 11

“And there was given to me a reed like a rod, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given to the Gentiles, and they shall’ tread under foot the holy city forty-two months.” Their treading down is soon to come to an end; and Jerusalem appears in the foreground. This is the centre of concern now, while the Beast may ravage there, though his own sphere be in the western world “And I will give10 to my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred [and] sixty 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 lamps that stand before the Lord of the earth.” The witnesses are two, not because necessarily limited to two only, but as giving an adequate testimony according to the law. It is not the Messianic order yet.

One often hears, for the purpose of illustrating the Revelation, a reference to Isaiah, Jeremiah, or the like; but we should bear in mind that these prophecies are not in their structure symbolical. Therefore the reasoning founded on the books and style of Jeremiah or Isaiah (Ezekiel being partly symbolical, partly figurative) cannot decide for Daniel or the Apocalypse. Here the figures have a language of their own. Thus the regular meaning of “two,” if figuratively used, 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.

"And if any one desire to injure them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any one desire to injure them, he must thus be killed." Clearly in this parenthesis we have not yet Israel as a whole in view, but a remnant of true worshippers owned, while the mass are given up, and the raising up of witnesses in sorrow, yet guarded by power after a Jewish sort, till the Beast, of whom we shall hear far more, rises up to kill them. For now that Christ's title to the universe is asserted, Satan pushes forward the Beast to claim the earth for himself.

But is this the testimony of the gospel? Is it thus the Lord protects the preachers of the gospel of His grace? Did fire ever proceed out of the mouths of evangelists? Did a teacher ever devour his enemies? Was it on this principle that even Ananias and Sapphira fell dead? Are these the ways of Christianity? Is it not evident that we are here in a new atmosphere, that a state of things is before us altogether different from that which reigned during the church condition, though even then sin might be unto death in peculiar cases? No more proofs are needed as 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, and to smite the earth as often as they will with every plague." In this respect they resemble Moses also. It is not meant that they are Moses and Elias personally; but that the character of their testimony is similar, and the sanctions of it 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 cometh up out of the abyss shall make war with them, and shall overcome them and shall kill them.” They are however preserved In spite of the Beast, till their work is done; but directly their testimony is completed, the Beast is allowed to overcome them. This is anticipation; and so the description of the Beast is characteristic rather than an existing fact. That is to say, all had not yet been given him which was to be.

So 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. But we see the character of grace which filled the Lord Jesus, and 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 His family on high. When the heavenly saints are changed, then He begins with the earthly. He will never mix them all up together. This makes nothing but the greatest confusion.

“And their body [is] on the street 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] of the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations see their body three days and a half, and do not suffer their dead bodies to be put into a tomb. And those that dwell on the earth rejoice over them, and [their hatred being more intense] make merry, and they shall send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those that dwell on the earth. And after the three days and a half a spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon those beholding them. And I heard a great voice out of the heaven, saying to them, Come up here; and they went up to the heaven in the cloud, and their enemies beheld them. And in that hour came 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.” This is to be as emphatically from God, as the first came from the abyss on the wicked Israelites, and the second from the multitudinous powers of the east on the faithless west. For it is 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 but final summary. This is clear, though often overlooked. “And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in the 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 kingdom of the world" (or "the world-kingdom," if our tongue admits of such a combination) "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 twenty-four elders that sit before God upon their thrones fell on their faces, and did homage to God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God the Almighty, that art, and that wast; because thou hast taken thy great power, and didst reign. And the nations were enraged, 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 the voice of those who know in heaven. The nations were enraged, and God's wrath come; but further, "the time of the dead to be judged." Not a word here speaks of the saints caught up to heaven; it is a later hour. "And the time of the dead to be judged, and to give the reward to thy bondmen the prophets, and to the saints, and to those that fear thy name, small and great, and to destroy those that destroy the earth." No mention is made here about taking them to heaven, but of recompensing them. There can be no such thing as conferring that reward till the public manifestation of the Lord Jesus. They had, in fact, been translated long before, and were seen glorified in heaven since the beginning of Rev. 4. The taking of those changed out of the scene is quite another association of truth. The reward in due time will fail to none that fear the Lord's name, small and great; but He will also destroy those that destroy the earth at that

time. It is the general course of judgment summarised to the close, and proclaimed on high.

This is the true conclusion of Rev. 11. The next verse (19), though arranged in our Bibles as the end of the chapter, is properly the beginning of a new series. For the prophetic part of the book divides into two portions at this point. This is another landmark 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 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 right connected view of that which it conveys to us. The seventh Trumpet brings us down to the end in a general way.

This is the habit of prophecy. Take, for instance, our Lord's prophecy in Matthew 24. There, first of all, we are given the broad outline as far as verse 14 to 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 comprehensively, 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 a little 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 fuller and more precise view of the appalling state of things 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 “the time of the dead to be judged,” as well as the day of wrath for the nations on the earth. Evidently this is the end of the age. Then, in the portion which begins with the last verse of Rev. 11, we return for a special communication. The prophet had been told that he must prophesy again before many peoples and kings; and from this point seems to be his prophesying again.

“And the temple of God in the heaven was opened.” It is not a door opened in heaven to give us the veil lifted up from what must take place on the earth as regarded in the mind of God. This John did see, the general view being now closed; and we cuter on a distinct line which connects itself with O.T. prophecy. It is not now the throne; but the temple of God in heaven was opened, “and there was seen the ark of his covenant in his temple.” This is the resumption of the divine link with His ancient people Israel.

Not that it is 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 still a transition state of things, but a further advance. 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. Doubtless as the Gospels show, and the Epistles prove, we do now enjoy the blessings of the new covenant as far as is compatible with higher privileges; yet prophetically its direct establishment awaits Israel, and this is here pledged. Blessed tokens now come to

view, with even aggravated proof that God will be then dealing with the world, not in grace as now, but in ever-growing severity of judgment.

“And there were lightnings, and voices, and thunders,” and besides not “an earthquake” only but “great hail.” It was not yet “the day”: on the contrary the deepest darkness must intervene. Judicial ways still prevail, and more than before. In the first scene of Rev. 4, when the door was seen open in heaven, there were “lightnings, and voices, and thunders,” but not even an earthquake. In Rev. 8 this addition appears. Now besides all the rest there is “great hail.” Clearly therefore we are thus prepared for greater detail in the judgments from heaven inflicted on the earth.

Revelation 12

Signs are beheld above: the sources, principles, and agents in the coming crisis are seen on high. “There appeared a great sign in the heaven.” The being seen in heaven shows that it is not a mere history of what takes place on earth, but a view given of God’s purpose. Though seen above, the woman represented is to be Israel on the earth. The symbol is of the chosen people as a whole, for a future state of things which God means to establish here below. Utterly weak in herself, she was “clothed with the sun.” Israel shall be invested with supreme authority on earth, long as she has been desolate and down-trodden by the Gentiles. “And the moon under her feet” intimates that the condition of legal ordinances (or, as some would regard it, derivative rule), instead of governing her as of old, shall be under her feet. How aptly the moon sets forth the reflected light of the Mosaic system to any thoughtful mind! What

are feasts, new moons, or sabbaths to the Christian? In the millennium this will not be out of sight, as now under Christianity, but reappear: only when Jehovah is truly honoured as her husband, there will be manifest subordination, as may be seen in Ezekiel's prophecy.

More than this appears. "And on her head a crown of twelve stars." There will be the fullest administrative authority in man, not only for use but to adorn her. In short, whether it be supreme, derivative, or subordinate authority, all is now assured to her. Israel is therefore to be the manifest vessel of God's mighty purposes for the earth; and God here so looks at her and presents her to the prophet's eye. But this is not all. Another glory is here, greater than all; for "unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." What could Israel do without Jehovah's Anointed, the Messiah? "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; as Isaiah proclaims to Israel in his last chapter. There is weakness and suffering yet, but all is secured, and the end pledged on high. Compare Micah 5:2, 3, where, as here, the birth of Messiah (for the woman is the mother, not the bride) is connected with the future day of Israel's deliverance. Only in the Revelation is the man-child caught up meanwhile to God and to His throne, of which we have more to say in its place.

"And there appeared another sign in the heaven, and, behold, 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 crushing as was the overthrow under Nebuchadnezzar, the Roman power trod down Jerusalem with a more tremendous and permanent tyranny. Besides, as the Roman Beast collided with Christ once, so must it be destroyed at His appearing. This therefore makes the unfolding of the double sign so much the more striking. Not that the deliverance is yet come; but Israel and the enemy are confronted before the prophet according to God's mind. What a mighty encouragement before Israel passes through the worst trouble!

The dragon has seven heads, as it is here said, or the completeness of ruling authority; and ten horns, not twelve, but at any rate an approach to it, in the instruments of the power wielded in the west. Man is never truly complete. God gave the woman twelve stars. The dragon has but ten horns. And this appears to look on to the last days; for the empire, whilst it possessed imperial unity, never had ten co-ordinate and subordinate kings, as the Beast will surely have before its judgment (Rev. 17:12, 17). It is the dragon too we may say in purpose. But God would not allow 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 to 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 a special place of honourable trust.

"And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth." Does not this imply that the

third part is the distinctively Roman side of the empire? It was “the third part” we saw in the Trumpets, both in the four earlier ones and also in the sixth. This seems to set forth the western empire, or what was properly Roman. The Romans actually possessed, because they conquered, a great deal that belonged to Greece for instance, and Medo-Persia and Babylon. This last was far east; but the properly Roman part was western Europe. There the dragon’s malignant influence was to be particularly felt, at least in those that filled the place of rulers. It “drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them unto the earth; and the dragon standeth before the woman that was about to bring forth, that he might devour her child as soon as she should bring forth.” It is Christ above all that he dreads. The old serpent is the constant foe of Christ in the war of all time. “And she brought forth a man-child, who is about to rule [or, tend] all the nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and unto his throne.”

Some things call for explanation here. First, a notion prevails that the woman is the church. Many Christians have so conceived. A few words are sufficient to dispel the illusion, and do. How could the church be the mother of Christ? Viewed figuratively as a woman, the church is the bride of Christ (as we see in Rev. 19, 21, 22); whereas the Jewish body is truly represented as His mother. Christ, as man, came of the Jews after the flesh. And He plainly is the One here described as the Man-child. The same truth is evident in the scriptures, whether we take the Psalms or the Prophets. “Unto us,” says Isaiah, “a child is born, a son is given.” Again, in the second Psalm, we find that He who is honoured by God Himself as the Son is to rule the nations with a rod

of iron. The Lord Jesus is the destined Ruler here prominent, as the woman is Israel in full corporate character for dominion on the earth. To the daughter of Zion shall come the first dominion, the kingdom to the daughter of Jerusalem, as Micah predicts.

It may be no small difficulty how to bring herein the birth of Christ. Observe then that here the Spirit of God is not proceeding with the course of the prophecy. For the seventh Trumpet brought in the end in a general way. It has been already explained that here we have supplemental matter of the highest moment. Another thing should be taken into account, that in this portion no date serves to fix the time when the birth of the Man-child takes place. But if emphatically timeless, why should the birth of the Man-child be introduced here, seeing that the Lord had been born, had lived, had died and gone to heaven long before? While introducing Israel according to His purpose, God in this striking manner rehearses it mystically, and combines it with His and our translation to heaven after the style of O.T. prophecy. The disclosure of God's covenant dealings with Israel in order to their eventual restoration furnishes the occasion. All are, as in this prophetic perspective, introduced here together, Christ being both the Bridegroom of the church, and the King of Israel and of all the nations, though only the last of these relationships suits this place save mystically.

God is not at all disposing the purposes before us as a question of time, but of connection with Christ their centre. The prophet is about to enter into the final scenes of the world; but before this is done, God's counsel is shown as to Israel. This brings forward the devil in his evil antagonism to that counsel; for it was

assuredly what the adversary most of all dreaded. Scripture lets us see Satan invariably opposing Christ with greater tenacity of purpose and hatred and pride than any other. Recognising in Him the fatal bruiser of himself and the great deliverer of man and creation to God's glory, a constant and direct enmity on Satan's part to the Son of God is familiar throughout the Bible. But there is more than this: Satan sets himself against His connection with the now poor and despised people of Israel. Hence before God espouses the part of Israel, the fact is shown that Christ is caught up to Him and to His throne. Not a word drops about His life; not a word here about His death or His resurrection. This proves to us how mystical the statement is. Had it been an historical summary, we must have had those stupendous events on which depends all reconciliation with God for man and the universe. But all this is entirely passed over. Like the woman, the Man-child is viewed in God's purpose. The reason seems just this, that here is intimated, as in O.T. prophecy, how the Lord and His people are wrapped up in the same symbol. Just so, in a yet more intimate way, what is said about Christ applies to the Christian. Compare Isaiah 1. 8, 9, and Romans 8:33-35.

On this mystical principle then the rapture of the Man child to God and His throne involves the rapture of the saints in itself. The explanation why it could be thus introduced here depends on the truth that Christ and the church are one, and have the common destiny of ruling the nations with a rod of iron. Inasmuch as He went up to heaven, so also the church is to be caught up. "So also is Christ," says the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:12, when speaking of the church; for we must naturally suppose the allusion is to the body rather than

to the Head. Yet he does not say, so also is the church, but “so also is Christ.” In a similar spirit this prophecy shows us the Male of might taken to heaven, entirely above the reach of Satan’s malice. If this be so, it has a remarkable bearing on what has been already asserted as to the book. We here begin over again, with divine purposes and their unseen action and aims as the object of the Holy Ghost in this latter portion. It is a supplemental volume, revealing secret springs and the great agents, with mercies too, of the closing scenes.

This is strictly in order. The heavenly saints are above. It is now a question of preparing the earthly people, Israel, for their place here below. Put for heavenly and for earthly people all turns on Christ. Hence Christ being born of Israel, there is and ought to be first set forth that connection of His. Next 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, the church following Him into heaven, without a date to either, like a binary star. In short, the first portion of the chapter is a mystical representation of the Lord’s relationship with Israel and of Satan’s deadly antagonism; then the Lord’s removal out of the scene to heaven, which gives room for God’s binding up, as it were, with Christ’s disappearance to heaven the saints’ translation there. In this way the rapture of the Man-child is not brought in here historically, but in mystic connection; and the great agents are all in their place according to God’s mind.

If this be borne in mind, the whole subject is considerably cleared. “She brought forth a man-child to rule all the nations with a rod of iron.” There is no 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 Revelation ii. it was expressly said that the Lord would give to the overcomer power over the nations, and he should rule them with iron rod, broken to pieces like vessels of pottery, just as He Himself received of His Father. But where for the present is Israel? Hidden in the wilderness, yet preserved till God's public kingdom appears. "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] sixty days." The days are numbered for the tried; as elsewhere in the shortest form compressed for like purpose as to the Beast's reign.

In verse 7 is a new scene; and here from counsel we come much more to facts, though unseen by men on the earth. It is not God's counsels or principles viewed in His mind, but positive events; first of all from above, as later on we shall find consequent changes on the earth. The mystery of God awaits its term. Its completion will surely come. But even before His world-kingdom come, what a vast and striking change! Saints will no longer have to wrestle with the spirituals of wickedness in the heavenlies! Satan can never again play the part of accuser on high.

"And there came war in the heaven: Michael and his angels to war with the dragon; and the dragon warred and his angels, and prevailed not; nor was their place found any more in the heaven. And the great dragon was cast down, the ancient serpent that is called Devil and Satan, that deceiveth the whole habitable world, was

cast unto the earth; and his angels were cast with him. And I heard a great voice in the heaven, saying, Now is come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ; because the accuser of our brethren is cast down, that accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony, and loved not their life unto death. For this be glad, O heavens, and ye that tabernacle in them." It is evident that at this time persons are spoken of as being above who sympathise deeply with their suffering brethren on earth. Such is the incontestable fact. Who are they but those one with Christ, the Male of might? Compare Rev. 13:6. They anticipate from Satan's catastrophe the entire establishment of the kingdom, though three and a half times have yet to pass in fact. Satan has lost that access to the presence of God in the quality of accuser of the brethren which he had previously possessed; nor will he ever regain the highest seat of his power then lost, the pledge of ruin ever more and more irretrievable. He is no longer able to fill heaven with his bitter taunts and accusations of the saints of God. What a blessed change for them! What a relief to those on high!

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

the close? Here it is explained. Satan cannot longer accuse above; accordingly he does while he can his worst below. He is cast down to earth, never to regain the heavens: a fact of deep import and of pregnant consequence. Again, he will be banished from the earth, as we shall find, into the bottomless pit by-and-by; and though he be let loose thence for a short time, it is only for his irremediable destruction; 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. How strange to fancy that such amazing events took place ages ago without the saints of God knowing it! From Rev. 4 there is a throne of judgment, not of grace; from Rev. 12 Satan has no longer access to heaven; and there is therefore no more room for wrestling against spiritual powers of wickedness in heavenly places. Our struggle against them is so characteristic of the Christian, that any interpretation of the Revelation is convicted of error, which assumes that it ceases while the church is on earth. The Epistle to the Ephesians must thereby be no longer applicable: a consequence necessarily flowing from the error, and as certainly false and impossible.

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. And to the woman were given two wings of the great eagle, that she might flee into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished shore a time and times and half a time from the serpent’s face.” Thus power is given to escape, rapid means of flight from Satan’s persecution; not power to

withstand Satan, and fight the battle out with him, but ample facility to hide from his violence. This is conveyed by the two wings of the great eagle — a figure of vigorous means to escape. The most energetic image of flight in nature is vividly applied to the case in hand "And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a river after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the river." The endeavour to stir up impetuous action, excited by his craft to overwhelm the Jews, is vain; for "the earth," or what was then under settled government, "helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth, and swallowed up the river which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was enraged 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 then are known for subjection to God and a certain witness of Jesus. If the woman represents a more general state of Israel, the remnant of her seed are the witnessing portion. The mass, or "the many" of the future as Daniel calls them, will be quite apostate. The Jews of that day will thus vary much. Even among the godly then some will be much more energetic and intelligent than others, as we see in Daniel 12. Satan hastens therefore, and sets himself to put down those chosen vessels in the testimony of Jesus, a testimony not so much of communion for the Christian, but distinctly in the spirit of prophecy.

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

Revelation 13-16

Revelation 13

The next chapter unfolds the plans that Satan adopts to accomplish his long-cherished design of supplanting (not only gospel and church as now, but) all testimony on earth to the coming kingdom of God. It is the apostasy: Old and New Testaments are alike denied. Of two especial methods he will avail himself, suited to catch a twofold class of men never wanting in this world. Many natural men like power, others like religion. It is clear that man's heart runs either after intellect and power, or, if conscience be active, into religious form to quiet it. The devil will therefore put forward two main instruments as leaders of systems that express human nature on either side, exactly suiting what man's heart seeks and will have.

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 in man; and as the church is the object of Christ's 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 Revelation 13 this is made plain. There are to be two Beasts or imperial powers; the first distinctively political, the second religious, both of them apostate and allies.

“And I11 stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads; and on his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like a leopardess, and his feet as of a bear, and his mouth as a lion’s mouth. And the dragon gave to him his power and his throne and great authority. And one of his heads [I saw] as slain unto death, and his death-stroke was healed, and the whole earth wondered after the beast. And they did homage to the dragon because he gave the authority to the beast, and they did homage to the beast, saying, Who is like the beast? and who can make war with him? And there was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and authority was given him to act forty-two months. And he opened his mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name and his tabernacle, [and] those that tabernacle in the heaven. And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority was given to him over every tribe and people and tongue and nation. And all that dwell on the earth shall do homage to him, whose name hath not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain. If any one hath an ear, let him hear. If any is for [or, leadeth into] captivity, into captivity he goeth. If any one shall kill by sword, by sword must he be killed. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.”

The Beast that was beheld emerging from the then revolutionary state of the world is just adapted for the dragon to energise in opposition to God’s purpose and will. In Rev. 12 the dragon was seen similarly characterised 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 heads names of blasphemy.” The dragon has the diadems on his heads; the Beast shows us more the final fact — the horns diademed. The dragon represents the enemy of Christ in his political employment of the Roman empire generally. It is the principle; and the heads or successive forms of power are crowned. The horns as a fact are only developed a little before its history closes in perdition. On the other hand, in the first Beast 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 is to be 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; they are to reign simultaneously and continuously with the Beast, as Rev. 17 informs us. Hence the horns of the Beast are seen diademed (not the heads, as in the dragon’s case originally).

Further the Beast is described afterwards, though with remarkable points of difference if we examine the Beasts, as at first made known to Daniel (7). “And the beast which I saw was like a leopard (or, panther), and its feet as of a bear, and its mouth as a lion’s.” Here we have, not the territories, but certain qualities that resemble all the three first-named Beasts of the prophet Daniel. Satan does not originate, but adopts whatever will suit of that which has been. Hence he endeavours by this most singular amalgamation to bring out in its final phase the Beast or fourth empire (for there is none to succeed), so as to show pretension to everything known of old, as well as evil without parallel.

What is meant by “the Beast”? The imperial system of Rome revived. All the empires refused to recognise God above. Man was made to own Him, and he 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. A beast does not look up but down; it has no sense of an unseen superior, no conscience toward God. “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 conferred on it. No empire has avoided the moral sentence implied in the symbols: expediency has ever guided, not God; but this Beast will go beyond all that have gone before in lawless contempt of God and in blasphemies (vers. 5, 6).

When John wrote, the fourth Beast was in power; 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, a Beast rises up out of the sea answering to the old Roman empire. That is, there will be a state of total confusion in the west, and an imperial power will rise up. “And I saw one of its heads as wounded to death; and its deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.” There are sufficient grounds for gathering that the wounded head was the imperial form of power. After having been long extinct, 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; a French, or a

Teutonic kingdom, or any other of large space and population; but the revival of the Roman empire will take the world by surprise. The grounds of this assertion, however, depend on Rev. 17, which will appear in its place. Vers. 5, 6 define its character and duration.

It is not simply that the empire had the distinctive heads and horns of the Roman empire, with qualities by-and-by that belonged to the previous empires; it was marked by the revival of imperialism at the close under Satan's authority. For "they did homage to the dragon, because he gave the authority to the beast: and they did homage to the beast, saying, Who [is] like the beast, and who is able to war with him?" It is evident from the context that an apostate and idolatrous state appears in the world. The dragon and the Beast are alike set up against God. This first Beast represents the western empire. The religious chief will not be in the west but in Jerusalem, and becomes, as we learn elsewhere, a special object of worship in the temple of God there at the close, as 2 Thessalonians 2 indicates, as well as Daniel 11:36-38. He is the second Beast of our chapter.

This is a difficulty to some, because it is distinctly said that the man of sin will not tolerate any other object of worship. But these wicked personages work together, and are allies. 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 due to the others. It is in vain for any to pretend to honour the Father without the Son, and he that worships the Father and the Son can only pay it in the power of the Holy Ghost. When we worship God as such, when we say "God," not Father only is

meant, but the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. So precisely is 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, consistent with divine worship paid to the man of sin, the contrast to “Jesus Christ the Righteous.” They are, as has often been said with justice, the great counter-trinity, the trinity of evil creatures as opposed to the Trinity of the Godhead. The devil is clearly the source of it all; but the public leader of his power politically is the first Beast; and the grand religious agent, who works out crafty plans and even miracles in its support, is the second Beast of this chapter, or the man of sin in the great prophetic Epistle.

This appears to be the true and mutual bearing of all, if we bow to these scriptures. Differences of thought exist here as in almost everything else. But in a world of doubt objection to it has no force. The only question is, What best satisfies the word of God? what most faithfully answers not merely to its letter but its grand principles? So far from any real obstacle in the fact of these three different objects being alike honoured in worship, the force and awful nature of the case cannot well be understood unless this is seen as the revealed truth.

At this time it is 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 fully exposed to his hatred. The tabernacle above may be blasphemed, and those that dwell there Satan may revile, but cannot even accuse them longer before God. He turns therefore to deadly persecution on the earth. “And it was given him

to make war with the saints" (clearly these are not in heaven), "and to overcome them; and authority was given him over every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation. And all that dwell upon the earth shall do him homage." There is an invariable distinction between the Gentiles at large in the world, and "those that dwell on the earth." The difference is that the former class is a broader term, embracing the world generally; whereas by the latter is meant the narrower sphere, whose character of earthliness is the more decided, because they had heard and hated the heavenly testimony of Christ and the church. Names and forms 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 working toward it now. The stream flows forward to this earthly and godless issue. Never since the gospel was preached were men more thoroughly settling down in the endeavour to make earth their paradise. They consequently forget heaven day by day, only thinking of it as a necessity when they die, and cannot avoid leaving the world. But as for habitually turning to heaven, as a hope full of joy or glory, still less as in faith a present home for the affections, whenever was it less livingly kept in the minds and hearts of men? One lack accounts for it all: Christ is not all, but the heart is divided between the first man and the Second. Such unbelief prepares for the designation given to the people that did hear of heaven, but deliberately at last give up all its hopes to settle down on the earth. They dwell on the earth. The others are "every tribe, and people, and

tongue, and nation," who have heard comparatively little about the gospel. The Beast will endeavour to deal with both. Alas! "all that dwell upon the earth shall do homage to him, whose name is not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain."

Carefully bear in mind that "from the foundation of the world" belongs not to "slain," but to the writing of the name. The Lamb was not slain from the foundation of the world, though there was the eternal purpose; but the name was written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain. Compare Revelation 17:8, where the omission of the slain Lamb makes the true connection plain and certain.

"If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that is for captivity, into Captivity he goeth." It is a statement to guard the saints from taking power into their own hands. They might cry to God, they might ask Him to arise and judge the earth; but they were not to resist evil. As the Beast would take power, so should he suffer the consequence. He might; lead into captivity, but into captivity he goes. He might kill with the sword, but so he must be killed himself: indeed his would be a far more awful doom. Patience, with this retributive sanction annexed, is put 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 only too natural. "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. "And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and it had two lamb-like horns, and it spoke as a dragon.

And it exerciseth all the authority of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and those that dwell in it to do homage to the first beast, whose death-wound was healed. And he worketh great signs, that he should cause even fire to come down out of the heaven unto the earth in the sight of men. And he deceiveth those that dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to work before the beast, saying to those that dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast that hath the stroke of the sword and lived. And it was given him to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as should not do homage to the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free and the bondmen, that they should have a mark given them on their right hand or upon their forehead, and that no one should be able to buy or sell, save he that hath the mark, the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast; for it is a man's number, and his number [is] six hundred [and] sixty-six."

This calls for more attention, because there is danger of some confusion and difficulty on this subject. Let it be observed that the second Beast more particularly resembles in wickedness what the Lord Jesus is in goodness. It is indeed a "Beast"; that is, he affects to be a composite system of power, though outwardly on a far smaller scale than the first Beast. Still it is a Beast, and not merely a horn; he has two, indeed, of peculiar character. "He had two horns like a lamb." There was the pretence of resembling the Messiah, and it would appear, not in priestly but in prophetic and kingly power.

But “he spoke as a dragon.” There was really the expression of Satan. — “And he exercises all the authority of the first brass in his presence.” Thus the second Beast is the more energetic of the two, and the active instrument of the darkest evil, the man of sin who denies the Man of righteousness, Christ Jesus.

So it has been when enormous wickedness has been forged for this world. Its promoters, the persons that exercise the influence (sometimes unseen, sometimes publicly), put religion forward as the rule. The religion of the earth is the prolific source of all the worst evil done under the sun. How different the wisdom that cometh down from above to form in Christ the service and the worship of the saints! The devil could not accomplish his plans if there was not such a thing as earthly religion. Is not this an awful and solemn fact for those that have the smallest connection with it?

The second Beast or Antichrist 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. Then he exercises all the authority of the first Beast before him, that is, in his presence, and with his full sanction. And he makes the earth and those that dwell in it to do homage to the first Beast. For there is a full understanding between them. In 2 Thessalonians 2 we do not hear of this, but that he claims worship, and is himself worshipped as God. No priest as such affects any claim of the sort. He arrogates no less to himself, sitting down in the temple of God and showing himself that he is God.

It makes the whole matter plain, if we remember that the first Beast leads the Roman empire, but as revived

with a seat restricted to the west. On the other hand, the second Beast, though in league with the first Beast he may mislead men far and wide, claims for himself the land of Palestine with a Jewish form of glory. If one look into 2 Thessalonians 2 it is clear 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 take care to read scripture with scripture. If one treat 2 Thessalonians 2 as giving all that the Bible tells about the man of sin, scripture is foreclosed, and one must have an imperfect account. On the other hand, if we take only Revelation 13, we shall want certain elements necessary for completing the sketch. All this is arranged with consummate wisdom by God, because He does not wish us to read only one part of His word, but that we should thoroughly search into every other. He does not give a proper understanding of holy writ, unless we confide therein and value all that He has given us. Consequently it is only by putting together these scriptures, as to which there is ample light for our guidance, that we can in our measure enter into His mind.

As the first part of the chapter brings before us a mighty external power identifiable with the Roman empire, equally certain is it that 2 Thessalonians 2 describes not a merely civil system so much as a religious power. An utterly lawless personage is the man of sin, but still essentially a religious power with the highest claim. It arrogates to itself Christ's place and the reverence that belongs to God. Now this is precisely what characterises the second Beast. It had two horns. Their character is connected with the whole testimony of John. For any one

who has looked into his Gospel will see that, even as to our blessed Lord Himself, its general bent is to trace what He was on earth, rather than what He is in heaven, where is His proper and unquestionable priesthood for the heavenly saints, in contrast with Aaron's on earth for the earthly people. There are exceptional passages, no doubt; but while Paul's object directs us to Christ in heaven as the special character of his witness, John on the contrary draws particular attention to what He was on earth.

This is not without importance for the meaning of these two horns. The Lord Jesus was the great prophet on earth; and assuredly He will reign as king over all the earth. But what lies between? He is priest; but He is priest in heaven (Heb. 8:4). Accordingly it is not the place of John but of Paul to bring out the heavenly priesthood of Christ. John never directly treats of Christ above as Priest or as Head. He dwells on His advocacy there (which has an aim quite distinct from His priesthood) in Rev. 13, and again on His coming to take us above in Rev. 14, as parts of Rev. 17 and 20 too are exceptions. But the general teaching of John is on Christ manifesting God here below; as no less clearly Paul's doctrine is man in Him glorified above.

But when the Antichrist appears, he does not take the place of priest; far higher will be his assumption. He sets up to be the Prophet that should come, and the great King, imitating what Messiah was expected to be for Israel. He has two horns, not seven. It is a lame imitation; he has not at all the full power of Christ. In the Lord we saw perfection of power and fulness of wisdom for government. In the Antichrist there is the pretension to what belonged to Christ connected with

the earth, with the most marked absence of what pertains to Him in heaven.

This is no mean evidence, by the way, that the idea of finding in the papacy 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 the corruption of what is heavenly, not Messianic. Popery is much more the antichurch than the Antichrist. But when Revelation 13 is fulfilled, no question can be of the church here any longer. The Christian body will be no more seen on earth; the saints of the high places who had been here will then be on high.

Accordingly it is not a mere sham clothing with the priestly power of Christ which the Antichrist puts on, but a false assumption of His prophetical place which was on the earth, and of His kingly sphere which will also be thereon. This personage with two horns like a lamb 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, exercising all the authority of the first Beast in his sight. Besides this, he does a vast deal on his own account which the Roman emperor could not do. 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 then came down and consumed the sacrifice of old, God demonstrating as clearly that Baal was not God as that Jehovah is so. So the second Beast will do wonders, if not really, "before men." Thus he deceives them that dwell on the earth by reason of those

signs which it was given him to work before the Beast. The signs were in their sight.

All this marks the Antichrist. The first Beast works no miracles whatever; he astonishes the world by reviving the long dead western empire: but this is a different thing, and cannot properly be called a sign. It may and will amaze men, but is no proper miracle. The Beast out of the earth, who is incomparably more subtle than the first, works great signs; no doubt it is by Satan's energy, but still he works them. The consequence is that he deceives those that dwell on the earth, saying to them especially "to make an image to the beast, which hath the stroke of the sword, and lived." More than this, we read that "it was given him to give breath 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." Whatever shame be the boast of liberty, as at the first French Revolution, the real future will be the most ruthless and despotic oppression to death over all who do not bow down, not only to the Beast, but to his image that is made by diabolical power or trickery to pronounce sentence like a judge.

The various guesses made respecting the number of the Beast are inadequate. It may be one of those secrets that cannot be unravelled until the person appears, when at least "the wise" shall understand. That we are to understand it now is more than we ought to assume. What moral profit could it serve? Assuredly everything that can edify and refresh the soul, all 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 now from the Revelation rightly

understood. Indeed we ought thus to gather more than those who are to be in the circumstances can 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 this may be just one of those points in which the Lord does not now gratify men's minds. Many explanations which have been offered entirely and obviously fail; for instance, "apostasy" and such like. "Apostasy" is not the number of a man; nor for similar reasons can "apostate" stand, nor perhaps "the Latin man."

Revelation 14

Next we come to chapter 14, where we have neither the counsels of God as opposed by Satan (hitherto in heaven to accuse before God, but at that day cast down unto earth), nor the plan and instruments by which Satan gives battle to those divine counsels. This we have had in Revelation 12 and Revelation 13. But now we enter on another line of things. What is God doing with and for His own? Nothing? Impossible! He does what is active in good for His then purposes. God 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 to which this chapter naturally lends itself.

The first is a full numbered multitude separated to the Lamb on mount Zion. It is no repetition of the sealed company in Revelation 7, no mere securing out of the twelve-tribed whole. Judah had a guilt which Ephraim,

far away, did not share; and grace there works, as one might say, “beginning at Jerusalem.” 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” is said, 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 at Zion 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 into view before the close. It answers more to the style of David than to the settled reign of peace in Solomon’s day. But how unintelligent to fancy that these out of Judah any more than the scaled out of Israel in chap. vii. are Christians! It is opposed, not only by internal reasons but by the structure of the book, which shows the heavenly saints changed and with the Lord Jesus (chap. 4). These saints are expressly in verse 3 distinct from the crowned elders, like the Gentile crowd in Rev. 7:9-17.

“And I saw, and, behold, the Lamb stood upon the mount Zion, and with him a hundred [and] forty-four thousand, having his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.” They are associated with the earth-rejected Messiah; and in the vision they are seen with Him on mount Zion. It is not a question of “their” Father. No such relationship is ever found in the Apocalypse, but the Lamb’s name and “his Father’s name written on their foreheads.”

“And I heard a voice out of the heaven, as a voice of many waters, and as a voice of great thunder; and the voice which I heard [was] as of harpers harping with their harps; and they sing as a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders: and no one could learn the song but the hundred [and] forty-four thousand that had been bought from the earth. These are they who were not defiled with women; for they are virgins.” They had not corrupted themselves; and the Lamb was their leader. With Babylonish wickedness they had nothing to do; pure in spirit they were 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 blameless.” “Before the throne of God” is spurious.

Such is the first action of God. It forms a complete remnant, not from the twelve tribes of Israel, such as we saw in Rev. 7, nor simply sealed for security against providential judgments. This is particularly out of Jews proper; first-fruits to God and the Lamb, gathered out from those guilty of His rejection. Now God answers all that and other wickedness by this merciful and honourable separation to the Lamb, who is about to be installed in His royal seat on mount Zion. They not only follow Him as Messiah, but as the holy Sufferer and rejected One.

The next scene gives us an angel with a message to Gentiles. “And I saw another angel fly in mid heaven, having an everlasting gospel to preach to those that sit on the earth, and unto every nation, and tribe, and tongue, and people.” Why is it called “everlasting”?

Remember that the gospel as now preached is a special gospel in character, fulness, and time, in no way an “everlasting” gospel. Nobody ever heard the gospel of the grace of God till Jesus died, rose, and went to heaven. 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 His grace as we know it is never in scripture called an “everlasting gospel.” Do not most use these terms without thinking what they really mean? When they speak of the “everlasting gospel,” they have probably a vague notion that it connects us with eternity. They think it a grand and worthy epithet, conveying one really knows not what. It is a mistake, if scripture is to decide.

“Everlasting gospel” means what it says: those glad tidings which always have been and always will be true. Whatever else God has made known to man, this has always abode unchanging. The glad tidings of God since man fell were that He purposed, by the woman’s Seed, Christ Jesus, to bless man and to crush Satan. Even the end of all things will proclaim the selfsame thing. The millennium will be the display and demonstrative testimony to it. When judgment in every form is over, in the new heavens and the new earth man will be thoroughly and for ever blest, and God will be with them, their God.

The declaration of this truth, as here described, is an everlasting gospel. In the latter day it will act as setting aside the lie of Satan, who puts and would fain keep man in a position of estrangement from God. For He is

morally forced to be the judge of men, instead of being the blesser of all that believe on the earth. All misrepresentation of God is the fruit of Satan's wiles; but the everlasting gospel presents God as the blesser of man and creation. This was His word ere sin entered, and this He will certainly bring to pass (not of course for every individual). Alas! most listen to Satan and despise God's mercy in Christ, especially such as having heard reject the gospel of His grace. And these are lost for ever. But God is love as surely as He is light: what ought He to be to all who persistently by grace honour both the Son and the Father?

The way in which the subject is spoken of here confirms this. "Fear God, 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 those that turn from God to all the vanities of the nations, as ready to trust in the creature as to distrust the true God. "And do homage to him that made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" It is the universal message of God to man, founded on His creative glory. The solemn threat of His speedy judgments is a ground for pressing on the defiled conscience 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 us consider why it is to be so. Men conjecture out of their own position and judge from their own circumstances. But none can understand aright as long as he reasons and concludes thus. Not so is any part of the Bible understood, 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 as Christians? We only glorify our God and Father just so far as we as children look up to Him as our Father, and as saints own Him as our God. This is surely true.

But here we no longer find Christians on earth There are elect Jews; there are nations preached to, along with "those that sit [or, are settled] on the earth." That is, there are men in fixed unbelief under this designation, as well as the mass of 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. They are called to fear God and give glory to Him and this is on the footing that He is Judge, just about to deal with His own world. He calls upon them to do homage to the Creator, away from the idolatry of those that worship the creature.

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 and educated orders of this country to drag into it the lower also. In the humbler classes their gross love for sensible objects, pleasant sounds, impressive processions, and striking shows prepares them for it. But there is the active instilling of a spirit, no doubt more subtle and refined among educated men, which 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: the excessive cultivation of art, music, flower-shows, the revival of Greek plays and aesthetics generally, perhaps of the Olympic games, etc. On these dangerous tracks all that is now energetically leavening the world tends to bring man back to heathenism again. The truth of Christ is to their minds severe and exclusive. How much more "light and sweetness" to have a Pantheon for Him and all other objects of veneration! Schiller strove for it, and Goethe with his maxim of "the good of evil," and Max Müller with his philosophy of religions.

However this may sound to those most confident in their unbelief, we must remember that another cause of a most solemn nature is plainly revealed: God is going to pour out a judicial delusion on Christendom. It is what the apostle calls the apostasy, or "falling away"; and it is at hand. He will not only inflict severe blows of judgment but give men up to believe a lie — the great lie of the devil — the easy-going god of indifference to man, if indeed there be a god. The great truth of all times is that God, the Creator of all, the God who has now revealed Himself in Christ and by redemption, alone is the due object of worship and service. So far then is this message from being a strange thing, that it appears exactly suitable to man as he will then be situated, and is no less appropriate to God's wisdom and goodness.

Another consideration perhaps may help some as connected with this and confirmatory of it, founded on the last part of Matthew 25, where all the nations are called up before the Son of Man when He sits as King on the throne of His glory. Surely this cannot be in heaven but on earth: how could "all the nations" be seen on high? 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 of hostile indifference, will be owned by the Lord when He judges the quick. It is no use for people to call it the general judgment, or the judgment of our works. It has nothing to do with us who believe on Him now. The one principle before us in this scripture is His dealing with the living Gentiles, or all nations according to their ways with His brethren. To act aright then will require real power of God through grace. The pressure against His messengers at that time will be enormous. If any receive them well, it will be from faith, however small may be the measure of their faith. That to honour His brethren is virtually to honour Himself, they had not themselves known. 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 Himself! When men are raised from the dead, they know as they are known; but these are the nations alive in flesh. Compare Matthew 24:14.

Certainly these Gentiles were wrought in by divine grace, yet evidently they are far from what is called “intelligent.” How often must one beware of making too much of this! What a constant snare it is to slip into unconscious or inconsiderate criticism! Men are apt to give themselves an exaggerated importance on the score of their knowledge. God attaches a far higher value to the heed paid to the Lord Himself, and to those He sends out. It is a crucial test. Then most of all it will be so, because these messages will go forth to the nations on the earth before the end comes. Growingly lifted up

and self-satisfied, the nations are summoned by Jewish messengers (poor and contemptible in most eyes), who will solemnly proclaim the kingdom just at hand; for the King is coming in person to judge the quick apart from and before the judgment of the dead. Some souls here and there will receive them, not only treating them in love, but this because they receive the message. The power of the Spirit alone gives them faith. None less than God Himself inclines their heart. Accordingly the Lord here refers to its reception, with the grace that accompanied it, as evidence of their heeding Himself in the persons of His brethren, the messengers.

This is similar to, if not the same as, the everlasting gospel. It is called by Matthew the “gospel of the kingdom.” The “gospel of the kingdom” and the “everlasting gospel” are substantially like. In the Revelation it is thus described, because it was always in the purpose of God, through the bruised Seed of the woman, to crush the foe 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 of a kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world. S. John, it would seem, calls it an “everlasting gospel,” because it is in contrast with special messages from time to time (Heb. 4:2), as well as with all that had to do with man as he is here below. At this most corrupt time the suited glad tidings 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 an everlasting gospel to 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. Both point, as do other visions of

the book, to the various operations of God's goodness, and to the different groups of blessing He will form. Is it incredible that God should thus work in honour of Christ the Lamb? How good is the God we adore!

The third section, which may be passed over with comparatively few words, is the warning of Babylon's fall. "And another, a second angel, followed, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, which hath made all nations drink of the wine of the fury of her fornication." It is the first notice of man's mock-church, once and long the chief source of ecclesiastical corruption, and still further lapsing into Gentile abominations in the future. But we shall hear in due time unmistakable marks and instructive details of an object so repulsive to God, and so deceptive for the natural man.

The fourth is a warning of fatal danger from the Beast. "And the third angel followed them, saying with a great voice, If any one doeth homage to the beast and his image, and receiveth a mark on his forehead, or upon his hand, he also shall drink of the wine of the fury of God, that hath been mingled unmixed in the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone before the holy angels and before the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up unto ages of ages: and they have no rest day and night, who do homage to the beast and his image, and if any one receiveth the mark of his name." So far these divine dealings go in pairs; as the work among the Jews, and then a final testimony to the Gentiles (though here we have angelic intervention, not in the first case); next is sent the warning about Babylon, and another yet more urgent about the Beast. "Here is the endurance of the saints, that keep the commandments of God and the

faith of Jesus." Grace and love could guard them, though they be confessors of a faith by no means up to the measure of the "one faith" of Christians, but suited of God to their day.

Then comes the fifth, which is very 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 since Rev. 4, 5) are on the eve of blessedness, not by personal exemption but by sharing the first resurrection and the reign with Christ, which terminates 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 the heaven saying, Write, Blessed [are] the dead which die in [the] Lord, from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; for their works 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 the next scene runs, "And I saw, and, behold, a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sitting son-of-man-like, 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 to reap is come; for the harvest of the earth is dried. And he that sat upon the cloud thrust (or, put) his sickle upon the earth; and the earth was reaped." It is not here a question of gathering in. One Son-of-Man-like is seen with the crown of gold, King of righteousness, not yet

manifested as King of peace, which will surely follow in its season (Heb. 7:2).

Then comes the close of all these things. “And another angel came out of the temple that [is] in the heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the altar, that had authority over the fire; and called with a great voice 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 further. How growingly intense is the repeated “sharp sickle”! For the harvest the call was out of the temple; here it is out of the temple that is in the heaven. It is not only wrath on earth but from heaven. 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). O ye that idolise forms and rites, postures and impostures, beware; yours is not worship in spirit and truth! Could an apostle if here recognise you as keeping the unity of the Spirit, So much the more tremendous is His vengeance on the earthly religionists who despise Christ and the cross in word and in deed. This angel has authority over the fire, the sign of detective and consuming judgment. “And the angel put his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and put [it] into the great winepress of the fury of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress unto the bridles of the horses for a thousand six hundred stades” (or furlongs).

In short then, if we sum up this series we have here the harvest and the vintage, the two great forms of divine judgment at the close: the harvest being that judgment which discerns between the just and the unjust; and the

vintage being the infliction of unmingled wrath on apostate religion, “the vine of the earth,” the object of God’s special abhorrence. For in plain and direct terms we have seven distinct acts in which God will interfere in the way, first of grace for a double testimony; then of warnings to the world; next also of comfort as to His deceased; finally of judging the evil results, as far as the quick are concerned, at the advent of the Son of Man.

Here closes the striking series of Rev. 12 - 14, which are not in historical sequence of the successive Trumpets, or at least of the seventh, but go back to give us the secret springs of the crisis to which we were brought generally in the seventh Trumpet, the plans of Satan when he lost access to heaven for ever, and what God meanwhile does for His glory to the end of the age. Then we resume a fresh and final septenary of divine inflictions, the seven last Bowls of God’s fury to be poured out on man’s apostate and impenitent iniquity.

Revelation 15

A peculiar scene is described in chaps. 15, 16. On this one we need not now bestow more than a few words. Thus it connects itself with what came before us in Rev. 11:15-18. Still more plainly it contains that which is shown us in Rev. 17, 18, the judgment of Babylon. “And I saw another sign in the heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having seven strokes, the last; for in them is finished the fury [ὁ Θυμὸς] of God.” You will observe that it is not yet the Lord’s appearing. This is of importance to show the structure of this portion of the book. We must carefully beware of supposing that the seven Bowls or Vials are after the Son of Man is come for the harvest and the vintage of the earth, which are at

the end. We must go back, therefore, not to the beginning of Rev. 14 but before its last acts. The last of the Bowls, or the seventh, is the fall of Babylon. This judgment of course corresponds with the third dealing of God in Rev. 14. The first is the separation of the godly Jewish remnant; the second, an everlasting gospel to the Gentiles; and the third, the fall of Babylon. Thus the last Bowl of wrath only brings us up to the same point. Hence the Bowls must not in any way be supposed to follow after Rev. 14, but only after its earlier part at the utmost. This is important, because each true landmark helps 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 appears. It synchronises with the third out of seven consecutive acts in 14. The end of Rev. 16 does not in point of time fall lower than the third step in those of Rev. 14. The fifth from its nature is not a judgment,. but a comfort peculiarly seasonable at that juncture. Certainly the fourth, sixth, and seventh parts of Rev. 14 are events necessarily subsequent to the seven Bowls of God's wrath, which close before the Son of Man appears.

Let us look then a little into the subject. "And I saw as a sea of glass." 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 needs and defilements. A sea of glass would not avail for those who required the washing of water by the word. Their immunity is indicated by that symbol. This is not only intelligible but even plain. When the glorified saints are caught up to

heaven, they no longer want what was set forth by the laver and its water to purify. The sea of glass attests that the purity was henceforth fixed. The fact is that they were outside and above the earth, where water is needed to cleanse the daily defilements. It is not blood we need for a perpetual standing, but the daily application of the washing of water by the word. If the Advocate wash not our feet, then have we no part with Him.

Here it is not merely a sea of glass, but mingled with fire. What does this teach? That these saints passed through the 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 hearing. If people ask, Are the saints to pass through the time of tribulation? the right answer is this, What saints are meant? Those represented by the elders were caught up to heaven at Christ's coming before that time. Scripture is positive. If one only means that saints called afterwards pass through that day of inflicted trial, it is unquestionable. In short we have only to distinguish persons and times, and all becomes plain: by confounding the two all is made a mass of obscurity. But scripture cannot be broken.

"And those that come conquerors from the beast, and from his image, and from the number of his name, standing, upon 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 association with the elders here. It is a closing scene of fearful trial'. This is important The only victors here noticed are confined to

the time when Satan's last plans will be consummated. These are seen, as a sign in heaven, delivered if they died before the Beast falls. At the least 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 those who refused to bow.

It will be recollected that according to Rev. 6 the first sufferers who died for the truth were to wait for another company to be killed as they were. But it is a mistake on every ground to interpret either the one chapter or the other as of Christ and the church. So with those standing upon the sea of glass mingled with fire. The structure of the book proves each to be a special company, and all distinct from the twenty-four elders, who really do represent the entire aggregate of those that rise at Christ's coming Although these joyful sufferers may have fallen under the enemy's hand, they really come off victors, and are here seen standing on the sea of glass having harps of God. It was therefore rightly styled "mingled with fire"; for this tribulation transcends all before. Their melody in praise of the Lord was none the worse for the sea of fiery trial through which they pass into His presence. The harps were of God, not man's.

"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 or true sense of the word. Assuredly they are saints most really, but they had not such relations as now subsist spiritually; they knew not the bond which is made good by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in those who are now associated with Christ.

So exclusive is it for us that those who were under Moses are under him no more; they own no master or head but Christ. The souls of whom we here read 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 the Almighty; righteous and true [are] thy ways, O King" — not "of saints" but — "of the nations."

There is beyond doubt no such thought or phrase in scripture as "King of saints." It is one of the worst readings of the rather vicious Text. Rec. of the Revelation. Not only is it against the best witnesses, but it conveys an unfounded notion of mischievous consequence For what can go more to destroy in principle and practice the proper relationship of the saints to 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 a connection that pertains to the new man. Besides, even 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 all may 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 the Gentiles" or "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 King of nations, as the Jewish prophet fully recognised of old.

“Who shall not fear [thee], O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only [art] holy (or, gracious): for all the nations shall come and do homage before thee.” Here again it is not Israel, but all the nations shall come. “For thy righteousnesses were manifested.” They anticipate the triumph reserved for God in the day of power and glory at Christ’s second advent.

“And after these things I saw, and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in the heaven was opened: and out of the temple came the seven angels that had the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and girded about their breasts with golden girdles And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the fury of God that 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 strokes 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 temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in the heaven (not yet on earth); and judgments follow on apostate Gentiles, not the revelation of the divine counsels touching Israel. Doubtless the mass or many of the Jews worship at this time the man of sin in the ostensible temple of God, as it was historically and to their extreme guilt. But truly before God this house, which the Lord left in His day as “their house” and “desolate” indeed, will then be Satan’s house beyond any other on earth.

Revelation 16

In chapter 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 sphere of Rome. The whole apostate region is smitten, and with yet more severity. “And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go and pour out the seven bowls of the fury of God unto the earth. And the first went, and poured out his bowl unto the earth, and it became an evil and grievous sore upon the men that had the mark of the beast, and those that did homage to his image.” Here it is God’s hand smiting with utter pain the men who were either slaves or worshippers of the Beast, though it resembled the plagues on Egypt, not yet the destruction in the Red Sea.

“And the second poured his bowl into the sea; and it became blood as of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea.” The infliction here fell on the unsettled and revolutionary state outside “the earth” of the preceding stroke. Spiritual rather than physical death is meant.

Then follows another stroke. “And the third poured out his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of the waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying, Righteous art thou that art, and wast, the holy (or, gracious) One, because thou didst thus judge; because they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and thou gavest them blood to drink: they are worthy. And I heard the altar saying, Yea, Lord God the Almighty, true and righteous [are] thy judgments.” The moral character and springs on which men think and act become deadly; and this in retribution for the heartless cruelty of Christendom, as at that time also, toward saints and prophets. For God does not forget such ways, however concealed afterwards under tombs, and

statues, and titles of pretended honour, since their death.

“And the fourth poured out his bowl upon the sun; and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. And the men were burnt with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, that had the authority over these plagues, and did not repent to give him glory.” Here it is not the sun, moon, and stars in accord with the great earthquake of the sixth Seal; nor yet their third part darkened as at the fourth Trumpet; but the supreme governing power scorching men beyond endurance. Yet men blaspheme God’s name all the more in the hardness of their impenitent hearts.

There is the usual order, as we have seen in the other series of seven judgments: four, and then three to follow. All the different departments of nature, whatever may be symbolised by them (and their meaning seems neither indeterminate nor obscure) were to be visited by the Bowls of God’s fury.

The three later Bowls, like the three Woe-trumpets, come to the closest quarters with men, and ever more and more unsparing.

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 throne of the beast; and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven for their pains and for their sores, and repented not of their works” Assuredly this does not agree with the imaginary picture some Futurists have painted of the Beast’s kingdom; any more than some

poets conceive of Satan reigning in hell. We can readily presume that he held out Elysian fields as a bait to his subjects; but on his kingdom darkness fell, and his people gnawed their tongues in their blasphemy against the God of heaven.

Thence we are transported to the east. “And the sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river Euphrates; and its water was dried up, that the way of the kings [that] are from the sun-rising might be prepared.” The Euphrates was the old boundary that separated the empire on its oriental frontiers from the vast hordes of uncivilised 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 to be what the drying up of the great river means. What a striking proof of the orderly structure of the book it is, that here in the sixth Bowl occurs a parenthesis, as we saw at the same point of the sixth Seal and of the sixth Trumpet!

“And I saw out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. For they are the spirits of demons, working signs, which go forth unto the kings (not ‘of the earth and’) of the whole habitable world, to gather them to the war of the great day of God the Almighty.” The three unclean spirits express the hatred of the dragon as the personal enemy of Christ, of the resurrection Beast from the pit or the revived Roman empire, and of the false prophet or Antichrist in the land. 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

or 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 (or, he) gathered them together unto the place called in the Hebrew tongue Harmagedon.” Compare Judges 5:19, 20. From verses 13 to 16 is the parenthesis in this septenary, as always.

Here it may be seasonable to point out the difference, in principle as in fact, which distinguishes the first act in the Lord’s coming again for the heavenly saints, from the second which applies to Israel and the earth. We are to be caught up to meet Him who will present us in the Father’s house. The godly Jews in the day of His appearing are to be delivered at what seems to be the last gasp by His destruction of their Gentile foes and of their own apostate brethren, when He descends to establish the kingdom in power and glory over all the earth.

Lastly comes the seventh angel, who deals with the world still more decidedly and universally by pouring out on the air. “And the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of the heaven, from the throne, saying, It is come. And there were lightnings, and voices, and thunders; and there was a great earthquake,” not only vast but unexampled, “such as was not since men were on the earth, such an earthquake, so great.” Clearly therefore judgment from heaven becomes yet more crushing in its blows on man here below. For the Bowl was poured on that which acts immediately on all here below, and is most essential to health and life.

“And the great city came (

ἐγένετο) into three parts; and the cities of the nations fell; and great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled, and mountains were not found. And a great hail as of a talent-weight cometh down out of the heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the stroke of the hail, for its stroke is exceeding great." "The great city" is civilisation in its general extent, and is distinguished from "the cities of the nations" (that is, of the nations outside "the great city") that fell in their local centres; but "great Babylon" is envenomed by that implacable cruelty which is inseparable from worldly religion, its corruption and idolatries. God did not forget her course who had long departed from His grace and truth. This enables us to put the warning of the fall of Babylon into its true place in the sevenfold series of God's dealings in Rev. 14. The end of chap. 16 brings us there, but goes no farther. It stops short of the Lord's appearing. None of these varied intimations could be spared without loss, though the hasty mind of man may count them strange and disorderly.

11 The true reading is uncertain, as it turns on a letter easily added or dropped. The three best uncials, two cursives, and most of the ancient versions support the third person; BP, the mass of cursives, the Memph., etc., the first person. Here Tisch. even in his last edition yields to the weight of the internal grounds in deciding for the latter.

Revelation 17-20

Revelation 17

It is necessary to bear in mind, if we have not observed it before, that Revelation 17 does not pursue the chronological course of the prophecy. It is an episode of special objects already treated, not being of the visions that carry us onward in historic sequence. It is a retrogressive description of Babylon in relation with the Beast and the kings, who were brought before us last under the Bowls of God's wrath.

This chapter explains how it was that Babylon became so offensive to God, and wherefore He judged her thus sternly; while the destroying Beast and his horns await the breath and sword of the Lord's mouth.. In giving the description of Babylon, the Holy Spirit enters yet more into an account of her relations with the powers, and gives important particulars of that imperial system of which Rev. 13 in its earlier verses told us not a little. Accordingly these are the two main objects of judgment brought before us in the chapter. Indeed the Beast's judgment carries us beyond all into defeat under the hand of the Lamb, the details of which are reserved for chap. 19. We must therefore look now into the two objects, Babylon and the Beast.

The principle is clear. Man has always sinned in one or other of these two ways, looking now at evil in its broadest forms. The "strange woman" figures corruption, human nature indulging itself in its own selfish desires, irrespective of God's will. The Beast is the expression of man's will raising itself up in direct

antagonism to God. In short one may be described as corruption, and the other as violence; for we see both before the deluge (Gen. 6:11, 12), and they go down to the close. More than this on the subject is given with great precision in scripture, because it is just the principle of sin in one or other form from the beginning.

Here then we read, “And one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, Come hither; I will show thee the judgment of the great harlot that sitteth upon the many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and they that dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.”

“And he carried me away in Spirit into a wilderness.” It is a thorough waste as to the knowledge or enjoyment of God. So in Isaiah 21 the prophet opens the chapter with that which was far beyond the horizon of the keenest creature view: “the burden of the wilderness of the sea,” so different from the burden which he saw and gave in Rev. 13, 14, as “the golden city.” Hence some refer a “wilderness” here to the campagna of Rome, and its desolation under the Popes as contrasted with its prosperous and populous splendour under the Caesars. This is no doubt true and significant, though spiritual drought and dreariness seem more consonant to the Spirit’s expression.

A new symbol appears. “And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet-coloured beast,” the well-known emblem of the Roman empire, “full of names of blasphemy” in its wicked opposition to God, and invested with its special forms of power, but with a full combination, “having seven heads and ten horns.” For the Spirit of God

regards it in its final shape and completeness, as far as it was to be attained. “And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and decked (or, gilded) with gold and precious stone and pearls.’ Nor is it perhaps unworthy of note, as has been remarked, that her officials alone in Christendom array themselves in these colours of the world’s glory.

Babylon is in direct contrast with the true church, and like the Lord, heavenly glory hers, but meanwhile despised and rejected of men. Everything that could attract the natural man was there; and all that which looks fairest ought to be, she thinks, devoted to religion. Religion! Ah! it is nothing but ecclesiastical pride and corruption as a whole, though individuals may groan in secret, shrinking back into base superstition through alarm at Protestant free thought or worldliness; a religion of grace and truth unknown, of indulgences in sin for money, of dogmatic falsehood like transubstantiation or papal infallibility, of the most bloodthirsty cruelty to real saints of God, of debasing honour to filthy relics, of blasphemous worship paid to saints, angels, and above all the Virgin. Granted that Rome holds a little that is true; but she is keener still for many a lie and fraud; and “no lie is of the truth,” says God’s word.

But here we see more, “having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and the unclean things of her fornication.”12 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. “And upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth.” Her outward grandeur in numbers, rank,

wealth, and pomp impose on high and low; but the plague-spot is her idolatry. As Israel's was against the One God, so hers is more guiltily against the One Mediator, the divine and only remedy in grace and truth.

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 her relation to the Beast, and by other particulars to be shown 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 empire, Jerusalem was and is trodden down by it and other Gentile powers. If there was any nation since John's day, which did not sustain but persecute and suppress Jerusalem, it was Rome, instead of presenting a gaudy harlot mounted on the proud and heartless empire.

The notion that what we have here is said of a future city of Babylon in Chaldea seems no less vain. There is a distinct contrast between the city now described 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 or hills. There is no doubt more in the symbol than the literal hills of Rome, because they are said to be also seven kings or governing powers. Yet 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. And the second sense of

these mountains is as inapplicable to a Chaldean city as the first.

The attempt to apply Babylon to ancient Rome is further 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. Any decem-regal division of the broken empire in the west was long after Rome had ceased to be heathen. Nobody can dispute that there arose a remarkable cluster of kingdoms in Europe, as the issue providentially of the fragments when the barbarians broke up the unity of the Roman empire. With that love of freedom which they carried from their wild forests, they destroyed the iron rule that bound men down, and set up their several kingdoms in the different parts of the dismembered empire. Thus the attempt to apply it during the pagan period is altogether futile on the face of the matter. Scripture affords much light to decide the true bearing of the prophecy; and no application to the past can possibly satisfy all the conditions satisfactorily. If ancient times fail fully to meet the requirements of the chapter, it is evident that the Middle Ages passed without any accomplishment as a whole; the Beast, in any consistent sense of the thing and word, was then non-existent. For the fulfilment 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 it is not denied 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 the full character of Babylon was manifested as here portrayed is another matter. We may surely say her cup was not yet full. Not

yet was that fairly out before men which God foresaw, as it finally provokes His judgment. Again it seems demonstrable that the relation to the Beast, at last 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 old 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 apostasy, still less the manifestation of the lawless one. But much as may have subsisted then, the Spirit here presents as a whole what cannot be found realised at any point of time in the past. We must perforce look for a still more complete development before the Lamb judges the Beast, after the ten horns along with him shall have destroyed Babylon. Did emperor or pope lead in this?

There is another remark to make. It is hard to see how Rome's city, or anything civil connected with it, could be called "mystery." Partly because of this, many excellent men have endeavoured to apply the vision to Romanism; and this religious system has an incomparably nearer connection with the mysterious harlot than anything yet spoken of. 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 truth in the Protestant application of the chapter, as compared with the Praeterist theory of pagan Rome. Yet it will be found imperfect, for reasons which ought to be clear to unbiassed and spiritual minds.

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, constitutes no title to such a name. A “mystery” points to something undiscoverable by the natural mind of man. It is a secret which requires the distinct and fresh light of God to unravel, but which when thus revealed becomes plain So it is with this very Babylon that comes before us. Justly does she gather her title from the old fountain of idols and of nature’s union for power without God. Confusion too is here the characteristic element. The designation is taken from the renowned city of the Chaldeans, the first spot notorious in both respects.

In short it would seem that God has hedged round His own draft of Babylon, so as to make it quits plain that Rome, city and system, figures in the scene. It may be taken to involve mediaeval application, though the full result will not be till the end of the ago. For where was the Beast after the past barbarian irruption and the resulting many-kingdomed state? Again, that it supposes Rome after it had professed the name of Christ is surely 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 of godliness. But here is a mystery altogether different: “Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth. And I saw the woman drunk with the. blood of the saints, and with

the blood of the witnesses of Jesus; and seeing her, I wondered with a great wonder."

Here were joined good and evil in godless union, for the worse, not for the better, an alliance unholy in principle, irremediable therefore in practice, between God and the natural man who substitutes rites for the quickening word of God's grace, for the blood of Christ, and for the power of the Spirit; and who employs the name of the Lord as a cover for gross covetousness, ambition, and cruelty, yet more excessive 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 means the idolatries of the earth, real shameless idolatry too, not merely that subtle working of the idolatrous spirit that Christians had to guard against from early days (1 John 5:21). Here it is the positive worship of the creature besides the Creator, yea, and notoriously more than Him. For who knows not the horrors of Mariolatry? Babylon is the parent of the prostitutes and of the abominations (or, idolatries) of the earth. It is not therefore a question of virtual idols suitable to ensnare children of God, but of that open image worship which is of the earth itself, or rather of him who is the prince of the power of the air, thorough going palpable idolatry. What is the crucifix and the Mass? What the veneration of angels and saints? What the honour paid to dead men's bones, hair, nail-parings, and old clothes? Relics indeed!

Such is God's account of Babylon the great. Take notice of this (which confirms the true application), 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 a great wonder. Had it been simply a persecution from pagan Rome, who could marvel at its contempt of the truth and hatred of those who confess it? That a proud heathen metropolis, devoted to the worship of Mars, of Jupiter, of Venus, and other wicked monstrosities of pagan mythology, should be irritated with the gospel which exposes it all, and should consequently persecute the faithful, must be expected, and is a necessary result, directly that the uncompromising spirit of Christianity was known. Had those who preached said nothing about idol vanities, were they content to present the gospel as a better thing than anything the pagans could boast, the pagans themselves might have acknowledged thus much. Indeed it is pretty well ascertained that there was a discussion among them, even to the suggestion by one of their emperors, whether Christ should not be owned and worshipped in the Pantheon, before Constantine, and not so far from the earlier ages of the gospel. But none ever thought of giving Christ the only place due to Him. For Christ, as the Son of the Father and witnessed by the Holy Spirit, must be not only supreme but exclusive. Nor was anything more repulsive and fatal to paganism in every form than the truth revealed in Christ, which necessarily displaces everything that is not itself, because He is the truth definite and complete. Consequently Christianity, as being directly aggressive on the falsehood of heathenism, was of all things the most obnoxious to Rome. That pagan Rome therefore must set itself against Christianity was to be expected; it could amaze no one.

But the prophet was astounded that a mysterious form of evil, the counter-testimony of the enemy (not

antichrist, but antichurch), could seem, and should be largely accepted as, the holy catholic church of God. He did marvel greatly that Christendom, if not Christianity, should with such a claim become the bitterest of persecutors, more murderously incensed against the witnesses of Jesus and the saints than ever paganism had been in any country or during all ages. This naturally filled him with intense wonder.

“And the angel said to me, Wherefore didst thou wonder? “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 surprising. Therefore says the angel, “I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, that hath13 the seven heads and ten horns. The beast that thou sawest, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose name was not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, beholding the beast that it was, and is not, and shall be present.”

The closing phase 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 convince that, whatever may have been the past conditions of the Beast, here is a future one; and in that future one the Beast 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 abyss. Bad as pagan Rome was, it would be exaggeration 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 the then duty of absolute subjection on the part of Christians to the powers then existing. Of course the application to the Roman empire would be immediate in the mind of any Christian at Rome. No one doubted the character of the emperor; there never had been a worse. Yet God took this very opportunity to lay it en the Christians as their duty to the worldly authority outside and over them. It was ruled generally that the worldly powers were ordained of God. But it is a very different thing to emerge from the abyss.

For there is a time coming when power will cease to be ordained of God. This is the point to which the last phase of the Beast refers. God in His providence did sanction the world-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 or have revoked all such thoughts themselves, but perhaps regard their rule in the world as a thing flowing from the people irrespectively of God. But the day is at hand when Satan will be allowed to have things his own way. For a short time (what a mercy that it is to be only so!) Satan will bring forth an empire suited to his purposes; as it will work on human self-will and the unbelief which denies God and Hi’; truth. It will be not only apostate but openly claiming to be God, and excluding the true God. But if thus it comes up out of the abyss, it is to go into perdition. It is added, “and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose name is not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that it was, and it is not and it shall be present.” “Yet is” is an unfortunate expression, but it is the fault of the bad Greek text of

Erasmus, Stephens, etc. It should be, “and shall be present.”14 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 conundrum in the message whatever. It is all plain and simple reference to the Beast “that it was, and it is not, and it shall be present.”

No wonder that the earthly-minded wonder; for all this will be a great reversal of man’s history and political maxims. There never has been a like experience. What mighty empire has existed, then become extinct, and finally reappeared, with higher pretensions and peculiar power, only to perish with unexampled horrors? 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 look for the resurrection of the empire. The marked difference is that in a dead man’s case it is God who raises him, whereas for the defunct empire not God but the devil will revive it again. Beyond controversy it is so unusual and abnormal a reappearance that it is altogether exceptional in the world’s history. 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 to come out of the abyss. That is, Satan will be the spring of its final rise and strange energy; he, and not God in any way whatever, will give it its character; as also he gives it his power and his throne and great authority.

“Here is the mind that hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And

there (or, they) are seven kings." The double force of the symbol has been already touched on. "The five are fallen, the one is, the other did not yet come." That is, the sixth head (reigning in that day) was the imperial form of government. Can anything of the sort be plainer? It is a time-note of signal value. The seventh should follow for a little; and the seventh was in one respect to be an eighth. "And the beast which was, and is not, even he is an eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into destruction." If in one sense an eighth, in another sense it would be of the seven; "eighth" perhaps, because of its extraordinary resurrection character, yet "one of the seven" because it is outwardly a head of rule again. This explains the wounded head that was afterwards healed. It is of the seven in that point of view, because it is old imperialism; but it is an eighth, because it has a diabolical source and strangely new character when raised up again. There never had been anything of the kind before.

"And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which received no kingdom yet; 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 real Beast or imperial power. It was the destruction of the imperial unity of Rome that gave occasion for the well-known kingdoms (ten, less or more) which the Gothic and other barbarians set up afterwards. We know that sometimes shore were nine or less, sometimes eleven or more; but supposing all this perfectly clear and true according to history, they did

not receive their power as kings for one and the same time 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 divided kingdoms) and the certain fulfilment of the prophecy in the future, when we believe what God has really told us. The language is neither difficult nor 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, but identified with the governing city of Rome. So far they were right. Nor is there any rem reason to wonder at their deriving help from partial light. It was but an imperfect view they had 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 how little a glimpse had they 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 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 gracious, His word rich, full, and deep, is it not sad to see His children satisfied with just

enough to save their souls, or keep them from positive starvation? In presence of grace surely this is not for His glory, any more than for their own blessing. The only right principle in everything is to go to the sources and streams of divine truth, there to seek refreshment and strength and fitness for whatever our God calls us to. Unquestionably He has been of late awakening the attention of His children remarkably to the value of His word, and not least of all to the portion we are now examining.

It is plain that the verse contemplates a new state of things in the future, and neither the Roman power when there was one head of empire, nor the eastern or Byzantine part of it after that partition, still less in the west the state of division under the kings who succeeded the deposition of Augustulus. In the mediaeval 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 subordinate chiefs or vassal kings. This is what drove men to the idea of making the pope to be the Beast. But the idea is wholly insufficient to cover or meet the word of God, which gives clear and strong reasons to prove the mistake of applying this to the pope as its complete meaning or 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, not subsequently when his rule was extinguished. He on the contrary receives his power and they receive theirs for one and the same time. They are contemporaneous.

This disposes of many a web of comments; for we find at once what is simple enough for any child of God who

believes this to be God's word for us to understand. Bringing in history has embroiled the subject; and those who appeal most to its evidence are the men who seem in this to ignore plain 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, ruled by Caesar Augustus, and no such state as that empire divided into ten kingdoms? Of course there must needs be a consultation with the kings, when the kings become an accredited part of that empire, as rulers subordinate to the Beast. But then 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 cast and west, but the broken up state of the west, when there ceased to be an imperial head. But the prophecy points to the Beast revived and the ten subject kings reigning over its western breadth for the same time, before divine judgment destroys them all at the coming of Christ and of His saints with Him. Hence this certainly must be future.

Now 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 feudalism and of liberty. Accordingly they have firmly stood for freedom; so that all efforts to reconstitute the empire which have been tried over and over again have hitherto issued in total failure. The great reason is manifest: there is a hindrance — "one that letteth." It cannot be done till the moment comes. When its own season arrives, as it surely will, the divine hinderer is to

be “out of the way,” and the devil is then 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 reigning, 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, to say nothing of reality or truth. Scripture and facts refute all such theories.

“These have one mind, and give their own power and authority to the beast.” Hitherto the reverse of this has been verified 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 all this political shuffling will be over. Then when Satan’s success seems complete, the Lord has His word to say. “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.” His saints, already on high, come with Him. It is the second act of His coming.

But still we have more to hear 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 misguidance of the Beast; but a

collision comes. The woman had been allowed to ride the Beast, to influence and govern the empire first. But the friendships of the bad, as the Stagirite felt, do not last. At last she becomes 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 crowds, and nations, and tongues; and the ten horns which thou sawest and the beast, these shall hate the harlot, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and shall burn her with fire. For God gave to 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. And the woman which thou sawest is the great city which hath kingship over the kings of the earth.” “The waters” indicate her influence stretching out far beyond the empire. It is a sad fact, and the words a true prediction.

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 rather destroyed it. 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 we must say that our Authorised Version, and not merely it but the common uncritical Greek Testaments, are quite astray. 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 rend (not “upon” but) “and15 the beast” — a difference of great importance The horns and the Beast join in hating the harlot. Not only are they supposed to be co-existent, but united in their change of

feeling against Babylon. “These shall hate the harlot, 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, which combine to destroy Babylon. Unhallowed love will end in bitter hate. 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 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 pious Protestants, as if they were mere Praeterists! What confusion! Is there not reason enough for saying that not even the shadow of solid ground appears for the system, when it denies the future crisis?

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” gives unquestionably the right sense of the verse. But it disproves the Protestant historicalism which refuses to allow an evil to come worse even than popery.

Thus everything implies their simultaneous presence for the same time and for common action with the Beast, in plundering and then destroying Babylon. God uses them for this object, their at length setting her aside, 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 field

unimpeded for the imperial power to develop itself in its final form of apostasy, blasphemy, and rebellion against the Lord. For religion, be it ever so corrupt, acts as a restraint on human will, as an ordinary government does, however evil. Even the worst of governments is better than none. That a corrupt religion is better than none, one does not say: but it may trouble men, putting 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 for her, who, faithless to God, had staked the usurped and abused name of Christ to Will worldly power and glory now lost for ever. “For God gave to 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 which 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 extending to the apostate days of the Beast and the Antichrist.

Revelation 18

Chapter 18 need not delay us long. It is not. the warning beforehand, as in Rev. 14, announcing Babylon’s fall before the fact; nor is it its exact place as the last of the Bowls of God’s wrath; nor yet as in Rev.17 the relation of Babylon to the Beast and the kings of the earth in contrast with the Bride’s to the Lamb and the millennial

kings as in Rev. 21. It is the catastrophe viewed as come, with a preceding call to God's people, and consequent on her ruin the lamentations of all from kings to seamen over her who had contributed to their pleasure and earthly greed. But there is a call for the joy of heaven, and of saints, apostles, and prophets, that God has judged her, the shameless deceiver and prostitute.

Thus runs the introduction. "And after these things I saw another angel descending out of the heaven, having great authority: and the earth was lightened with his glory, and he cried, saying, Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great, and become a habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hated bird; because of the wine of the fury16 of her fornication all the nations have drunk, and the kings of the earth committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich by the might of her luxury. And I heard another voice out of heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her strokes; for her sins reached up to the heaven, and God remembered her unrighteousnesses. Award her, even as she awarded, and double to her double according to her works: in the cup which she mixed, mix to her double. How much she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, so much give her torment and grief: because she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and I am no widow, and in no wise shall I see grief. For this reason in one day shall come her strokes, death, and grief, and famine; and she shall be burnt with fire; for strong [is] the Lord God that judgeth her."

It is a description, as we readily see, not of the corrupt woman's relation to the Beast but of the city's fall, with certain dirges put into the month of the different classes

that groan because of her extinction here below. But along with that, God warns of her total 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 sins reached up to the heaven, and God remembered her unrighteousnesses.” Then the word is, “Award her even as she awarded you, and double to her double according to her works: in the cup which she mixed, mix to her double. How much she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, so much give her torment and grief: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and I am no widow, and I shall in no wise see grief.”

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 ecclesiastical influence; she is regarded here as the most conspicuous aider and abettor of the world in its luxuries and delicacies and the pride of life, or what men call “civilisation.”

This is accordingly traced in our chapter with considerable detail, and unto 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, or their occupation.

“And the kings of the earth, that committed fornication with her and lived luxuriously, shall weep and wail over her, when they behold the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Woe, woe, the great city Babylon, the strong city, because in one hour came thy judgment. And the

merchants of the earth weep and grieve over her, because no one buyeth their lading any more, lading of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet; and all thyine wood, and every vessel of ivory, and every vessel of precious wood; and of brass, and of iron, and of marble; and cinnamon, and spice, and incense." Nor are these by any means all. "And unguent, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and cattle and sheep, and of horses and chariots, and of bodies, and souls of men. And the ripe fruits thy soul desired are departed from thee, and all the fair and bright things are perished from thee, and they shall find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, who were enriched by her, shall stand afar off for fear of her torment, weeping, and grieving, saying, Woe, woe, the great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls, for in one hour so great wealth was desolated. And every steersman, and every one sailing to a place, and sailors, and as many as ply their work on the sea stood afar off, and kept crying as they beheld the smoke of her burning, saying, What [city] is like the great city 7 And they cast dust upon their heads, and kept crying, weeping, and grieving, saying, Woe, woe, the great city in which all that had ships in the sea were enriched by her costliness; for in one hour was she desolated. Rejoice over her, heaven, and ye saints and ye apostles and ye prophets; for God judged your judgment upon her."

Yet is it a profound error to infer from the divine denunciation of her far-reaching and malignant influence as the centre, and factor, and patron of the

world's luxury, that so vast an impulse to commerce is Babylon's worst virus. That she, proclaiming herself the church, should thus play the harlot instead of being a chaste virgin for Christ, is no doubt monstrously false and evil. But to combine idolatry with the Lord's name is viler still and unpardonable before God; to which must be added her implacable and deadly hatred of all that truly bear witness to God and His Anointed.

But the graphic account does not end until the Spirit of God shows us another figure of Babylon's downfall. "And a strong angel took up a stone as a great millstone, and cast [it] into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall be cast down Babylon the great city, and shall be found no more at all; and voice of harp-singers and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no artificer of any art shall be found any more at all in thee; and voice of millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; and light of lamp shall shine no more at all in thee; and voice of bridegroom and bride shall be heard no more at all in thee; because thy merchants were the grandees of the earth, because by thy sorcery all the nations were deceived. kind in her was found blood[s] of prophets and saints, and of all that were slain on the earth." The reason is given at the close; not only "for by thy witchcraft were all the nations deceived," but above all "and in her was found blood of prophets and saints, and of all that were slain on 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 the 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 being warned by it. When God does judge, it is not merely for the evil fruits of those then judged but for all from its first budding till that day. Far from being unrighteous, this is, on the contrary, the highest justice from a divine point of view in public government.

We may illustrate it by the members of a family, and suppose, for instance, a drunken father. If the sons had a 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 two sons of Noah, who had a due sense of what was proper) 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 Alas! there is a son in the family, who, instead of being admonished by his father’s sin, tales licence from it to indulge in the same. On him the blow falls, not on the unhappy parent The son is doubly guilty, because he saw his father’s nakedness, yet felt it not enough to turn away in silent sorrow. He ought to have felt the shame as holily hating the sin itself, yet withal in deep compassion for his parent But far from this, the unwitting exposure he wilfully exposed in mockery, not in grief. Then and thus is guilt aggravated in the case of his wicked son.

It is a 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 at Rome, as she of Chaldea had heard of law and prophet. The Roman Babylon too must hear the final testimony of God, the gospel of the kingdom that is to go forth in the last days; but she loves earthly pleasure and power, and refuses truth in any measure. She despises 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, whilst enjoying herself more luxuriously in the present life. For it is here to obliterate all remembrance of heaven, and to make this world such a paradise as suits her, which she embellishes, not with pure and undefiled religion, but with the arts of men, the idolatries of the world, and the snares of Satan.

This it is which will bring out the indignant judgment of God upon the last phase of Babylon, so that the guilt of all blood of holy ones 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 souls individually for eternity. The judgment of the dead is strictly individual judgments in this world are not. His blows on the quick come more nationally as on Israel; incomparably more severe, as in possession of greater privileges, is the judgment of corrupt Christendom, or Babylon here so called. But according to His principle of government it is not merely personal guilt, but that which, from despising the testimony of God, thus morally accumulates from age to

age in the ratio of the testimony of God and of men's wickedness indulged in spite of it. All Israel too shall be saved (Rom. 11:26) as a people, and for the glory of Jehovah on the earth. But there is neither restoration nor mercy for Babylon, but unmitigated destruction, extinction at length through God's indignant judgment.

Revelation 19

"After these things I heard as a great voice of a great crowd in the heaven, saying, Hallelujah, 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 a second time they said, Hallelujah; 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.17 Babylon was the spurious church as long as the church was in question, and the final corrupter, when churches were no longer, and there came forth the closing testimony of God's judgments on the world. There was an unclean form of open heathenism, in connection with the Jews in times past. Then it was the literal Babylon, of course; here it is symbolical. A mysterious lawlessness inherits the well-known name of Babylon when Rome is brought forward; nor does it merely embrace Christian times but the end of the age after the saints are gone, when the course of divine judgment sets in. Bear this in mind: to leave the last part out is fatal to any accurate understanding of the Revelation.

"And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and did homage to God that sitteth on the

throne, saying, Amen, Hallelujah.” The heavenly saints are viewed still as the heads of the glorified priesthood, and also have the administration of God’s government. But it is the last time. “And a voice out of the throne came forth, saying, Praise our God, all ye his bondmen, [and] ye that fear him, the small and the great. And I heard as a voice of a great crowd, and as a voice of many waters, and as a voice of strong thunders, saying, Hallelujah, for the Lord God the Almighty reigneth.18 Let us rejoice and exult, and give the glory to him: because the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife made herself ready” The elders as usual understand the mind of God. The judgment of great Babylon, the harlot, connects itself with the marriage of the Lamb in heaven, and the bride’s getting ready to share His appearing in glory also, and the reign of the Lord God the Almighty about to begin over the earth. Now that we have the symbol of the bride before us, that of the elders and the living creatures disappears. The bride is in view, and the guests.

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? It hardly means this exactly. The elders answer to the heads of the heavenly priesthood (embracing in the glorified state the Old Testament saints and those of the New); they are by no means limited to the church, Christ’s body. When the Lamb and His purchase by blood were celebrated in heaven, the four living creatures joined the elders, though hitherto quite distinct. The glorified saints are not royal priests only but administer power in the world to come far

beyond angels now. The living creatures were from Revelation 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), we have not the bride alone but another class of saints, who at once come forward. Only one thing, as far as scripture speaks and we know, was requisite. The saints must all be manifested before the tribunal of Christ, that each may receive the things [done] in [or through] the body. In full grace they had been changed and translated to heaven. But righteousness has its place also, before the marriage as well as in the manifestation with Christ, each in due place. Thus, it would seem, the bride made herself ready; and her dress confirms it. "And to her was given that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of saints." This is sometimes misunderstood. It is not what Christ puts on them, but a recognition even at this time of whatever has been morally of God, the working undeniably of the Spirit of Christ. But this each saint has, though the blessed thought here is that the church has it not merely in the way of each possessing his own; the bride has it as a whole, the church in glory. The individual does not love his own fruit. This romaine true also in its own place, as we shall find; and when it is a question of reward, it is the grand point. But when the bride is seen above, such is the way in which it is presented here, as shown by verse 8. The Spirit of God implies that here it is not the righteousness Christ is made to us, whereby we are accounted righteous, but righteousnesses personal and actual. What Christ is remains as the

foundation truth. Before God we need and have that which is found only by and in Christ, which has another and a higher character compared with the righteousnesses of the saints.

But this is not all. “He saith to me, Write, Blessed [are] they that are called unto the marriage-supper of the Lamb.” Here ample ground appears for saying that the four-and-twenty elders and the four living creatures are not the church only, because when the bride comes forward, we have others too. The guests, or those that were called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb, refer clearly to the Old Testament saints. They are there in the quality not of the bride but of those invited to the marriage of the Lamb. They can hardly be the Apocalyptic saints, for the simple reason that, as shown in the next chapter, those sufferer unto death are not yet raised from the dead. These remain as yet in the condition of separate spirits. But not such is the way in which the guests are spoken of.

It seems therefore to be incontrovertible fact that the elders and the living creatures comprehend both the Old Testament saints and the church or the bride of Christ. Consequently, when the bride appears, those others, the Old Testament saints who had been included in the elders and the living creatures, are now seen as a separate company. This may seem to some a little difficult, but it is of no use to evade difficulties. We have to face what seems hard, bowing to the word and seeking to learn through all. We do not mend matters by foregone or hasty conclusions, which only complicate the truth, as we are bound to account for the presence of the other saints at the marriage-supper of the lamb, who appear as guests, not in the quality of the bride. In

general this has been either passed over altogether, or some unsatisfactory inference has been drawn which cannot satisfy but embroils the prophecy.

“And he saith to me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell before his feet to do him homage; and he saith to me, See [thou do it] not: I am fellow-bondman of thee and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus. Do homage to God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” ‘The last is a reciprocal sentence, which admits of either member preceding or following, as they are equivalent. “The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.”

John’s error gave 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 this account it was wholly wrong 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 that characterises this boor; is the testimony of Jesus. Thus divine testimony is not confined to the gospel or to the church, but the prophetic spirit which is peculiar to the Revelation as a whole, after the church is translated, is equally the testimony of Jesus. This is most important, because it might be (as it has been) forgotten by those who make the gospel and the corresponding presence of the Spirit to be the same at all times; as others have thought (because after Revelation 4, 5 the sequel treats of Jew separate from Gentile, and the world an object of God’s judgments) that this cannot be a testimony of Jesus. But “the spirit of prophecy” (such it is all through the Revelation after the seven churches are done with) “is the testimony of Jesus.” To us the Holy Spirit is rather as a spirit of

communion with Christ. This was the new and special privilege of Christianity. By-and-by, after our translation to heaven, He will work, and as vitally, in those who bow to God in the reception of the prophetic testimony, which is here owned to be none the less “the testimony of Jesus.”

“And I saw the heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon [called] faithful and true, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war; and his eyes a flame of fire, and upon his head many diadems, having a name written which no one knoweth but himself, and clothed with a garment dipped in blood; and his name is called The Word of God.”

Thus 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 remembrance comes to view as the object of God’s counsels; nor is it a door opened above, as we saw when the prophet was given 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 the heaven is itself opened for yet graver facts, and of incalculable moment for man and the universe and the enemy. Christ Himself is about to be displayed enforcing His rights as King of kings, and Lord of lords; and this in the face of the world. Victorious power put forth to subdue is the meaning of the white horse. It is no longer a question of sustaining His saints in grace, but of sovereign power for judging the earth. There was judicial discernment with the distinct possession of all titles to sovereignty. Only now is He seen with this royal or imperial emblem. We learn hence how mistaken it is to conceive of the Lord as King in the preliminary vision of Rev. 1, “the

things which John saw." This is not His relation to the churches, or "the things which are." He is the long-robed Priest judging them, and finally setting them aside, before "the things which are about to take place after these." Nor is this emblem of His coming forth to judge and reign over the earth seen while the glorified are in heaven, as in Rev. 4, 5; nor in fact in any scene on high till the Lord comes forth to take His inheritance in person as here.

He appears in indisputable human glory; but the greatest care is taken to let us know that He had that which was above man and the creature in general; for "no one knoweth the Son but the Father." Have we not here what answers to those words? This name none knew but He Himself. He was a divine person, whatever new position He assumes towards the world. His vesture dipped in blood shows that He comes to execute vengeance, an unmistakable sign of death for rebels. He had been the Word of God in the revelation of grace; when known by-and-by, it will be as the executor of God's judgments. In both ways He equally expresses what God is. The Gospel and the Revelation of John perfectly disclose both, whether it be in grace or in judgment.

"And the armies that [were] in the heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white, pure. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp [two-edged] sword, that with it he might smite the nations; and he shall rule (or, tend) them with an iron rod; and he treadeth the winepress of the fury of God the Almighty. And he hath upon his garment and upon his thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."

Here we learn of what His train consists. They are glorified saints, though no doubt angels may be there also. This is confirmed by Rev. 17:14, where it was told us that saints 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, they are never spoken of as “faithful.” “Faithful” is what belongs to a man of God. It supposes the exercise and the object of faith. “Called” would be most evidently out of court, 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. Fallen angels are not called, and holy angels never need to be — they are kept. Calling is the fruit of active grace on God’s part toward man, and only toward him when fallen. Even man himself when he was innocent in Eden was not “called.” Directly he sinned, the word of God came, and he was called by grace through faith.

It is evident therefore, that the saints in a glorified state are here represented as following the Lord out of heaven. They are not seen now 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 the wicked in the world, it is not in the quality of bride but of armies or hosts that the saints follow Him. But they include no doubt the guests as well; all the glorified saints of O. and N.T. take their place in His train.

Nevertheless it may be remarked, that these saints are not said to be executers of judgment as Christ is.19 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. We are to judge the world, even angels (1 Cor. 6); but this will be in our reigning with Christ. Hence there is no sword proceeding out of our mouth; nor are the saints or heavenly hosts said to be arrayed in such a fashion 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, bright, pure." Angels, we know from other scriptures, will be there; yet 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 all the more notable is that the rod of iron is promised to us, not the sword. There is the reigning dignity, but not the execution of judgment in the awful emblems attributed to the Lord Himself. For He "treadeth the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty," another character of judgment never attributed to the saints. "And he hath upon his garment and upon his thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords." Supremacy of rule and lordship belongs to Him no less than to the Father, or God as God (1 Tim. 6:15).

The proclamation of the angel follows, inviting all birds of prey to the supper of the great God, to eat the flesh of all the great and small of the earth. "And I saw an (one) angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a great voice, saying to all the birds that fly in mid-heal on, 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 ones, and flesh of horses, and of those that sit on them, and flesh of all, both free and bond, both small and great." A sad and humbling end for human pride at any time; saddest of all after the corruption of the church and apostasy from law and gospel, when modern civilisation will have proved itself faithless and hostile to God and His Son.

Lastly 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" (caught alive), "and with him the false prophet that wrought signs before him, with which he deceived those that received the mark of the beast, and those that worshipped his image." The second Beast is no longer seen as an earthly power, but as a prophet, of course the False Prophet. All the energy to mislead men in the presence of the first Beast was long in his hands; now nothing more is spoken of. Thus he is morally judged. So from Daniel 7, and Daniel 9 we may see that the Roman emperor (who professes himself then the firm ally of the Jews) overrules covenants, however firm, and puts down any deference to sacrifice or offering, times or laws. His will is supreme, and dictates the protection of abominations or idols; and the False Prophet carries it out.

"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 against Jehovah and His Christ: what further need of any process of judgment! "And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat on the horse, which [sword] proceedeth out of his mouth: and all the birds were filled

with their flesh." Their doom was just, but by no means after the same sort as the two leaders; theirs was condign. But how sad for us to think that so it will be with the kingdoms of the west, and that their services with their kings and captains are thus to perish! Is not Great Britain to be one of them? Can Christian men suffer their eyes to be darkened by leaders who do not believe prophecy in general and sneer at this profound book in particular?

Revelation 20

A new and immensely important fact is described — the binding of Satan. He is no longer to be allowed to prowl about the world ensnaring and destroying. It is not his final judgment. "And I saw an angel coming down from the heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years and cast him into the abyss, and shut and sealed [it] 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." The unclean spirits when cast out by the Lord deprecated consignment to the abyss before the time. Immense will be the relief for man and the earth when they are thus shut up, as we see their prince here.

Then we come to a disclosure of wondrous blessing. "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to 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 did not homage to 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." Not many words are required to show that it is no mere figure of the new birth on the one hand, or of a flourishing state for the gospel or the church. It is the foreshadow of a real resurrection. Here the vision was of thrones with sitters already there, and of others now caused to join them, who had suffered unto death for the truth; of which the inspired explanation is, "This the first resurrection." Let us look at the different groups that have part in the first resurrection.

First, the thrones were already filled. Instead of judgment being executed on them, it was "given to them." They themselves were to judge. Scripture is clear that the saints are destined to be invested with judicial authority of a glorious nature. We shall reign with Christ. These are the same saints whom we have seen set forth by the twenty-four elders in heaven, next, by the bride and the guests at the marriage-supper of the Lamb, and finally by the armies that followed Him out of heaven. They are the heavenly saints generally up to the Lord's coming to receive and set them in the Father's house.

It is no longer a question either of celebrating the preliminary ways of God's government, or of the war with the Beast and kings of the earth. Accordingly we have the power of evil restrained beyond all example; and ruling in righteousness as never seen before. There are thrones filled with persons come from heaven in the train of Christ, who now reign along with Him. The language of symbol is as definite as any other. There is no lack of precision, but the very reverse. Peculiarly compact energy attaches to symbolic language.

But there is, in the details which come next, much of interest and consequence to observe, in that an accession follows of 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. 6:9-11, long before seen under the altar, and poured out like burnt-offerings to God. They had cried to the Sovereign ruler to avenge their blood on their foes, but were told they must wait a little for others, their fellow-bondmen and their brethren, to be killed as they were. Here accordingly we have them all. For there is added another company of faithful men who suffered when the Beast set up his worst and final pretensions. But these would not do homage to the Beast, or his image, nor would they receive the mark. These compose the third class here spoken of. We can understand the special mention of these two sections of the saints who suffered after the rapture to heaven. For they did not live for the power and glory of the kingdom. But if they died for Christ, God takes care they shall not lose, but share the first resurrection. They thereby become saints of the high places.

The first were the saints who came out of heaven after Christ, already in the changed or glorified condition. Consequently it was seen that 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 of those that were beheaded,” etc. “Souls” alone often means persons, as is familiarly known. But here it is “the souls of,” etc. It is a different phrase, and of different sense. It means the souls of beheaded persons. He first saw their disembodied condition; then another similar class; and next states that “they lived.”

It is a raising up of both classes from the dead to join others already raised. For there were thrones, and people sat upon them, changed before this into the image of Christ's glory. Then were seen others in the condition of souls who bore testimony after the first, those beheaded for the witness of Jesus and the word of God; lastly, those who refused the Beast in every form, — a testimony more negative than the former, but not less real. The evidence of the third class might have been given a little more distinctly than in our version; not "and which had not," but rather, "and those who did not do homage to the beast, nor his image, and received not his mark upon their forehead, and upon their hand." As these were in the separate state, it is added, "and they lived." Thus only were they enabled to reign with Christ.

What can be simpler or more beautiful than the way in which this verse sums up for the sufferers what the Revelation had promised? After "the things which are" the visions of this book open, not with the rapture of saints to heaven, but with the sight of saints already in heaven. They are often before the seer in his visions, but seen always in a complete condition There is no addition to their number. Accordingly the translation of the church with the Old Testament saints must have already taken place before Rev. 4 begins, all such being caught up at the self-same time to be with the Lord above. We have seen also that these follow the Lord out of heaven (Rev. 19:14), and are next seen enthroned (Rev. 20:4). When the Lord takes His own throne, they are given theirs by grace. Further, we find that the saints who had suffered for Christ, during the time that the glorified 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 Revelation 6, or in the later persecutions (Rev. 13, 15) up to Babylon’s extinction, were now raised from the dead. “They lived,” and were put thereby into a condition suitable for reigning with Christ, no less than the already changed Old Testament saints and the church itself. The dead saints were now all raised to reign over the earth.

Nor is this all here. Another sort of resurrection awaits all others, resurrection of judgment. 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,” which includes all that reign with Christ during the thousand years.

Let it be here carefully observed that the first resurrection does not mean all rising exactly at the same moment. Undoubtedly the change of all shore caught up takes place in the twinkling of an eye; but this in no way denies that other bodies are to be raised at a different time. For certain there are two acts of resurrection: one when the Old Testament saints and the church are caught up to heaven; the other when Satan is bound, after the Beast and False Prophet are thrown into the lake of fire, as well as Babylon judged. 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 an instant of time.

To see this plainly adds immense clearness in the understanding of the book. “The first resurrection” does

not intimate that there is but one act of raising, but that all who share this resurrection, whenever raised, are raised before the millennium begins. When Christ reigns, all such have part in the first resurrection. First Christ Himself was raised at least 1,800 years before the church; then the church, with the Old Testament saints; then these Apocalyptic saints at the least some years after. This gives a full and just view of the various parties that have a share in this resurrection. “This is the first resurrection Blessed and holy [is] he that hath part in the first resurrection: over them 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 is clearly a personal reward to those who had suffered. How mischievous the thought that the church is ever to reign without Christ, though natural to man’s heart! The Corinthian saints dropped into it (1 Cor. 4:8) and were rebuked for its unspirituality and worldliness. What more opposed to the portion of the apostles, as of Christ? We are called to suffer now, not to reign. “If we endure, we shall also reign together.” We rightly look to be glorified together with Him, but not apart from Him. To a loyal Christian heart, no reign of saints could satisfy or even be tolerated without Christ, the Firstborn among many brethren.

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 this 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 that [are] in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the 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. Even in that day the distant nations, “the number of whom is as the sand of the sea,” fall a prey to Satan. If we had not this fact revealed, we should have lost a crowning proof of man’s evil and of Satan’s wiles and power.

“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 is a larger circle and embraces all of Israel and those Gentiles who, being converted, refuse Satan’s deceit. They flocked to that centre. It is an evident contrast with the state supposed in the wheat-and-tare field of Christendom which is found at the end of this 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 the surrounding camp of the God-fearing Gentiles forms now a wider circle, distinct from the beloved city Jerusalem on earth, where the Jews were. But the good and bad were not mixed up as now. The unrenewed of the nations compass them both with their countless hosts, as if to eat them up like grasshoppers. “And fire came down out of the heaven [from God], and devoured them. And the devil that deceiveth them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where [are] both the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night unto the ages of the ages.”

But another scene follows still more solemn, the most awe-inspiring of all for man to contemplate, yet full of blessing for such as are Christ’s to look onward to, putting down every enemy and trace of evil, and

vindicating good where the creature altogether failed. Here is seen but one throne. It is the last judgment, the 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), thrones were seen; for the risen saints reign with Him But now there is but one throne: Christ judges the dead. Not a word implies His then coming, but the risen wicked stand before the throne.

"And 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." 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. By the coming of the Lord all must mean His coining to the habitable earth. But manifestly, if the Lord does not come before this, there is no world to come to; for the earth and heavens were fled. The common notion therefore, that the coming of the Lord is at this point, is an evident fallacy upon the face of the scripture which describes it, not to speak of others that confirm it elsewhere. It is not a syllogism that is wanted or that can satisfy here: we only require, only believe, the word of God. A single verse dispels clouds of arguments.

Afterwards no doubt a new heaven and a new earth are seen; but who contends that this is the sphere to which the Lord comes? He will come as He went (Acts 1:11). "His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east." To this earth He is coming, not to the new earth in the eternal state. To the same world in which He suffered He will,

according to the scriptures, come back, and for seasons of refreshing from His presence. Then will be, not the day of the destruction of the universe, but times for restoring all things, whereof God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began. These glorious times have never yet been accomplished, and therefore must be before eternity. They are reserved for Christ's presence and reign, as He waits for the joint-heirs before He enters on it. But for the eternal judgment heaven and earth fled away; when it is over, 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 Revelation 19. He came to the world, and avenged His people on the Beast and the False Prophet with the kings and their armies; after which the risen saints reign with Him over the earth a thousand years. This it is, not on but over the earth. He with the glorified saints will have their home on high; none the less shall they reign over this world for the allotted time. Compare John 17:22, 23.

Then, as seen, comes the final test of the nations of the earth after that kingdom has run its course, when the devil, let loose for a little, once more deceives flesh and blood after the analogy of all other dispensations. Even the age of visible glory cannot change the heart of man; though in the absence of the enemy and the controlling presence of the great King, they rendered feigned obedience for a long while. The kingdom 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 at once be judged, and good be sustained wondrously for a thousand years. If any wrong should be done, it does not slip through. As far as the display of government goes, it is according to God morally and for His glory, though secret elements of evil may be there, never allowed to appear, 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 must far exceed anything yet seen on the face of the earth. At the beginning and all through the Apocalyptic transition there will have been carnage, and worse and worse, among both the western powers and those of the east. In fact all the nations will be desolated by judgments of one kind or another. For all that, the world abiding 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 and long-living races of mankind. Since sin entered, the state of nature will be unexampled for the fruits of the earth and the enjoyment of all that God has made here below. Consequently an increase in population follows

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" who form then a vast "camp" round "the beloved city" of Israel. There will not be as now tares and wheat growing together; the righteous at once flock around the holy metropolis of the earth at that unwonted sight; and fire out of the heaven settles the insurrection. But now comes the judgment of the wicked for eternity which is in question.

"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is of life. And the dead were judged out of the things written in the books according to their works." Before "God" is a spurious reading.

After this is not the destruction of those rebels by divine judgment, but the dissolution of heaven and earth. Jesus sits upon 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;20 and this very simply, because they are never said to die. There is no scriptural reason to infer that any saints die 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 babe dying now. Man converted will then not merely reach the natural term of a thousand years (as did neither Adam nor Methuselah), but pass that bound.

If alive before the thousand years, he lives after the thousand years; in fact, he shall never taste death. From general principles we may be assured that the saints of the millennial earth will be changed when the heaven and the earth disappear. Assuredly they will be preserved through that crisis in some way suitable to divine wisdom. God has not told us how, nor is it ours to pry. He has reserved the matter, though not without enough to guide our thoughts. It is one of those cases which every now and then appear where God checks and reproves our 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 “new heavens and a 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; he who essays to conceive the detail is striving to draw a bow beyond the power of man.

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 as written there among those judged. There was the sad register of undeniable sins 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, each one, 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.

Neither the sea nor the unseen world could longer hide their prisoners. "And the sea gave up the dead that [were] in it, and death and hades gave up the dead that [were] in them: and they were judged, each one, according to their works."

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, the lake of fire." 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 ill; and thus it must be for ever. Death and Hades, which had so long been executioners in a world where sin reigned, and still did their occasional office when righteousness reigned, themselves disappear where all traces of sin are consigned for ever. God is "all in all."

12 Most copies, it would seem, read

τῆς γῆς, "of the earth" the Alex. and others give

αὐτῆς, "of her." The Sinai MS. has both.

13 The description here is simply character, not dates. If a person drew from this, for instance, that the Beast 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 historical time, for which we must consider other scriptures.

14 Even the Complutensian editors gave 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. But καίπρε ἐστίν was unmitigated error.

15 It now appears that the Cod. Reuchlin. Capnionis, which was used by Erasmus, and lately discovered after a long obscurity by Dr. Franz Delitzsch, reads καὶ (not ἐπὶ)

τὸ θ. as did the Complut. Polyglott, and all editions of the least critical value. Scholz's note ("rec. cum cdd. pl.") is a myth. Who can cite MSS. in its favour, though some versions represent it?

16 "Poison" has been suggested by pious and learned men. But it is better rendered homogeneously with what is said elsewhere. we cannot apply "poison" to God's wrath, but we may with many scriptures employ "fury" to mark His extreme indignation, and Babylon's excessive deception and unbridled iniquity.

17 It may interest some to understand how the Romanist endeavour to divert the prophecy from its evident application to this system wholly fails. They assume that, if Babylon means the corrupt church, the symbol must

be a married woman false to her husband, not a harlot. But no: their assumption confounds, as they habitually do, the church with Israel, which was indeed married to Jehovah. But the church is, or ought to be, a chaste virgin; and the marriage is future and in heaven, as Rev. 19:7-9 proves. Hence the only correct figure for the corrupt and false church is the “harlot,” as in Rev. 17, not adulteress.

18 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” clearly conveys that God just entered on His kingdom; they rather imply that it was past. It anticipates that He reigned as a fact.

19 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.

20 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) It is due to the Lord that all should be there manifested; it would be a great loss to the saints if it were not so. But to those who have not Christ, and are therefore found “naked,” how awful, utter, and unending is their judgment when it comes!

Revelation 21-22

Revelation 21

In the first eight verses of chap. 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 an unspeakably solemn fact to read, which we are bound to preach. 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, we equally see 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. “The sea is no more” — a fact quite different from the millennium. The sea, so important for all life as it is, vanishes thence, no more needed, nor even consistent with the new and eternal conditions.

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem coming down out of the heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of the heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God [is] with men, and he shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their God. And he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; nor grief nor cry nor distress shall be any more; [for] the first things passed away. And he that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he saith, Write, for these words are true and faithful. And he said to me, It is come to

pass. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to him that thirsteth of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But for the fearful and unbelieving [and sinners] 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." What a picture of eternity! How worthy of God, and how different from the dreams of monks and priests, on the one hand, and on the other from all the impostures of the east!

Observe a singularly important fact. All the dispensational names of God disappear. It is only "God" and "men" now. There is nothing more to hear of "nations"; nothing remains of separate countries and kingdoms, of kindreds or tongues. It is the eternal state; and, in fact, the fullest description of that state furnished in the Bible. But 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 reveals a great truth not here spoken of, yet quite consistent with it, that as Christ received the millennial kingdom as man, He gives it up when the aim shall be fulfilled. His rights as God remain unchanging.

Although there is such a levelling of temporal distinctions, and men have to do directly with God (men raised from the dead, in their changed condition, according to Christ in His counsels), we still see the Jerusalem on high, "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 no doubt it is, the bride the Lamb's wife, then we have her separate condition asserted in eternity. This is His tabernacle, and it is regarded as a

distinct object, no doubt associated with men, but not confounded with them. Men are not regarded as composing this tabernacle; they co-exist. It is no longer above (that is in the thousand years), but come down, that God may thus tabernacle with men, and Himself be with them; their God. What rest! These things the overcomer shall inherit.

All things are thus made new; and further, “these words are faithful and true.” Nothing more needs to be done. As God is the beginning, so is He the end; nor this only, but the Revealer of all from first to last. As His grace furnished freely of the fountain of the water of life to the thirsty one, and thus strengthened him to win the victory over the world and him who ever opposes God and His Son; so the fearful who did not trust Him, and the unbelieving, with the sad train of evildoers that springs from such dishonour of God, have their portion where His wrath burns unquenchably. They judged themselves unworthy of life eternal; on them the second death exerts its resistless power. Hence no scheme can be less intelligent, or more inconsistent, than the strange disarrangement of such as synchronise Rev. 21:1-8 with the millennium. Such exposition is indeed lame, halt, and blind. Sometimes the one thing, sometimes the other, cannot pass muster.

Here occurs a remarkable change in the sequence of the visions, though easily understood; for it must be evident that there can be nothing to follow this in point of time, seeing that it is the eternal state. Here then we unquestionably go back to be shown an important object in the prophecy which could not, without interrupting its course, have been described before. Yet in this it is as we saw in Revelation 17, after Babylon had been

brought before us in the course of the prophecy. Babylon had been seen twice: first, in the septenary of God's warnings and testimonies (Rev. 14); and then as the object of God's judgment under the seven Bowls (Rev. 16). Afterwards a full description of Babylon and its relation to the Beast and the ten kings is given. It would have been awkward to bring in this long description before, because the flow of the prophetic stream would have been interrupted. It is a subsequent appendix in Rev. 17 and 18.

An exactly similar order is repeated here, and it becomes the more apparent from the similarity of the introduction on each occasion. "And there came one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls full of the seven last strokes, 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 (Rev. 17:1), Is it too much to believe that God intended this analogy to be noted by us? In neither case is it a pursuance of the prophetic course of time. But this is a description of the holy city previously (Rev. 19:6-8) to our deep interest set before us, just as the other was a description of the corrupt city, whose judgment had been fully 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 and riding the Beast, with the closing catastrophe.

Here is seen coming down out of heaven from God the holy city, which is declared to be the bride, the Lamb's wife, in the plainest contrast with the vile harlot. Yet to this heavenly city, after Christ comes, the kings of the earth bring their offerings and their homage, in contrast

with her maddening excitement of the nations, her filthy fornication with their rulers, her blood-guiltiness as to the saints of Jesus, and her abominations against God. In short Babylon, the disgusting counterpart of the holy city, in earthly ambition seeks the kings and the masses for her own lusts, while God's church suffers now in patient faith and love, and shall reign when Christ reigns. The one therefore throws much light upon the other.

But we may also notice that the truth as to this proves its exceeding importance. For if we heed the plain fact of retrospect at this point, there is a complete removal of the difficulty caused by taking the last vision of this book as part of the prophetic series which began in Revelation 19. Clearly it is an added digression for the purpose of fully describing an object already named passingly in the foregoing series, which really closes at Revelation 21:8. As Revelation 17 was a descriptive digression, so is the portion from chapter 21:9. The account given of Babylon in Revelation 17 does not follow Revelation 14 or 16 in point of prophetic time, but wholly differs from them in this respect. It gives a retrogressive account of Babylon's character, and shows how its enormity 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 as the vessel of His glory for unmeasured goodness and blessing in the millennium, as the devil during this age has used Babylon, seeking and abusing the world's glory, unto the dishonour of God and of His Son, to accomplish his destructive plans of evil here below. Just as the city of man's confusion was seen in her vile, degraded, and degrading relations with the Beast and

the kings of the earth, this city is seen in her pure and glorious relations with the Lamb, and with the kings and the nations of the earth also.

“And he carried me away in Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God, having the glory of God.” It is not into a wilderness the prophet is now carried, but set on “a mountain great and high,” and shown, not the great but “the holy city Jerusalem.” The great city before was either earthly Jerusalem or yet more Babylon. Here we have to guard against a prevalent error. The holy city shown to the prophet is declared to be, not the abode of the bride but the bride herself, viewed here in a governmental point of view, the metropolis of the kingdom to come and indeed of all creation, still with special reference to the kings and the nations of the earth. Earthly Jerusalem, so prominent everywhere in the Old Testament prophets, is not seen here, but the holy city that comes down out of heaven from God; and she is the bride of the Lamb. It is still in a governmental aspect. For the city is seen now as the holy vessel of divine power coming down out of the heaven from God for governing the earth during the millennium, “having the glory of God: and her light-bearing was like a stone most precious, as jasper stone like crystal,” which naturally jasper is not, any more than gold is like pure glass. It is intentionally supernatural and symbolic.

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 [those] of the twelve tribes of [the] children of Israel.” It was

important, just because it is the bride, the Lamb's wife, to show that angels serve there, and further, that Israel is not forgotten. The very name indeed shows a similar design; yet we must not forget that the church can only be heavenly. Still God does not conceal His ways with His old people. As the angels here are seen in the quality of porters that stand at the gates; so for the twelve tribes of Israel, they are merely written there. No hint whatever is given that they constitute any part of 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, when all the families of the earth are also blessed. It is plain that the city's aspect is central for the universe, yet not without a special thought and mark of Israel; and is it not quite right 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 on them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." These would appear to be (save Judas Iscariot, of course) the twelve apostles 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 may be very sure that God will not give a worse place to the apostle Paul; yet we may discern that this is scarcely his place.

“And he that spoke with me had a golden reed au a measure, that he might measure the city, and its gates, and its wall. And the city lieth four-square, and its length [is] as great as the breadth. And he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs: the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured its wall a hundred [and] forty-four cubits, a man’s measure, that is [the] angel’s.” If the last be the thickness of the wall, which otherwise does not appear, it has been suggested that it was not for protection against a foe. As a whole it was a cube. Infinite it could not be, but finite perfection. Thus there is a completeness and perfection about it suited to its then present and everlasting character.

Afterwards we come to its intrinsic description, and this — of the building of its wall, its foundations, its gates, and its street. Jasper kept up the manifestation of God’s governmental glory, as gold divine righteousness in access to God, and this like pure glass where was no question of evil but transparent purity. The very foundations displayed the varied out-shinings of His nature. It was no question longer of testifying on the High Priest’s breast how precious were His people to Him. And what a figure of moral beauty in the twelve gates, each of which was one pearl, utterly beyond nature! “And the building of its wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like pure glass The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation [was] jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the

twelfth, amethyst.21 And the twelve gates [were] twelve pearls, each one of the gates severally was of one pearl. And the street of the city [was] pure gold, transparent as glass." How it all lifts us up above man and nature!

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 its temple, and the Lamb." This was no real 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 to be. 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 temple. "And the city had 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 immeasurable. "For the glory of God enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof." Creature lights are gone, that the divine may illumine.

After "the nations" in verse 24 omit the words "of them which are saved." The best authorities leave out this addition, without which we have the true force of the verse. It is a wholly unwarranted interpolation. "The nations shall wall: 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 people read the Bible that they are not stopped by such an expression. “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 an altogether anomalous expression, and betrays man as its blundering author.

But it is plain that the nations are not in the city. “And the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour unto it” — not into, but unto. That is, it is an expression of the homage that they pay. The word means either as the context may require. “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 no wise enter into it anything that defileth, nor one making abomination and a lie; but only those written in the book of life of the Lamb.” Moral unfitness has its solemn censure; but sovereign grace must be asserted also as in the last clause. Only such objects of divine love were here admissible.

Revelation 22

Another glorious description follows. “And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, going out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” The last words indicate a new governmental form of deep interest. It is not now lightnings and thunders and voices: these were 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, that is the imagery which suits. “In the midst of its street and of the river, on this side and on that, [was] life’s tree” — not merely as the original one, but now according to the fulness of the provision of God’s grace for man on the earth, yet also for man in glory — “bearing twelve fruits, in each month yielding its fruit; and the leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations.” In Eden’s paradise there was no “healing” power; there was the tree of life, but only death for the disobedient. Man on the earth has his portion in the goodness of a God who is manifesting His kingdom; and from the heavenly city is provision for healing the nations; whereas “the nation and kingdom that will not serve ‘Zion’ shall perish.”

“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, and they shall see his face, and his name [shall be] on their foreheads. And night shall not be any more; and they need no light of lamp, and light of sun; for the Lord God shall give them light; and they shall reign unto the ages of the ages.” The reign for a thousand years is not all. In another way as here the saints shall reign without limit. (See Rom. 5:17.) The pure in heart shall see God, as they shall serve Him in glory. The description closes in verse 5 After that we have suited admonitions to the end of this book. On these a few words may suffice.

Verses 6, 7, commend these sayings afresh; and the coming of the Lord is urged in connection with them. “And he said to me, These words are faithful and true; and the Lord, the God of the prophets, sent his angel to show to his bondmen the things which must shortly come to pass. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that

keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book." Responsibility is here impressed in this respect, as we have seen before also.

But it is added, "And I John am he that heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to do homage before the feet of the angel that showed me these things. And he saith to me, See [that thou do it] not: I am fellow-bondman with thee and with thy brethren the prophets, and with them that keep the words of this book. Do homage to God. And he saith to me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book." Again the character of it, as derived from Christianity having already taken its place, is here asserted. In Daniel's time, expressly to Daniel himself, the book was to be sealed, and even 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 at hand." In Daniel's time it was not at hand. But now Christ is come, and is dead, risen, and glorified. 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 al!. All that instinctively belongs to the body of Christ is unearthly and unworldly. The church is heavenly; and in heaven are no times or seasons. There may be lights of the heaven to mark times and seasons for the earth; and to the lamp of prophecy we do well to pay heed. But the church consists of souls called out from the earth, and is not of the world: consequently to the Christian 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 this 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 God's 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." Here is intimated that the time will come on earth, when the testimony of grace terminates. All after that is fixed for good or ill. With this too the Lord's coming is fitly connected. "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward [is] with me to render to each as his work shall be. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed [are] they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. Without [are] the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie." 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 at the last: whatever the state in which the Lord at His coming will find men, all is closed up and fixed. We see that it is in connection with the foregoing, not His coming for such as do keep the sayings of it, but for

those whom He shall find here below, “to give to each as his work is.”

Further, Jesus here 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 life’s water 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 say, it is true, “Come quickly.” This would not be fitting for the church or for the Christian. Patience or endurance of hope is what becomes us. Nor could it have had weight, even if suited. But it is blessed that He says, “I come quickly”; and it is only Christ who in scripture ever says so. We as properly say, “Come.” Desire as we may that He should come quickly, we leave this to Him, because we know His love and can trust Him. If He tarries, it is not that He is “slack concerning his promise,” but that His long-suffering brings salvation to many. And who could defraud either the soul of salvation, or the Lord of showing it? It is Himself thus presented and as the bright Morning-star who brings into activity the church in her due expression of affection as bride. Here at the end we are outside the governmental strain of the book, as we see for the saints individually at the beginning of the parenthesis in Revelation 1:5, 6.

“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come.” It is to Jesus. To whom else could they say it? The bride breathes out the word to the Bridegroom; and the Holy Spirit is He that gives fervour to her desire that Christ should come. But there is a message also to others. There is a word, even if one entered little into the bride’s consciousness, to him that hears: “Let him that heareth say, Come.” He is encouraged to repeat the same cry. As a believer, be not afraid though you may know but little; for the Lord neither forgets nor slights real faith, however unintelligent. Has He not this class in view when He invites those who hear His voice to say, “Come “

The bride properly represents such as enter into the normal possession and enjoyment of the privileges nearest to Christ: if there are many who fall short of this practically, they are provided for in grace. “Let him that heareth say, Come.” At least they know the Saviour’s love and hear His voice, and, far from these being left out, they are invited individually to say, “Come.” To hear Him may not be the appropriation of all; but it is an incalculable boon for the soul, the turning-point of all blessing. It is just the way into all, if it be not the entrance upon all and its enjoyment actually. “Let him that heareth say, Come.” There is nothing in the coming of Jesus to harm or disturb him; there is everything in His coming to soothe, cheer, and satisfy. At that moment he will be changed and conformed to the image of God’s Son. The image of the man of dust shall give place to that of the Heavenly One, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory according to the working whereby He has power even to subdue all things to Himself. At once and for ever he

shall be like Himself inwardly and outwardly: what can be so assuring to the saint?

But while there is such a bridal, and such a believer's, call for Christ to come, it is not overlooked how many there are insensible to Him. To such His coming could be no joy, but in their state dismay and despair. The hope of His coming draws out on their behalf the deep feelings and earnest appeals of those who wait for Him. Hence the added calls of grace, "And let him that thirsteth come; he that will, let him take life's water freely." Not either of these classes outside is asked to say, "Come." This would be vain, untrue, and profane, till they have drunk life's water in His name. But even as they are, grace calls on each of these to come to the still accessible and ready and unfailing Saviour. Be one ever so overwhelmed with sense of sin, ever so conscious of having paid the penalty of long turning from the Fountain of living waters, "let him that thirsteth come." Jesus ever lives, and is ever near, now to give life's water. Yea, if only made willing by God's grace to receive the indispensable boon, which neither believer nor church can supply, Jesus stoops to his need: "he that will, let him take life's water freely." But, O reader, forget not that grace despised ends in judgment; and the deeper the grace, the more sure and severe God's judgment; and Jesus the Lord shall pronounce and execute it.

Then follows a tremendous warning against any meddling with the words of this book: "I testify to every one that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any one add unto these, God shall add unto him the strokes that are written in this book; and if any one take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God

shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, that are written in this book." Its integrity is thus guarded, if any warning could alarm audacious self-confident man.

"He that testifieth these things saith, Yea, I come quickly. Amen: come, Lord Jesus." What care to keep the hearts of His own fixed and fervent and constant in the blessed hope! And this, not only by His assurance, but by the revealed and ready response of the inspired writer. We misread prophecy, if we put off that hope. "The grace of the Lord Jesus [Christ be] with all the saints. Amen." So ends this book, and the Bible.

21 It may interest the reader to know that the most learned of authorities, in his History of Precious Stones, avows his profound wonder at the arrangement of the twelve foundation courses of the New Jerusalem. Notoriously it differs wholly from that of the High Priest's breast-plate, or rationale as the Latins have rendered the λογεῖον or περιστήθιον." "Instead of this S. John has most ingeniously disposed of them according to their various shades of the same colour, as the following list will demonstrate, taking them in order from the bottom upwards." "So minute an acquaintance with the nicest shades of colour of the precious stones will more forcibly impress the reader, if he should attempt to arrange from memory, and by his own casually acquired knowledge alone, twelve gems, or even half that number, according to their proper tints. The 'sainted seer' alludes in other passages... in a very technical manner" [iv. xxi. 11]...." Such allusions display that exact knowledge of particulars, only possessed by persons dealing in precious stones or from other circumstances obliged to have a practical acquaintance with their

nature; which could never have been found in a Galilean fisherman, unless we choose to cut the knot of the difficulty with the ever-ready sword of verbal inspiration." Oh! the helplessness of man's ability and erudition, when he fears to believe in God's writing His word through man. The difficulty then vanishes, and is solved to His glory, without recourse to cutting any knot. How sad when a clergyman is not ashamed to avow his scepticism, and prefers to leave unsolved so striking a dilemma, as he frankly acknowledges, rather than own the divine source, character, and authority of scripture! All is simple and sure to faith, without which it is impossible to please God.