

THE APOCALYPSE EXPOUNDED

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The Apocalypse Expounded.

INTRODUCTION.

The study of the Book of Revelation is one that cannot fail to be of interest to us all.

Whether we think of the serious and critical times in which we live, both in the Church and in the world—whether amongst Jews, Christians, or the Nations—whether in Palestine, Europe, the Near East, or the Far East, how should we not thank God for inspiring the writer of this book to give us such an outline of prophetic events, from the time of the apostles themselves right down to the consummation of all things in the eternal state.

The serious nature of the crisis through which the world is passing, has driven large numbers of God's people to the Book of Revelation, filled with a longing to understand what appears to many to be almost incomprehensible mysteries. Even worldly men are found to be constantly quoting passages from the Apocalypse as though the language described more accurately than any they could suggest, the great and startling happenings and probable developments of our times.

There is a widespread feeling amongst serious and thoughtful people that we are approaching some tremendous change in the world's history. By not a few it has been thought that the end of the world is approaching. The very date of this great catastrophe has been definitely fixed from time to time, and that in defiance of our Lord's words.—

“Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, by My Father only” (Matt. xxiv. 36).

“It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power (or, authority)” (Acts i. 7).

This date-fixing has done much harm, and has alienated many from a study of prophecy. Let it be clearly understood that we have no such idea as that we are approach-

ing *the end of the world*. As we proceed in our study it will be become evident that much has yet to take place before—

“The coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat” (2 Pet. iii. 12).

There is a growing feeling amongst Christians, and more especially amongst those who watch the signs of the times in the light of Holy Scripture, that, the end of the present DISPENSATION is drawing near.

Some may be a little perplexed by the words of Matt. xxiv. 3.—

“Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

The Greek word here translated “world,” really means “age” or “dispensation.” It is important to remember that the coming of Christ does not mean the end of the world as a material system, but the end of one dispensation, and the introduction of another.

What is meant by a dispensation?

A dispensation means an indefinite period of time during which God acts towards men along certain definite lines.

For instance, after his creation man was placed in the garden of Eden. This may be called the age, or dispensation of INNOCENCE.

Then came the Fall, through Adam’s disobedience. After the Fall man was left to himself for a period of about 1,500 years. This may be called the dispensation of CONSCIENCE. It resulted in such appalling wickedness, corruption and violence that God had to send “the Flood upon the world of the ungodly” (2 Pet. ii. 5).

After the Flood the world had a new start (Genesis ix. 1). That might be called the dispensation of GOVERNMENT, the reins of which were placed in the hands of man. Noah abused this charge and failed to govern himself. That dispensation ended in Babel, the separation of nations and confusion of their languages. It culminated in IDOLATRY (Joshua xxiv. 2).

In the days of Abraham, a new start was again made, and new principles of divine truth were established. The Abrahamic dispensation might be called the dispensation of PROMISE. The promises made to Abraham were

unconditional, and will be literally fulfilled in their earthly and spiritual spheres (Genesis xii. 1-3, xv. 18-21). God's unconditional promise, His confirmatory oath, the immutability of His counsel, and His impossibility to lie, form the strong consolation of all those who have fled for refuge to Christ, and have their anchor fixed sure and steadfast in His Person and Work, and faithful Word (Hebrews vi.).

All these promises are made good in Christ on the ground of faith (see Romans and Galatians). At Sinai the LAW was given, but we are told that "the promise was not given to Abraham through the law, but through the righteousness of faith" (Rom. iv. 13). God has demonstrated for all time that man can never be blessed on the ground of works of law, but simply and solely through faith (Galatians iii.).

At length, "when the fulness of the time was come" (Gal. iv. 4), Christ came—

"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John i. 10, 11).

This may be called the dispensation of GRACE.

Briefly, but not exhaustively, we have pointed out some of the different dispensations:—

1. *Innocence*—ending in the Fall.
2. *Conscience*—ending in corruption and violence, and the Flood.
3. *Government*—ending in confusion at Babel, and idolatry.
4. *Unconditional Promise*—God's sovereign election in Abraham.
5. *The Law*—"all the world guilty before God" (Rom. iii.).
6. *Grace*—came by Jesus Christ—despised, rejected, crucified.

This ended the trial of man. Every test that God could apply has ended in demonstrating man's utter ruin through sin. His probation is over. Calvary manifests his hopeless condition.

(1)) We would urge all who seek to serve the Lord in the gospel, whether in Sunday Schools, Bible Classes, or

public preaching to weigh with close attention the following Scriptures—

“Now is the judgment of this world” (John xii. 31).

These words were spoken in view of the Cross. Listen!

“Now is my soul troubled and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour” (John xii. 27).

By wicked hands man crucified and slew the Prince of Life and Lord of glory. This was the climax of his guilt, the crowning act of sin. The judgment of this world as a moral system had come. The trial was ended. At the Cross the sentence was *pronounced*, to be *executed* in the day of judgment before the Great White Throne, unless grace leads the individual sinner to repentance.

(2) Again—

“If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin.

“He that hateth Me hateth My Father also.

“If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father” (John xv. 22-24).

The entrance into the world of the Lord Jesus Christ, was not only a proof of God's Love—it *was* this, for God so loved the world that He gave His Son (John iii. 16)—but it was God's final test for guilty man.

(3) It is all summed up in that memorable discourse of Stephen, the first Christian martyr—

“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did so do ye.

“Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.

“Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it” (Acts vii. 51-53).

Terrible indictment! Fearful record of guilt extending from Sinai to Calvary, and even to Pentecost and beyond—

A broken law—persecuted and slain prophets—a betrayed and murdered Christ—a resisted Spirit.

(4) Again, in the parable of the householder and his vineyard—

“And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruit of it.

"And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

"Again he sent other servants, more than the first; and they did unto them likewise.

"**But last of all he sent unto them his son**, saying, They will reverence my son.

"But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

"And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard and slew him" (Matt. xxi. 33-46).

It is this aspect of the Cross of Christ that is sadly ignored in the preaching of the present day. There are two things we learn at the cross, amongst many others, viz., God's infinite love to man, and man's utter hatred of God.

(5) This explains that marvellous verse—

"Once **in the end of the world** hath he (i.e. Christ) appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. ix. 26).

It was the end of the world *morally*, but not *chronologically*.

It is too late to talk of looking for fruit (Matt. xxi. 34)—it is too late to talk of keeping the law—it is too late to preach about improving man or of spiritual evolution—too late to imagine that God's Kingdom can be brought in by human effort. The trial has already taken place—the accumulated evidence of guilt has been given—the verdict has been declared—GUILTY BEFORE GOD (Rom. iii. 19)—CONDEMNED ALREADY (John iii. 18).

So far as man's spiritual condition before God is concerned, it can be likened to nothing else than that of a condemned criminal awaiting the execution of the sentence already passed.

When lo! wonder of wonders! A God of love and mercy steps in and offers to justify the guilty, and save the lost on the ground of the atoning sacrifice of Calvary.

The blood shed by man avails for man. The vilest and the guiltiest may be saved, pardoned, justified, yea, glorified with Christ.

This pentecostal proclamation, which first was preached in the streets of Jerusalem (Acts ii.), and has been all down the centuries, is still being published.

This is the GOSPEL dispensation. But it is drawing to a close. It will terminate "in a moment, in the

twinkling of an eye," when the Lord descends into the air and removes His saints (1 Thess. iv. 13-18). We are approaching the end of the *dispensation*, not the end of the world.

The rightful Heir has been cast out. The world, under the leadership of Satan, has for the moment seized on His inheritance. But He "whose right it is" is coming again with power and great glory to take possession. All things are His,

- (1) by creation rights (Col. i. 16);
- (2) by purchase (Matt. xiii. 44-46);
- (3) by gift of His Father (Heb. i. 2, 3).

The Book of Revelation reveals to us how those rights will be made good—how that purchased possession will be redeemed—how the kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

We would urge the paramount importance of *prayer* while we pursue the study of this marvellous book. We would seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in its interpretation, and a walk consistent with its sanctifying instruction.

CHAPTER I.

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST.

"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John" (i. 1).

These are most remarkable words, and need to be well weighed. It is not, as some have said, the unveiling of His person, but a revelation which was given to Christ by God.

Some might ask, But was not Jesus Christ God? Most certainly He was. In the Gospel of John His divine glory is clearly revealed—

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God" (John i. 1).

Yes, Jesus Christ is God. It is not enough to say that He was divine. This has been loosely said of mere men. But Jesus Christ was God, as absolutely as was the Father. He said—

"I and My Father are one" (John x. 30).

And it is of Jesus Christ, the Son, that God has said—

"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever" (Heb. i. 8).

The revelation of this great fundamental tenet of the Christian faith is contained in John's gospel. But not only this, "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." The eternal Son of God became man. He was born of the Virgin Mary. The child born at Bethlehem, was The Mighty God—

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

"Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this" (Isaiah ix. 6, 7).

This is an inscrutable mystery. That one and the same person should be both God and man baffles our power to explain. But it is not beyond our faith to receive. Many have stumbled over the passage in Mark xiii. 32—

"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father."

The gospel of John teaches unequivocally the deity of the Son. And yet He was man. He was one with the Father, and yet in subjection to the Father. Let the following passages be carefully read—

"As My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things."

"I speak that which I have seen with My Father. . . . But now ye seek to kill Me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God" (John viii. 28, 38, 40).

"I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say and what I should speak" (John xii. 49).

"All things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you" (John xv. 15).

"I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me" (John xvii. 8).

These passages, and many others, prove that while on the one hand He is revealed as one with the Father *in the unity of the Godhead*, yet He is also seen as man in subjection to the Father—speaking the Father's words, doing the Father's works, receiving all things from His Father's hands. It is in this sense that we must understand Mark xxiii. 32. He who could say "I and My Father are one," could with equal truth affirm—

"The word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me" (John xiv. 24).

"All things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you" (John xv. 15).

In the Book of Revelation we are given a view of *the glorified humanity* of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is impossible to separate His deity from His humanity. The natural man may here see insurmountable difficulties, but faith beholds divine perfection.

THE GENERAL OBJECT OF THE BOOK.

If the gospel of John reveals the grace of God in salvation, the Apocalypse declares God's government of the

world and His judgment. The gospel records the solemn fact of the rejection of Christ—

"He was in the world . . . and the world knew Him not.

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John i. 10, 11).

"Ye will not come unto Me" (John v. 40).

"Me it hateth" (John vii. 7).

"Now is the judgment of this world" (John xii. 31).

"The world seeth Me no more" (John xiv. 19).

But the Christ rejected by man, and cast out by the world, is God's appointed Heir of all things (Heb. i. 2). The Book of Revelation reveals how God is going to bring about the subjection of all things to Him who is the rightful Heir.

Here again we notice a striking contrast between John's Gospel and his Revelation. In the Gospel, believers are viewed in their birth relationship as the children of God, whereas here they are seen in their servant character. Since Pentecost believers are not only *children* of God, partakers of the divine nature, born of the Spirit—but also *sons*, sealed by the Spirit, who is the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. Besides this we are *servants*. This latter does not contain the same thought of nearness and intimacy. There will be saints on earth after the Church is removed to heaven, but the dispensation will have changed—indeed we may say it will revert to a similar state of things as preceded the day of Pentecost. Before Pentecost they were Jewish disciples, with Jewish hopes, and looking for the Kingdom to be restored to Israel. After the Rapture a Jewish testimony will once more arise. This will come before us as we proceed through the study of this Book.

The difference spiritually between the Jewish disciple and the Christian is clearly taught in Galatians iii. 2, 3; iv. 7, where the contrast is shewn between a *child* in bondage under law, and a *son* in the liberty of redemption. But the Book of Revelation is a book of instruction to the *servants* of God both before and after the Rapture.

There are many Christians to-day who entirely ignore the Book of Revelation; they look upon it as too difficult to comprehend and as of comparative unimportance. The time of the ordained minister is as a rule so absorbed in providing social entertainments, and in the study of

modern theology that the Book remains to them an utterly sealed book.

But to be a true and intelligent servant of God it is absolutely necessary to make oneself acquainted with that which is here revealed, for these things "*must shortly come to pass.*"

We are more convinced than ever that we are drawing very near to the close of this present dispensation, and that very soon the solemn events recorded from chapter iv. onwards will begin to unrol themselves before the eyes of an astonished world.

TWO SCHOOLS OF INTERPRETATION.

As is well known, there are two chief schools of interpretation of this marvellous book. The Historicist believes that much of it has already been fulfilled in the history of the past, whereas the Futurist believes that all after chapter iii. awaits fulfilment. There have been able exponents in the past along both lines. Personally we believe there is truth in both, and while there is justification for the Historicist *application* of the symbols, the final *interpretation* awaits fulfilment during a short period of crisis towards which the world is hastening.

BY HIS ANGEL.

"And He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John."

Not directly to the church were these communications made, not even directly to John himself, but "by His angel unto His servant John." We cannot but be struck with the measure of distance here implied. Such was the fallen condition of things in the assembly of God, that this style of intervention is employed, and yet, such was the importance of the subject to be revealed, that not only *an* angel, but *His* angel was the chosen vehicle of communication.

Times of ruin in the Christian dispensation are here supposed, analogous to the Lo-Ammi condition of God's earthly people. The Apocalypse thus closely resembles the Book of Daniel, where the communication of the mind of God is made not to the people as a whole, but to a chosen vessel. So that when all is in ruins, yet individual

faith may shine as brightly, and devotedness may be as pronounced as in the best days of the dispensation.

THE CHARACTER OF THE BOOK.

"Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, [and] of all things that he saw" (verse 2).

It may be noticed that the last "and" of this verse as contained in the A.V. should be omitted. This is an important matter to note, for the things which John saw were not a separate subject of his testimony, but rather the character of the whole book. The last clause of the verse explains the force of the two first. The whole book is a divinely given *vision*, as the frequently repeated words "and I saw" make clear. But this vision in its entirety was none the less "the Word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ." Hence the book of Revelation is as much inspired as any other portion of the Scriptures, and cannot be neglected without suffering serious loss.

THE TIME IS AT HAND.

"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things that are written therein: for the time is at hand (or, near)."

A special encouragement is given at the very commencement of the book, which may well lead us to enter upon its study with confident expectation of blessing. No one can even *read* it without blessing, little as they may be able to understand it. But to *hear* its words, and surely this involves a moral state of soul—and then to *keep* those things, that is, to have the whole being controlled and influenced in a practical manner thereby, is indeed to be blessed of God.

And why? Because the time is near. All was future when John wrote, and all from chapter iv. is future still. But the things described are morally so near that only unbelief and ignorance can despise them.

THE RIGHTFUL HEIR.

The Heir of all things is about to take possession. The prophetic utterances of Psalm ii. are about to receive their complete fulfilment. The nations are raging, the peoples are imagining vain things. The kings of the earth are

about to set themselves in array; the rulers are about to take counsel together against the Lord and against His Christ. They have done so already in Russia, and their atheistic propaganda in being diligently spread throughout Europe, and our beloved England, but—

“He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.”

Yes, the decree will soon go forth. The rightful King shall soon be set upon the Holy hill of Zion. No need then for Sir Herbert Samuel, nor for any earthly viceroy. The King Himself will be there. Rejected now, but crowned then, Jehovah will say—

“Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession” (Psalm ii. 8).

Nearly 2,000 years ago Jehovah said unto Him—

“Sit Thou at My right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool” (Psalm cx. 1).

The hour is about to strike. God has given to Christ the full programme describing the steps by which all His purposes for the universe are to be carried out. Christ has distributed this programme to His servants. It lies before us in this marvellous Apocalypse.

Let us read it—let us hear it—let us keep its sayings for
—*THE TIME IS NEAR.*

CHAPTER II.

THE THINGS THAT ARE.

THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

"John to the seven churches which are in Asia" (i. 4).

We must not suppose that there were no other assemblies than these in Asia. These seven were selected as typical.

In Paul's epistles sometimes individuals are addressed, as Timothy, Titus, or Philemon; or, all the saints in a certain place, as Ephesus, Philippi; or, the assembly as a whole in any particular town, as at Corinth, Thessalonica.

Then, again, groups of assemblies in certain districts are spoken of, as the assemblies of Galatia, Asia, or Judea (Gal. 1. 2, 22; 1 Cor. xvi. 19). But here we find something quite different. A definite number in a certain district are addressed, namely, seven; and these, besides, are not all that were to be found in that district.

The number *seven* is worthy of our notice. It is a symbolic number, no doubt, and implies a full and perfect history of the Church as God sees it in its sojourn here below. It is *God's Church History*, and not man's; and if we call it a *history*, yet is it given *prophetically*.

Doubtless they were actually existing assemblies at the time that John wrote, and they were actually in these varying conditions, but these were just the very conditions in which the Church as a whole was to be found at different stages of its history from John's day right down to the Coming of the Lord. These stages are here prophetically depicted.

THE SALUTATION.

"Grace unto you and peace."

The salutation itself is the usual one when the saints of the church dispensation are addressed. Grace, the unmerited favour of God, in which we stand; and peace, a peace which has been made by the blood of the Cross. These two things abide ever true throughout the chequered history of the Church.

But the character of the Saluter here demands our attention. It is so unlike what we find in the Epistles generally. It does not say, "grace and peace from God the Father," for, as we have seen, it is not the intimacy of the relationship of children to a father, that is unfolded in this Book, as in John's epistles; neither is it the revelation of the Father in the Son, as we find in John's gospel.

God is here brought before us as a God of judgment and of government. It is not the *privileges* of the Church that are in view but her *responsibility*. Another has written, "If my father were a judge, and had to summon me to his court, he would summon me in the name of the King, and not as my father."

So, here it is, God in His own essential being—"Him *which is*," the self-existing and ever-abiding One. This is the character in which God made Himself known to Israel—the "*I am*."

But not only this—"and *which was*," for all that God is in His present absolute and essential being, He was in ages past to Abraham, Moses, David, etc.—"and *which is to come*," or "THE COMING ONE." Though dispensations may change, God remains ever the same in His essential being. He is the "I AM," the unchanging One, Who can no more tolerate disobedience and iniquity in the professing Church than in Israel before. And He is the *Coming One*, Who will reckon with those who have stood in the place of privilege and responsibility during His absence.

THE SEVEN SPIRITS BEFORE THE THRONE.

"And from the seven spirits which are before His throne."
(i. 4).

There can be little doubt that this remarkable expression refers to the Holy Ghost, the third Person in the Trinity, and not to angels or created spirits. But how unlike the way in which John speaks of Him in his gospel, or Paul in his epistles. It is not here a divine Person operating in new birth, as was true in past dispensations, is still true, and will also be after the Church is gone. Nor is it as the Spirit indwelling the believer, and baptizing all believers into one body—a line of truth which is peculiar to this dispensation.

In the Apocalypse it is the Holy Ghost as connected with God's government of the earth, and that not only as regards the assembly in its present responsibility, but also with reference to the earth after the glorified saints are seen in their place with Christ on high (see chap. i. 4; iii. 1; iv. 5; v. 6). The number seven is symbolical, and the combined thoughts seem to be—(1) plentitude of divine power (seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, chap. iv. 5)—(2) completeness of spiritual discernment (seven eyes which are the seven Spirits of God, chap. v. 6)—(3) variety of God's ways in government of the earth (sent forth into all the earth, chap. v. 6).

THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST.

“And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth” (i. 5).

This presentation of Christ is of all importance to the proper understanding of the Book of Revelation: He is introduced here, not in His heavenly glory, but, as Man on earth. He is not here seen as Head of His body set at God's right hand in the heavens (Eph. i.); nor, as High Priest interceding for His people here below. All this was true of Him, but He is here viewed as on earth, God's answer to all the failure of man, be it Jew, Gentile, or Church of God. Jesus Christ was God's faithful witness here below.

All else failed, but He remained faithful. “This man hath done nothing amiss,” was the dying malefactor's testimony to Him, confirmed by the centurion's “certainly this was a righteous man.” And yet He died; nay this was His perfection of obedience, devotedness, and love, for He came to do the will of God, purposed and decreed before all worlds. He glorified God on the earth, and finished the work He had been given to do. Yes, blessed be His name! before He undertakes the work of judgment, He undertook and accomplished the mighty work of atonement.

And could He be holden of death? No, God stepped in and broke the power of the grave, and He is “the first begotten of the dead.” Carefully note that this too is connected with the earth; not a word is said of His

exaltation to glory, nor of His present priestly activities of grace for His people.

Then, as to His future, He is "the prince of the kings of the earth." God is yet going to vindicate Him in the very scene of His rejection, His humiliation and death. Evidence of this we shall see accumulating as our examination of the Book proceeds, and reaching its climax when as KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS, He comes forth from heaven for the overthrow of the Beast and the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against Him (Rev. xix.).

THE SONG OF REDEMPTION.

"Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.

"And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (i. 5, 6).

The mention of that peerless name of Jesus draws forth an outburst of praise from the heart of the child of God. "Unto Him that loveth us," it is not merely "loved." True, He loved us with a perfect love when He laid down His life for us at Calvary, but that same redeeming love continues as deep and infinite, as when He proved it there. Another has written—

"The love is looked at as an abiding thing. Individually we can say, He loved me and gave Himself for me (Gal. ii). We can also say, Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it (Eph. v.). But here, just as judgment is about to begin, what assurance is given by the Spirit of God presenting the fact to us in the present tense—To Him that loveth us! It has no end!"

The utter failure and breakdown of the dispensation, and the imminence of the appalling judgments about to sweep the earth from end to end, cannot rob the child of God of the precious consciousness of His Saviour's love. But more: "hath washed us from our sins in His own blood." Here it does not use the present tense and say "washeth," for "the worshippers once purged" have "no more conscience of sins" (Heb. x. 2). The believer owes everything to the precious blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son; and in view of judgment so soon to be executed, in the sense, too, of his own unworthiness, with what peace-giving power this thought comes to the heart,

"He who is the Judge, Himself loves us with an unchanging love, and He Himself has washed my sins away in His own precious blood." Thank God! we know that precious blood can never lose its power—"once purged . . . no more conscience of sins."

But not only this: "and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father." This had been promised to Israel upon the condition of their obedience (Exod. xix. 6), a condition under which they completely failed; here it is the saint's present position under grace. Some read it, "a kingdom of priests," and the thought seems to be a united company, owning and subject to the government of God, before the day when all shall have to bow in judgment; not "a rabble of independent wills," as another has put it. This at one time they had been, but now through grace a subject and united band who draw nigh to God in priestly service of worship and intercession.

"To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever"—oh, what joy to contemplate the eternity of praise and worship of which our blessed Redeemer is worthy, which even now the redeemed ascribe to Him, and with which high heaven will soon ring, and earth, too, when all God's ways are consummated. Praise breaks forth! Before our blessed Saviour went forth to Calvary, "they sang an hymn" (Matt. xxvi. 30); and here the book of judgment opens with a hymn. Amen! is the glad response of faith.

THE CRY OF ANGUISH.

"Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him" (i. 7).

Not only are there the songs of salvation, but the solemn warnings of judgment. There are those who refuse the Saviour, and these must meet the Judge. There are those, to-day, who despise and trample under foot the blood of Christ, and, these are verily as guilty in God's sight as those who shed it—"every eye shall see Him, and *such as have pierced Him*," for thus the passage should be translated, and thus, too, it embraces not only the Jews in the past, but all who have since, through their sins and rejection of His precious blood, crucified Him, as it were, afresh.

BEHOLD ! HE COMETH WITH CLOUDS.

Yes, the warning has gone forth, whether men will heed it or not. This is not the coming of Christ for His own, but His revelation in power and great glory for judgment. Everything points to the nearness of these solemn events, as the Spirit testifies in this very passage—"the things must shortly come to pass," and "the time is near." Men may scoff, and boast, and plan, but the hour of the world's judgment has struck, and a wail of despair will rend the earth from living men and women, for "every eye shall see Him." It will then be too late for repentance, for the door will be shut. Oh, how the reality of these things should move every Christian to separation from the world which is hurrying to its doom! and should impel us to redoubled efforts to rouse the slumbering and the careless, for now is the accepted time and "now is the day of salvation."

"Yea, amen: I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (i. 8).

The Church's testimony has been given; the outburst of praise, followed by the solemn warning of approaching judgment, has been heard; the certainty of His coming in power and glory, who had been pierced and nailed to the tree by wicked hands, has been announced, when lo! a voice is heard rising above the sceptical reasonings, and vulgar scoffings of the world—"EVEN SO, AMEN." It is His whose voice once shook the earth, and who has declared, "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven" (Heb. xii. 26).

CHAPTER III.

JOHN IN PATMOS.

"I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (i. 9).

The way in which John here introduces himself is worthy of all note. It is not as an apostle, nor as one in a place of God-given authority in the Church; nor is it as a member of the body of Christ, and as one in the enjoyment of full Christian privileges. Undoubtedly he was both an apostle and a member of Christ's body, the Church—for he lived in that dispensation—yet these are not the thoughts here emphasized. Rather does he take a more general position of identification with the suffering and persecuted saints of God, whether of the Church period, or of that which will follow it.

Most of what is described in the Apocalypse concerns the time that comes after the Church period, when there will be saints suffering violent persecution for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they will render. What comfort it will be to them, when passing through the fire, to look back and know that all had been foreseen and foretold, and that God's chosen instrument for this had himself endured, along with others of a dispensation at that time past, like persecutions.

THE PATIENCE OF JESUS CHRIST.

John links himself with his fellow-believers in all their path of tribulation and suffering for Christ's sake; they were suffering, and so was he, for this was not the time of the kingdom in *power* (see Rev. xii. 10), but in *patience*—and yet not patience in a vague and general sense, but "the patience of Jesus Christ." He waits, and so do we, for the time when suffering shall cease and glory burst forth upon this whole creation.

"The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ" (2 Thess. iii. 5—R.V.).

Another has written—

“This is a patience quite outside of ourselves, it is ‘the patience of Christ,’ maintained in our souls by the Holy Ghost. His endurance while sitting, “expecting,” at the right hand of God, is the most marvellous of the displays of His excellencies since His obedience unto death. Both are to the glory of God, the obedience as the humbled man, and the endurance as the glorified man. Have we grasped this? Have we grasped the immense significance of the statement, ‘Because thou hast kept the word of MY PATIENCE?’

“Think of a mighty Victor, as He is, waiting nearly 1,900 years for the fruit of His victory, and that because He will not move till it is the Father's good pleasure to signify that He shall take it! Think, too, of the Father's estimate of what is due to Him, that He should give Him the fruit of all these years in-gathering as His reward! saying to Him, ‘It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: *I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth*’ (Isaiah xlix. 6).

“Yes, most adorable Saviour! much as we yearn for Thy return, sincere as is the Spirit's cry within us that Thou shouldest come, we gladly wait on, that Thine inheritance may be enlarged thereby: Thou art worthy, Lord Jesus!” [Hartridge]

YOUR COMPANION IN TRIBULATION.

John was in Patmos, no doubt, on account of his faithful ministry of the Word. The persecutions under Nero were raging in the Roman world. Multitudes were being martyred, and subjected to all forms of torture. John links himself with these in heart and spirit. He himself was banished from home and kindred to the isle of Patmos, but God was behind all the movements of the world, and the tyrannical machinations of a cruel emperor. Little did he think that in sending John into exile he was carrying out God's plan to give to us, and to His people in a coming dispensation, this marvellous “Revelation of Jesus Christ.”

IN THE SPIRIT.

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet" (i. 10).

It is very important to grasp the full force of this expression—"I became in the Spirit,"—as it should be. It is well to remember that ever since the Holy Ghost came down from heaven at the day of Pentecost, all true believers have been *indwelt* by the Spirit. This distinguishes the whole of the present dispensation (see John xiv. 16, 17). The Spirit dwells *in* the believer as the seal of his faith in accomplished redemption, and as the earnest of coming glory. Besides this, which is *always* true of the Christian, there is the being "filled with the Spirit," which is only true as we walk in fellowship with God, and obedience to His Word.

But when John "became in the Spirit" it was something totally different. He then spoke as a prophet inspired directly by the Holy Ghost, so that all that he gave utterance to was the Word of God. Evidently this cannot be said of the ordinary Christian, no matter how godly he may be. It is a mistaken use of the words, therefore, that we sometimes hear in prayer, that "we may be in the Spirit on the Lord's day." John was in the Spirit as a prophet, communicating "the revelation of Jesus Christ," which he then received in vision.

Similar language is used by Ezekiel (xi. 5, 24, 25):—

"The Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and said unto me, Speak; Thus saith the Lord . . . Afterwards the Spirit took me up, and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea . . . Then I spake unto them of the captivity all the things that the Lord had showed me."

It was the prophetic state, and the chosen instrument was taken out of himself for the moment, and came under the controlling power of the Holy Ghost, so as to give forth that which, to the hearer, was nothing less than THE WORD OF GOD. He spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. i. 22).

ON THE LORD'S DAY.

In John's case this took place on "the Lord's day." This shows his Christian position, for the Lord's day was as characteristic of Christianity as the Sabbath was of Judaism. It was the day of Christ's resurrection—the day

that spoke of complete victory over all the power of death, of darkness, and of the devil—the day that spoke of God's entire satisfaction in that work of His own Son which had glorified Him with respect to sin—the day that brought back to John's heart, and through him to all Christians, the blessed memory of those words, "Peace unto you."

The Lord's day is the first day of the week. It was on that day that the early Christians assembled to "break bread" (Acts xx. 7). And though deprived for the moment of the privilege of gathering together with them, John is found on that day, as they were, in heart occupation with the Lord and His own.

Some have confused "the Lord's day" with "the day of the Lord." But this is a great mistake. The "day of the Lord" is often spoken of both in Old and New Testaments. It is a day that will come as a thief in the night" (1 Thess. v. 2; 2 Pet. iii. 10), and it will end with the complete dissolution of all things in "the heavens and the earth which are now," introductory to "the new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Now that day has not yet come, so it cannot be "the day of the Lord" that is meant when we are told that John was in the Spirit on "the Lord's day." It is expressed quite differently both in Greek and in English.

A GREAT VOICE, AS OF A TRUMPET.

John, then, hears *behind* him a great voice. This is most significant. His mind was set, and rightly so, on things that were future, events connected with the establishment of the kingdom in power, but he is recalled by the Spirit to that which *preceded* the kingdom. He has to receive a God-given vision of the ruin and breakdown of the dispensation to which he himself belonged, and which led up to the Kingdom. God never restores what has failed under man's responsibility. One dispensation follows another, and each fresh one is brought in upon the failure of that which went before.

How strange must have sounded the "loud voice of a trumpet" to John, accustomed as he had been to the sweet accents of the Shepherd's voice calling His own sheep by name. The same Person was speaking, but how changed were the circumstances! There was no change,

verily, in His heart of love, for He loved His own which were in the world unto the end; but here He is judging the state of that which professed the name of Christ.

WRITE IN A BOOK.

The vision was not only for John, but for all God's people that should be found on earth from the time of John until the ushering in of the new heavens and the new earth. It therefore must be written in a book and sent to the seven churches, *representative* churches as undoubtedly they were. How strange and sad that for the most part the churches of to-day remain in utter ignorance of even the letter of the book, and that only here and there do any of those who teach and preach, apply themselves to any serious study of its contents.

The number seven was not accidental but intentional. God was about to give HIS church history in a prophetic form. That history was to be a full and complete forecast of the professing Church from apostolic times down to the coming of the Lord, and thus the well-known symbolic number *seven* was chosen—the number of completeness.

It was chosen, however, not only on this account, but because these different churches possessed features in their day which, known beforehand to God, the Church as a whole was to possess during different stages of her history here below. This will become clearer as we proceed in our study of the book.

“And I turned [back] to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks: and in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one like unto the Son of man” (i. 12, 13).

The word “back,” omitted in the A.V., is of importance, as showing what was the attitude of John's mind at the time. He was looking forward in contemplation of glories about to be revealed, but is re-called authoritatively to view that which represented the Church in its responsibility as seen by the eye of Christ Himself.

GOLDEN CANDLESTICKS.

They are *golden*, as typifying their true character as established of God. The Church was set up at the beginning by God Himself to be a witness of *His* glory, and as such was founded on divine righteousness. Gold

in Scripture seems to convey these two great thoughts—divine righteousness, and divine glory.

They are candlesticks, for the bounden duty of the Church was to exhibit the light of the Holy Spirit in this world of darkness during the absence of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His session at the right hand of God.

Our thoughts naturally turn to the golden candlestick in the Sanctuary of O.T. times, only there, there was but one, which represented Christ Himself, and not the Church. There the light shone in the Sanctuary alone, whereas here these seven golden candlesticks are to give light in the world.

The truth here presented is not that of the unity of the Church as the body of Christ. Each assembly is seen in its own separate responsibility, and each assembly presents a complete moral picture of the external and visible church in its progress through this world, at different periods, starting with its first decline in Ephesus, and ending with its total rejection in Laodicea. The church, as the body of Christ, can never be spued out of Christ's mouth, but the assembly as an external and visible witness for Christ will be. No true believer in Christ can ever be lost, but multitudes of those who profess the Christian religion stand in awful danger of being so.

True *confession* of Christ is one thing—mere *profession* is quite another.

CHAPTER IV.

THE THINGS WHICH THOU HAST SEEN.

VISION OF THE SON OF MAN.

"And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle" (i. 13).

"In the midst"—how frequently are these words used with reference to our Lord. On the Cross (John xix. 18) He was "in the midst," dividing between faith and unbelief. Triumphant over death (Psalm xxii. 22; Heb. ii. 12) He leads His redeemed people in their praise. When gathered together in His name (Matt. xviii. 20) He is there to hearken to their petitions and grant their requests. And soon, when earth's pilgrimage is ended and heaven's glory is reached (Rev. v. 6), He will be the everlasting object of their worship.

But here, in Rev. i. 12, He is *in the midst as Judge*, and we cannot fail to discern the resemblance of the description here given to that of the Ancient of days in Daniel vii. It is the same Person described in Daniel and Revelation. He is not presented here in His character of priestly service of intercession, He is clothed with a garment "down to the foot." In Luke xii. 37, and John xiii. 4, He girds Himself for service, but in Revelation it is more the dignity of the judge—the flowing robes and the golden girdle of divine righteousness (see Isa. xi. 5).

"His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were like unto a flame of fire" (i. 14).

What wonderful unfoldings of the glory of His person! Here we stand on the border line between two dispensations. As Son of man He had been "lifted up" on the Cross, and though slain by wicked hands, yet, forgiveness, salvation, and heaven have been offered to "whosoever believeth in Him." But now the hour of the world's judgment has struck, and the Son of man who once was rejected, despised, spat upon, and crucified is about to "execute judgment also" (John v. 27).

THE ANCIENT OF DAYS.

And who is this Son of man? He is Jehovah, the Ancient of Days. The Ancient of Days is the eternal God, and what is said of the Ancient of Days in Daniel vii. is here said of Christ, the Son of man. Christ is both God and man. The Word was God, and yet the Word became flesh (John i. 14), and in the vision John beholds humanity and deity combined in one Person. He who in grace became man is truly God. How strikingly are all the attributes here seen in vision.

Hair white like wool—maturity of wisdom.

White as snow—spotless purity.

Eyes as a flame of fire—penetrating scrutiny.

“And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters” (i. 15).

His holiness is as great as His love, nothing escapes the searching glance of these eyes of fire; nothing, whether in the world, or in the Church, or in the individual professor of His name. Fire is the well-known biblical symbol of all-consuming judgment. Here in Revelation, it is judgment pure and simple without a sacrifice—“Our God is a consuming fire.”

But if the *eyes* denote the penetrating nature of this judgment, the *feet* as clearly teach the strength and firmness with which that judgment will be executed. The *brass* burning in the furnace teaches in symbol that all iniquity will be judged according to the requirements of divine righteousness.

Gold, as seen at the mercy seat, is the symbol of divine righteousness, as found intrinsically in God Himself; and through that wonderful type we are taught the blessed truth that by virtue of the blood of Jesus the worshipper is brought right in to where God reveals Himself in all His own glory and majesty.

Brass, as seen at the brazen altar, likewise symbolizes divine righteousness, but not so much in connection with God's nature, as with the responsibility of man. It was at the brazen altar that sin was dealt with, but by means of a sacrifice that was consumed by the fire of judgment.

Brass symbolizes the righteousness that the sinner *needs* and *gold*, the righteousness that God *provides*.

But there is more! His *voice* was as "the sound of many waters." Here we learn in symbol the majesty, the authority, and the power with which God's holy and righteous judgment will be executed. If all that God has promised in grace will certainly be fulfilled, so will every warning of judgment come to pass, "for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (Isa. i. 20).

JUDICIAL CHARACTERISTICS.

"And He had in His right hand seven stars; and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was as the sun shineth in His strength" (i. 16).

Further glories of our adorable Lord are here unfolded. All power was His, and supreme authority. Stars, truly were set to give light amidst darkness, but they were subordinate to the one great source of light. Christ, indeed, was the true light when here amongst men (John i.). In its fulness and perfection, yea, in its supreme force and brightness, it now shines in Him—"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 6). In His blessed face the sun shineth in its strength. It is so now for faith in blessing, it will be then for unbelief in judgment.

God is now challenging a scoffing, unbelieving world. The "midnight cry" has gone forth. Signs are multiplying on every hand that the Lord is coming. Everything politically, ecclesiastically, morally, and socially, is calling men's attention to the great fact that the Lord is at hand.

"And at midnight there was a cry, Behold the Bridegroom! go ye out to meet Him. . . . And as they went to buy, **the Bridegroom came**" (Matt. xxv.).

The cry has gone forth. This in itself is a sign that is awakening widespread attention, whether men believe it, or whether they do not.

IN HIS RIGHT HAND.

This is the symbol of *supreme power*. He holds the stars in His right hand. The last verse of our chapter shows us clearly what these stars represent; they stand for the "angels" of the seven churches. Doubtless the question, as ever, arises, Who are the angels? We may, of course, dismiss at once the thought of their being

angelic heavenly beings. Nor are the angels symbols of anything else—the “stars” are the symbols, and these are symbols of the “angels.” According to the derivation of the word, they are “messengers”; and according to the constant scriptural usage, except where literal angels are meant, they are *representative* in character (Luke vii. 24; James ii. 25. See Greek).

There can be no reasonable doubt that in these addresses to the seven churches the angels are *persons*. Who these persons are we shall discuss later on. But is it not plain that these stars are set in a place of responsibility in connection with the church—responsibility to Him in whose hands they are to be lights, subordinate lights, amidst the darkness? If the moon and stars of the material creation were set by God in the heavens to give light upon the earth, these symbolic stars are held responsible to shed spiritual light during the night of Christ's absence. How great the privilege! how solemn the responsibility!

OUT OF HIS MOUTH.

The sharp two-edged sword is a weapon of judgment; it is the quick and powerful Word of God, which is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. With this sword the Faithful and the True One will presently, in righteousness, judge and make war; the rebellious nations will be smitten before Him, and the followers of the Beast and False Prophet will be slain (Rev. xix.). How solemn it is to consider that the same sword of judgment is used in His dealings with that which calls itself by His name. Theologians to-day, and *so-called* Christian ministers are sitting in judgment upon that Word, and calmly discussing whether it be in very deed and truth the inspired Word of God. How soon all this will be changed when He comes forth from heaven to give unto everyone according as his work has been!

HIS COUNTENANCE.

Supreme authority, the sun shining forth in all its strength; the “Day of the Lord” introduced in all its brightness with no possibility of evil hiding away in some dark corner either of the world as such or of Christendom

—all this is suggested, but, Who may abide that day? And who shall stand when He appeareth?

“For, behold, **the day cometh**, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and **the day that cometh** shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

“But unto you that fear My name shall **the Sun of righteousness** arise with healing in His wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

“And ye shall tread down the wicked; and they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet **in the day that I shall do this**, saith the Lord of Hosts” (Mal. iv. 1-4).

And is not the Book of Revelation the introduction of that day? And does not this first chapter show us in vivid language the Judge Himself, both God and Man in One Person clothed in His judicial garments, just about to come forth to execute the judgments which shall subdue all things unto Him? We have seen Him in His *personal* glory in verses 13 and 14; we see Him in His *official* glory in verse 16.

CHAPTER V.

I FELL AT HIS FEET.

How overwhelming the sight was to John, accustomed as he had been to lean his head upon His bosom.

"And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead, and He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not: **I am the first and the last:**

"I am He that liveth and was (or, became) dead; and, Behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (i. 17, 18).

It was no mere man at whose feet John fell, but a divine Person, and that not in any vague or ambiguous sense. Christ, the Son, was and is as truly God, as the Father is God. His becoming man in no wise altered the truth of His Godhead. It was the only becoming attitude for the creature to take in presence of his Creator, "*I fell at His feet.*"

Later on in the book, John fell at the feet of the angel, and was at once rebuked. "*See thou do it not*" (xix. 10; xxii. 9), was the immediate check to any worship of the creature, and what was an angel but a creature, however excellent in power? But He before whom John falls in chap. i. was his Lord and his God, hence no rebuke follows, but His right hand of power is outstretched, not in judgment, but to uphold the fear-struck saint, and words of cheer and comfort follow, "*Fear not.*" For after all the Christ of the Apocalypse is the Christ of the Gospels. If His sword be girded to His side to strike through kings in the day of His wrath (Ps. cx.), yet is grace poured into His lips for those that are His own (Ps. xlv.).

THE ESSENTIAL DEITY OF CHRIST.

Then follow words which prove beyond all question the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, "I am the first and the last." Who but God could be "*the first*"? And who but He could be "*the last*"? No beginning had He, and neither can He have an end. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last (xxii. 13).

These words, "*the first and the last*," occur three times in the prophet Isaiah, and in that part of the prophecy which establishes Jehovah's undivided claim to be the One and only true God (Isa. xli. 4, xliv. 6, xlviii. 12).

The nations had their idols, they were but pretence—Jehovah alone was very God. Jehovah controlled the affairs of the world, giving power to whom He would, and causing nations and kings to be blown about as dust and driven stubble—"I AM THY GOD" (Isa. xli. 10).

Jehovah was King and Redeemer of His people Israel—"BESIDE ME THERE IS NO GOD" (Isa. xliv. 6). The idols of the heathen were "profitable for nothing," they were fashioned with hammers, and wrought with tongs, and planes, and compass—with what graphic irony does the prophet here describe them! But listen to Jehovah's triumphant boast—"IS THERE A GOD BESIDE ME? YEA, THERE IS NO GOD, I KNOW NOT ANY" (ver. 8).

Again, JEHOVAH the first and the last, was the Creator of all things; His hand laid the foundations of the earth, His right hand spanned the heavens. No language could more conclusively prove essential deity. Jehovah, the first and the last, was *Creator of all things* in heaven and earth (Isa. xlviii. 12, 13); He was *Redeemer of His people* (Isa. xliv. 6), and *Disposer of all the earth* (Isa. xli. 1-5). All this we learn from the prophet Isaiah. But Revelation i. 17, 18, applies it all to the Lord Jesus Christ, for it declares that He was the first and the last, quoting these very passages. Christ, then, is *not only man, but God*. Eternal praise to His name!

Furthermore, Christ is *the Living One*—"I am He that liveth"—as the Father hath life in Himself, even so the Son (John v. 26), and, blessed be His name! He is the *Source* of life to all who believe in Him. And yet, amazing truth! this Living One has died. He who was God from all eternity, became man that He might die (Heb. ii. 14), and by His death Satan's power has been annulled, and his captives delivered from bondage and fear, ere long to be brought as sons to glory, under the leadership of their victorious Captain.

But what suffering was His in order to bring all this about!—suffering inflicted by man's wicked hands, suffering, too, at the hands of a holy God, but suffering voluntarily endured in eternal and infinite love.

The "was dead" of our A.V. does not contain the full expression of His *love*—"I am He that . . . *became dead*." This language could only be used of One, and that our adorable Saviour. There was no necessity for Him to die, unless it were the necessity of His love, obedience and devotedness—and yet He died. This aspect of the truth expressed at Calvary is here maintained by the use of the word "became," thus guarding the glory and dignity of His person.

Not only this, His *willingness* to die is presented; it was not enough to merely state the fact of His death, but He in the love of His heart "became dead." How admirably perfect is the language of God's inspired Word!

But death has no more dominion over Him; He is alive "*to the ages of the ages*," and this not merely as God, but as Man. God He ever was in the eternity of the past, God He was when here on earth as man, and God He ever will be, in the ages of eternity to come. But He became Man at His incarnation.

"The Word was made (or, became) flesh and dwelt among us" (John i. 14).

In becoming man He did not cease to be God; but having once become man, He will never cease to be a man; He is alive *as a glorified man* "to the ages of the ages," this being the well-known expression throughout the Apocalypse for *eternity*.

Not only so, but He has "the keys of hades and of death." He who in His infinite love died for us, and rose again, has complete authority and power over death. Satan had the power of death (Heb. ii. 14), and used that power to bring man still more under bondage through the fear of death. And what more terrible than death to one who has no Saviour? What more awful than a step into the dark unknown?—for death was the judgment of God because of sin, and besides and beyond this there is *the judgment after death* (Heb. ix. 27).

How well Satan knows how to wield this fear over man's conscience, but for the believer in Christ this fear is gone for ever. Satan's power has been annulled, "the

stronger than he" has overcome him, has taken from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divided his spoils (Luke xi. 22).

Sinners saved by grace are the spoils of that glorious victory of Calvary, and Christ has become our Deliverer from the fear of death. He has the keys, all power of deliverance is His, all authority too; none can dispute His rights, He is Lord both of the dead and the living (Rom. xiv. 9). With what calm, unruffled peace the believer can face death under all its circumstances!—its sting is gone, its victory crushed, its strength for ever broken.

"Thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. xv. 57).

"I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Habak. iii. 18).

CHAPTER VI.

THE THINGS WHICH ARE.

"Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter (or, after these things)" (chap. i. 19).

In this well-known verse we find the key to the whole book. A threefold division of all that the book contains is here given. This has already been noticed, but for any intelligent interpretation it cannot be too much insisted on.

The first division, namely, "the things which thou hast seen," has already passed before us. It is the vision of Christ's glory, as described in the first chapter. We are now about to enter upon the second division, namely, "the things which are."

This is a remarkable expression—the present state of things. These things are brought before us in the second and third chapters; they describe the Church period. Originally given *prophetically*, they may now be largely read *historically*, for we are nearing the end, as Christians in ever increasing numbers are fully convinced.

That we are right in saying that "the things which are" are those described in chapters ii. and iii., is evident from chapter iv. 1, where, after the address to the seven churches, John is shown the things which must take place "after these things," that is, after "the things which are." it is important to observe that the word "hereafter" (chap. i. 9, and iv. 1) of our A.V. is altogether too vague; the thought conveyed by the Greek (*μετὰ ταῦτα*) does not imply *indefinite futurity*, but *immediate sequence* (in the sense of our English word "thereupon").

How then are we to understand the expression "the things which are?" Clearly they are the *present* state of things. But were they present merely in John's day? or have they been prolonged and extended in such a way that they are present still? We must remember that the *whole* book is *prophetic* (see chap. i. 3). We cannot, therefore, exclude the prophetic interpretation of chapters ii. and iii. It may be objected that the seven churches were churches that were then all actually existing, and that now they have all ceased to be. Why were actually existing churches addressed?

In the first place, it is noteworthy that the Lord would never have His people postpone the hope of His return. He would ever have it as their immediate expectation. Hence, that which to us may seem, as we look back, a long and dreary pilgrimage presented no such sorrowful anticipation to our brethren of earlier days. It was their duty, as it is ours, to be *always* waiting for Christ—"Ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord" (Luke xii. 36)—and hence the language of inspiration was always such as to bring that "blessed hope" near.

IT NEVER IMPLIED LONG DELAY.

This most interesting fact has often been pointed out—the virgins (Matt. xxv.) that first went forth were those that went in to the feast; the servants to whom the pounds were given when the nobleman went into the far country, were the same that were called before him on his return (Luke xix.); Paul included himself amongst the number that might be alive (1 Thess. iv.) when Christ should return—"we which are alive" he says, not "they which shall be."

Known unto God were all His works from the very beginning; and, had He been pleased to do so, He might have communicated to us the fact that long centuries would intervene between Christ's ascension to glory and His return to fetch us home. But we are distinctly told to watch, and for what reason?

"Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh" (Mark xiii. 35).

"The things which thou hast seen," then, are described in chapter i; "the things which are," in chapters ii. and iii; whereas "the things which shall be after these things" commence at chapter iv. and continue to the end of the book. In the mind of the Spirit the whole period of the Church's history here on earth is described as "the things which are." The distinctly prophetic and future portion of the book does not commence to be fulfilled until the Church's history on earth is closed." The things which shall be *after these things*" (chapters iv.-xxii.) unfold God's future dealings with the world, introducing by a succession of judgments Christ's Millennial Kingdom, and finally the Eternal State.

THE MYSTERY OF THE SEVEN STARS.

Surely none can fail to see that the seven churches (or, assemblies) spoken of in the two following chapters require an application far more extended than these seven literal churches in Asia. The very use of the word *mystery* ("the mystery . . . of the seven golden candlesticks") implies such an interpretation, for there was no mystery about these seven particular churches. The mystery consisted in this, that they were to be taken as representing various stages and phases of the Church as a whole upon earth, which the lapse of time has now proved to have covered a long and extended period, but which at every stage could be spoken of as "*the things which are.*"

"The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches" (i. 20).

And what are the stars? They are lights, *subordinate* lights, in contrast with the sun which is *supreme*. Moreover, they are lights that shine *during the night*. Furthermore, we are told that the stars are the angels of the churches. And what, and who are the angels? We have already seen that an angel is one that *represents* another. Elsewhere we read of the angel of Jehovah, the angel of Peter, and the angels of little children; here, for the first time, we read of angels of churches. Clearly this presents a different thought from any of the gifts or office bearers with which we are familiar in the epistles.

No doubt the very vagueness of the expression, and the difficulty of deciding definitely who is meant, is intended to act on the conscience of each individual member of that which professes to be the Church of God. Unquestionably leaders and those occupying a more prominent position in a local assembly of Christians are specially responsible, yet we must remember the constant reiteration of the words—

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

The angel is specially addressed, nevertheless the whole assembly and each individual member thereof is responsible to hear. And everything here speaks of responsibility, for the assembly itself is described as a candlestick, or

lamp, and of what use is a light that is hidden out of men's sight?

THE CHURCH IN ITS RESPONSIBILITY.

Perhaps with no part of the book of Revelation are we more familiar than with chapters ii. and iii. Much has been written by more than one of the Lord's servants upon the seven Churches with which the Bible student might most profitably make himself acquainted. We shall therefore endeavour to be brief, and summarize rather than develop.

One great principle stands out clearly. The Church is viewed here in her responsibility, and is itself the subject of judgment. This is a fact we do well to bear in mind. We often hear people ask, when viewing the terrible condition of the world, "What has the Church to say to these things? What voice has she for the present time?" But here we are told what God has to say to the Church herself.

The history of the Church as a responsible vessel of testimony for an absent Christ is one of declension and failure, ending in utter rejection in Laodicea; but how solemn the fact that the first step in declension is seen in Ephesus. No assembly in apostolic times was more highly favoured, but how different the Ephesus of John to the Ephesus of Paul.

The humbling fact stands forth that the Church is no more able to maintain God's testimony in the world than Israel was of old. No privileges, however great, can keep us when faith, and love, and hope begin to wane. The Church as a vessel of outward testimony has failed, and will be set aside as certainly as Israel has been. God had long patience toward Israel during centuries of idolatry. He warned and besought by all the prophets He sent to them, but all in vain. Even so it is with the professing Church. The true Church, composed of all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, will be "caught up" at His coming, and will be manifested in glory, but mere profession will be spued out of Christ's mouth.

We cannot too seriously weigh the fact, as brought before us in this Book of Revelation, that it is the Church which is judged, and not the Church which judges. We do not make light of what Scripture elsewhere teaches

with reference to the judgment of evil and the exercise of discipline. These have their place, and are the sorrowful consequence of the flesh in action in individual members. But when the Church assumes the place of authority over conscience, and sits in the seat of judgment, she departs from her proper attitude of subjection to Christ (Eph. v. 24), and submission to His Word. What the Spirit here says, He says to the churches, and each individual member is responsible to listen.

In these days of the pretensions of Rome, it is of ever increasing necessity to resist the putting of any authority between the soul and Christ. The believer needs no earthly priest to stand between him and God, for the precious blood of Christ has opened the way for him into the Holiest of all; and he needs no ecclesiastical authority to usurp the place of God's Word, which speaks directly to both heart and conscience in the power of the Holy Ghost. It is just here where the addresses to the seven Churches come in to encourage the heart, as well as to appeal to the conscience, but it is individual work—

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: **To him that overcometh, etc.**”

The ruin had begun in Paul's day; all sought their own and not the things of Jesus Christ. It was to the elders of Ephesus that Paul spoke words of special warning (Acts xx.)—words that at that time might have seemed improbable of fulfilment—that the danger was from *within* and not from without, and that from amongst their own selves men would arise to draw away disciples after them. But Paul, in view of all this, commended them to God and the Word of His grace. And is it not the same for these days described prophetically by John?

The professing Church as a whole is seen in its ruin, but the individual believer is cast upon God Himself and His Word; the *individual* it is that is called upon to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS.

Revelation ii. 1-7.

In this first address all is very general, this is seen both in the character in which Christ presents Himself at the beginning as well as in the promise to the overcomer at the end.

“These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks” (ii. 1).

The Lord does not here assume some special character relative to some special state of the assembly, but one which is applicable during the whole length of the Church's history here below, whatever the special condition at any particular period.

He holds the “stars” in His right hand, not one only, but the “seven,” proving the general character of this first address. The stars, as we have seen, are those who hold a place of special responsibility in the assembly—it may be by office or ministry. But then, besides this, each individual in the assembly has his or her responsibility to hear, for the words addressed to the angel are spoken to the Church as a whole, yet the promised reward to him who hears is given to the individual overcomer.

It is a solemn thing to remember that the Lord in His judicial character of Son of man walks amidst the candlesticks. The Church of the Living God, in her responsibility, is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. iii. 15). She is left here to be a faithful witness to the great mysteries of the faith, which all centre round the person of the Lord Jesus Christ—His spotless humanity, His essential deity, His atoning sacrifice, and His triumphant resurrection and reception into glory. Yes, she is left here on earth during the absence of Christ to be a witness for Him, a light amidst the darkness.

CANDLESTICK REMOVED.

God has long patience, but when the Church ceases entirely to be a true witness for Christ, her candlestick will be removed and she will be rejected as a vessel of testimony. This will be actually done as regards the

whole professing Church when she will be spued out of Christ's mouth (Rev. iii. 16), when the Lord comes to take away His own. As a matter of fact the candlestick has long since been taken away from Ephesus. And are there not many local churches of whom the same may be said in our day?

There have been times of great spiritual awakening in our land—the early days of Congregationalism, the revivals under Wesley and Whitfield, and other such-like movements. Men and women converted to God during those times of refreshing have built churches and consecrated them to the service of God and the preaching of His Word. Multitudes were saved therein so long as the Gospel was faithfully preached. In those days crowds thronged to hear, and to be fed with the bread of life. It has been our sad lot to visit not a few of such from whence not a ray of light now shines, emptied by Modernism and an unconverted ministry. They are veritable sepulchres of the dead. Their candlesticks have been removed.

“I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them that are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not. ✓ and hast found them liars” (ii. 2).

Here in Ephesus all seemed in good order. The eye of man could detect nothing amiss. There was much that even Christ Himself could approve. There was much that met His high commendation, and the Lord does not make light of these things. It is ever His way to give full credit for everything that in any little measure is done for Him, and it ill becomes us to belittle it in one another. It would be well indeed if we always were to act in this Christ-like manner, and emphasize all the good we can in one another before referring to what needs correction.

WORKS, LABOUR, AND PATIENCE !

There seems to have been great activity in the Church at Ephesus, and, no doubt, much that was done was of a spiritual nature. Yet, one cannot help comparing this with the Church of the Thessalonians. There we read of a work of FAITH, a labour of LOVE, and a patience of HOPE. It looks as if the real spring and power had begun to wane. The external form was there, but the internal power of the Spirit was absent. And what can

be said of much of the activity of the churches to-day? Concerts, whist drives, bazaars, dances, theatricals and all forms of worldly amusements! What is all this before Him whose "eyes are as a flame of fire?"

Doubtless Ephesus had not sunk so low, or the Lord could never have spoken with any measure of approval of her works.

But there was more. There were some who for reasons of their own laid claim to be apostles. Paul had spoken of such before; "false apostles," he calls them, "transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ" (2 Cor. xi. 13); men who were seeking power and importance in a fleshly way, but shirking the true and spiritual signs of apostleship such as we see them in Paul himself.

The Lord here commends the angel of the Church at Ephesus in these words:—

"Thou has tried them which say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars" (ii. 2).

Of course, we to-day, knowing that apostles were at the *foundation* of the Church, as Paul by the Spirit writes to this same Ephesus (Eph. ii. 20), would not be likely to listen seriously to any making such a claim; but in John's day true apostles might not all have passed away; they therefore had to be tried, and their claims investigated. This had been done; they had been found liars, and their pretensions were refused; and this was to their credit from the Lord.

How this testing had been made we are not told, but may we not infer that God's guidance had been sought in prayer, and His Word been relied on for direction? This is our resource in every difficulty that may arise to-day—an unfailing one—God and the Word of His grace.

LOSS OF FIRST LOVE.

Work, labour, patience, intolerance of evil, reliance upon God and His Word for guidance in difficult circumstances—not only so, but doing it all for Christ's name's sake. Who would have thought that anything at Ephesus was amiss?

"Nevertheless I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love" (ii. 4).

Here was the root of all spiritual trouble, the starting-point of decline, which, if unchecked, would continue to

utter and complete rejection. It is well to observe that the word "somewhat" is an interpolation. As the verse stands in our excellent A.V., it would look as if the leaving of first love was but a slight affair, whereas to Him whose eyes were as a flame of fire it was a danger that overshadowed all the outward appearance of service and devotedness. THOU ART FALLEN, was the verdict.

"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, **except thou repent**" (ii. 5).

Every argument that love can devise is used to bring back the erring assembly to its earlier and brighter attitude. The memory of all the infinite blessing that had been ministered to them by servants of the Lord at rest from their labours; those "unsearchable riches of Christ" that had been preached amongst them, "the riches of grace," "the riches of glory," "the love of Christ," known and enjoyed, and expressed by them in days gone by; that first love of a newly captivated heart, absorbed, engrossed, and satisfied with its object, and manifesting itself in an activity of love to Christ and all His own; the assurance from the Lord Himself that those *first works* of true heart consecration and devotedness to Him were cherished in His heart—"remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works."

But all proved of no avail. Declension begun imperceptibly, went on to complete neglect of love even so great as His, until the candlestick of Ephesus was actually removed in governmental discipline. What took place at Ephesus locally may elsewhere have taken place locally during the centuries that have rolled by, and, so far as the professing Church is concerned, will take place universally when, at the coming of the Lord, He takes all His own in the twinkling of an eye to where no blight of sin or worldliness can enter.

But yet again the tender heart of Christ recalls another matter for commendation, as though it might have been forgotten in the enumeration of that which drew forth His approval—

"But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate" (ii. 6).

What the Nicolaitanes were we are not told. Some have thought it to be the commencing spirit of clerisy (from the derivation of the Greek word which means "conquering the laity"). The Christian ministry must not be confounded with that spirit of clerisy which lit the fires of Smithfield. The former is a gift from God, the latter is a product of fleshly hate against God and His people under the pretence of a divine institution. For the present we leave it there; later on, in Pergamos, it appears again.

Now comes the call to the individual.

WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH UNTO THE CHURCHES.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (ii. 7).

It is clear from this that it is not to the Church that we must turn, as though she had authority to teach. This is the claim of Rome, but it is a false one. Yet it works insidiously.

We often hear the question asked in these days of unrest and confusion, "What has the Church to say? Has she no voice for the times?" The responsibility of the Church lies in this that she is "the pillar and ground (or, support) of the truth" (1 Tim. iii. 15). How miserably she has failed in her duty is patent to all whose consciences are in any measure alive. How quickly the Pauline energy of the Spirit ceased, how rapidly declension supervened. In John's day it was no question of the Church teaching as Rome claims, but this—"What the Spirit saith unto the churches."

THE OVERCOMER.

Nevertheless, is it not a blessed encouragement in spite of all the deepening shadows of predicted apostasy, to be urged on individually to victory by the Lord Himself?

No matter what the state of things in the professing Church may be, the individual Christian may always be an overcomer. The general principle is laid down in those well-known words:—

"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. xii. 21).

And again—

“This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John v. 4).

And what is overcoming? Well, to begin with, IS it not essential that we should realize how keenly interested is the Lord Jesus Christ in the spiritual condition of each one of His own? It is not enough to be His, and to know that we are; it is not enough to know that none can ever pluck us out of His hand, and that our title to glory we can read in His blood.

Each one of His own blood-bought ones will infallibly be in heaven by-and-bye, but meanwhile we are on earth, and it is here and now that He longs for faithfulness and devotedness to Himself.

Moreover He points out to us what are the special dangers of the way, and shows us the one and only secret of being well-pleasing to Him. It is to love Him with that earnest, fresh, and ardent love that at one moment of our Christian life flooded our souls—that moment when first we learnt His great love to us.

Are we conscious that that first love has cooled down within our hearts? Then, listen to the command of injured love: “Repent and do the first works.” If Ephesus of the early centuries turned a deaf ear, and went on from bad to worse until her candlestick was removed—if the professing Church as a whole refuses to listen, and pursues her downward course until she be spued out of His mouth, yet still the individual may hear and overcome, encouraged by the promise:—

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (ii. 7).

THE PARADISE OF GOD.

We cannot but compare that first paradise which man forfeited by his sin and disobedience, with the paradise of God established in immutable righteousness. The tree of life is found in both. To have eaten of that tree when sin had come in would have been to perpetuate an existence of misery and sorrow—

“And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever.”

No, this could not be! A life of perpetual estrangement from God was not that which He had planned for man:—

“Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, . . . and He placed . . . Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (Gen. iii. 22-24).

But if the gates of man's earthly paradise have been closed by sin, the gates of God's heavenly paradise have been flung open by redemption, and “whosoever will” may enter in on God's simple terms—

“Blessed are they that wash their robes (see *margin*), that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. xxii. 14).

The glorified throng who walk those golden streets, and repose along the shady banks of that pure river of water of life, shall ever be able to put forth the hand and pluck the fruit of that tree of life which never will cease to grow and yield her all-satisfying fruit. What a joy to the overcomer, toiling through the dust and heat of the battlefield, to look forward to that bright scene when Christ shall be the eternal source of His people's satisfaction and delight, and to know that His own hand shall press that fruit to his lips.

“TO HIM THAT OVERCOMETH WILL I GIVE
TO EAT OF THE TREE OF LIFE.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHURCH OF SMYRNA.

Revelation ii. 8-11.

"And unto the angel of the Church in Smyrna write: These things saith the First and the Last, which was dead and is alive."

We come now to a very special period of Church history—history written beforehand; it may be called the *persecution* period. Taking that history as a continuous whole, it covers about the first two centuries. During that time, under the Roman emperors, persecution constantly broke out, inflicted, not by professed Christians, as happened later on, but by the heathen world.

The Lord reveals Himself here to His tried and persecuted people in a character that was specially calculated to sustain and strengthen their faith.

"These things saith the First and the Last, who became dead, and lived" (i.e., after becoming dead).--R.V.

Deep and important truths, which are constantly Satan's point of attack, are wrapped up briefly in these words. In the first place, He who speaks, the Lord Jesus Christ, is none other than God, for of God only can it be said that He is First and Last. God is unaffected by all time limits, and is *beyond*, as even He was *before* all that pertains to *time*, be it prisons, persecutions, or even death itself.

But more, He Who here speaks, our adorable Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, was Man as truly as He was God—"He became dead." This was one of the reasons for which He took part of flesh and blood—

"He was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death" (Heb. ii. 9).

But He is risen from the dead—"He became dead and lived." How large the circle of truth contained in this short passage! The DEITY of Christ, the HUMANITY of Christ, the DEATH of Christ, the RESURRECTION of Christ. Glorious, amazing truths which may well bow the soul in worship and sustain in danger's hour.

"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich)."

NOTHING TO CONDEMN.

In the first place, it is to be observed that in this address to Smyrna there is no reproof made—no leaving of first love, drawing forth a call to repentance. Persecution may limit the number of outward disciples, but it likewise induces intense reality in those who are true. There is no playing at being Christians when the fires of martyrdom are being kindled. It must be one thing or the other, but no neutrality, no half and half confession.

On the other hand, days of persecution are not days of great activity in Christian work, hence in this address "works" are left out (see R.V.). At Ephesus there were many "works," but first love was wanting. At Smyrna hearts beat true to Christ, but "works" were not in any prominence. They were a poor and afflicted people, despised by the world, no doubt, and poor in the eyes of men, but in God's sight, how rich!

THE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN.

"I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

"Fear none of those things which thou shall suffer; behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days" (ii. 10).

Persecution has ever been the portion of God's faithful people; and the devil has always been the instigator thereof. But he employs human agency. In these early days of the Church's history and warfare that agency was two-fold, not only imperial Rome, but also the Jews, whose ancestors had so recently crucified their Messiah. The apostle Paul all through His public ministry of the Gospel was constantly being opposed by the Jews. To give but one instance, when at Antioch (Acts xiii.), the gospel of God's saving grace and pardoning love was announced, it first was proclaimed to the Jews. But their proud, rebellious hearts rejected the message. They went out of the synagogue despising God's offer. But the Gentiles besought that the words might be preached to them the next Sabbath day. Almost the whole city came together to hear the Word of God the following Sabbath, but we are told that—

"When the Jews saw the multitude, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming" (Acts xiii. 45).

All acquainted with early church history, such as may be found in Gibbon, Milman and other historians have abundant evidence of the fierce intolerance of the Jews against Christianity, and their fiery persecution of the Christians.

THEM WHICH SAY THEY ARE JEWS.

"Christianity" wrote Dr. Milman, Dean of St. Paul's, was at first "but an expanded Judaism; it was preached by Jews; it was addressed to Jews." The Acts of the Apostles contains the inspired record of the progress of the gospel in its early stages gathering thousands of adherents from amongst the Jews.

When Paul came upon the scene a new impetus was given and the floodgates were opened so that the message of redeeming love burst every barrier and reached to men "in all the world," and was "preached to every creature which is under the heaven" (Col. i. 6. 23).

This brought the Jews into fierce conflict with Paul, as the Acts record, even the Romans having to step in and protect him from their fierce hatred.

It has often been held, and not without just cause, that the persecutions recorded in the Smyrna period were inflicted by Roman Emperors, and the limitation of "ten days" has been connected with the persecutions which Roman history seems to shew were directed against the Christians at the time of Diocletian.

In the extended interpretation of chapters ii. and iii. this may very well be the case. But the emphasis laid upon "the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not" we suggest has a very definite reference to the opposition that the gospel met with at the hands of those who were Jewish born nationally.

Paul refers to them in Rom. ii. 17-29—

"He is not a Jew which is one outwardly . . . but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter."

It was too late to make a boast of being a "Jew by nature" (Gal. ii. 15). They had crucified their own Messiah, and now persecuted even those of their own nation who believed in Him to the saving of their souls. True the outward form of their religion continued. They had their synagogues, but in heaven's estimation it was

the very synagogue of Satan. The call had now come to go forth from that which laid claim to be God's approved religion, and to take sides with those who believed in Him whom they had crucified—without the Jewish camp, bearing His reproach. The Christians were in tribulation and poverty, a despised people but rich beyond all telling with the unsearchable riches of Christ.

THE DEVIL, THE PERSECUTOR.

They were a suffering band, tested and tried. Dark days were in store. Not only the gathering clouds of persecution from without, whether at the hands of Judaism as seen in the Sanhedrin and Synagogue, or from pagan Rome. The Devil was the real instigator of it all. He it was who would cast some into prison. Jews and Pagans were but his agents. By all this God was accomplishing His purposes of grace towards His people, recovering them from that fatal torpor of waning first love—

“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life” (ii. 10).

Martyrdom in some cases would take place. How graciously the Lord prepares His people for the coming storm! Sufferings they should have, imprisonment, too, all the malice of Satan let loose upon them, even a martyr's death—but, if so, they should have the martyr's crown, the crown of life.

Eternal life is the gift of God (Rom. vi. 23), but the *crown of life* is a special reward for faithfulness amidst special circumstances of tribulation, and this reward will be bestowed upon multitudes who in after-years, whether in the Middle Ages or more recently, have laid down their lives for Christ.

THE PROMISE TO THE OVERCOMER.

The promise in this case was of a special kind, and suited to the martyr period.

“He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (ii. 11).

Here we get the assurance in the very strongest language that death in its final form as the judgment of God would never be theirs. The unbelieving sinner

who dies must die twice, and the second death will be his final doom, not extinction, not annihilation, but the lake of fire (Rev. xx. 14). But for the child of God it will never be so. He may pass through tribulation, but the period is limited—"ten days"—it will not be the endless tribulation of the ungodly.

How comforting when passing through times of suffering for Christ's sake to know that all is in God's hands, and even though persecuted, His people are never forsaken.

How brightly the crown of life will shine on many a brow that now lies cold in death! How near a place will the crowd of martyrs have to Him Who became dead but lives! What a special link will exist, and that for ever, between Him Who died in love to us, and those who have been actually and in their bodies conformed to His death! We shall not grudge them their special recompense.

CHAPTER IX.
THE CHURCH OF PERGAMOS.
Revelation ii. 12-17.

A very different state of things presents itself to us here from what we found in Smyrna.

There *persecution* was prominent, persecution from a heathen world, and Jewish antagonists of Christianity. But here, at Pergamos, a more subtle form of evil is seen. Corruption was at work within.

Satan's persecutions drive the soul nearer to God, whereas his seductions and offers of worldly advancement draw the heart away from Him. This seems to be the special danger portrayed in Pergamos, which in the extended interpretation of the addresses to the churches would be the period of Constantine, about A.D. 313 onwards.

The world had grown weary of persecuting, and Satan, ever on the watch to ruin the testimony of God, and to injure those who sought to uphold it, had now devised means better calculated to gain his ends.

The reference to Balaam carries our thoughts back to the days of Israel's journeying to Canaan, when Balak the king of Moab, sought to keep them out of their inheritance by force. This, however, he could not do, for God had made promises which no power of the enemy could reverse—God was not a man that He should lie; He had spoken and would make it good.

This is, indeed, a comfort to faith amidst the darkest days. God will not cast away His people. But so far as outward testimony is concerned, the corruption of worldliness succeeds in spoiling it, where persecution fails. Balaam wanted to curse the people but he could not, for God had given a commandment to bless, but his evil counsel brought about that trespass against the Lord, which drew forth the chastisement of His hand (Numbers xxxi. 16). It is to this that allusion is made by the expression the "doctrine of Balaam."

"To the angel of the Church in Pergamos write; These things saith He that hath the sharp sword with two edges."

A changed state of the professing Church necessitates a different attitude on the part of the Lord. The sword hitherto had been in the hands of a persecuting world,

it is now seen transferred to the One Who walks amidst the candlesticks.

The time is coming when that sword will be used in the judgment of the world. After the rapture of the saints, and just before the millennial reign of Christ, the heavens will open and forth will come

THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS,

attended by the armies of heaven—the glorified saints.

The Word which now is speaking life to every one that heareth and believeth (John v. 24), will then sweep down in judgment all His proud and rebellious foes. But before the day of this world's judgment, the Lord deals with the Church. He will not judge the saints by-and-by with the world, lest they be condemned (1 Cor. xi. 32), so He deals with them now in chastisement.

"I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is; and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth."

It will be noticed that the words of our A.V.—"I know thy works"—are omitted. Neither at Smyrna nor at Pergamos is any allusion made to works, but for very different reasons. Days of persecution, as in Smyrna, were not days of activity in outward work, and days of worldliness as in Pergamos were not such as to produce devoted service.

If Smyrna takes us back to days of Diocletian persecution, Pergamos describes prophetically what we now know took place historically in the days of Constantine the Great (see Gibbon's *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*).

WHERE SATAN DWELLETH.

"I know where thou dwellest"—Are these words of reproof for unfaithfulness? or, Are they anxious solicitation on the part of One Who can gauge the danger of His weak though faithful people? As a matter of fact Pergamos was the centre of Pagan idolatry in Syria, and a centre of philosophic intellectualism. It had a vast library which eventually was transferred to Alexandria. It was a citadel of Satanic opposition to Christianity.

The echoes of persecution had not died away. Individual faithfulness, even unto death, had been seen in

one at least. How stirring the words—"MY FAITHFUL WITNESS"! Here was one who had not counted his own life dear unto him, and had sealed his faith with his blood.

Further, the Lord loves to own all that was good in Pergamos as a whole; they had held fast His name, and not denied His faith. Nevertheless they dwelt where Satan's throne was. It was there, where he was prince, that their life of responsible testimony had to be lived. Satan is the prince of this world: he was proved to be such at the Cross, where he led the world against Christ. And it is in this world which has rejected Christ, that the Church is responsible to witness for Him—

"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."

As we have said, the world had grown weary of persecuting. Indeed the futility of such methods was apparent, for the more they persecuted, the more vigorous became the life and testimony of the Church. The gospel was making its way in the world, and those in high places were coming in contact with it; even the Emperor Constantine began to listen and be influenced. This in itself, though a signal mercy to those in exalted positions, presented dangers of a special character to the Church.

Here, in Revelation, God is not giving us an account of the progress and triumph of the gospel, such as He does in the Acts. No, He is here describing prophetically the declension of the Church. So that the Spirit of God here brings before us the snares and pitfalls which the great Adversary would lay at the feet of the saints, resulting even from what God in His mercy was doing for the eternal salvation of souls.

All this we have pointed out is here given *prophetically*, but we know what took place *historically* in the days of Constantine. Persecution ceased by order of the Emperor, and all the most important official positions of the Empire were thrown open to the Christians. Here lay the spiritual danger. How difficult to maintain the Church's position, as a body that was not of this world, when that very world was opening its arms to receive them! Now was Satan's opportunity, and *from amongst themselves* he

raised up men *to teach the doctrine* of association and amalgamation with the world. Balaam's doctrine succeeded where the sword of persecution had failed—

"So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate" (ii. 15).

The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, too, became a snare. What was this? Many different explanations have been attempted, but as this chapter (verses 8 and 15) is the only one that makes any allusion to these people, it is difficult and dangerous to be too dogmatic. One thing at any rate we may learn, and that is that the downward course was being rapidly pursued. Nicolaitanism, whatever it was, was hateful to the heart of Christ. In Ephesus the Church shared that hatred, and absolutely refused the DEEDS, whereas in Pergamos toleration was given to the DOCTRINE that produced those deeds.

Some have thought from the derivation of the word, which implies "conquering the people" that there is an allusion to that clerical intolerance that characterized the dark ages of Rome. No tyranny has been more awful right down the ages. It lit the fires of Smithfield, and invented the tortures of the Inquisition. The fierce flames of martyrdom were lit and fanned by an intolerant clergy—

"Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

THE OVERCOMER.

The call sounds out clear as a trumpet. Repentance is the only remedy. If too late for the Church as a whole, at any rate the individual may take heed, and overcome in the energy of faith—

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, our faith.

"Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John v. 4, 5).

But at any rate the sword is in the hand of Him Whose eyes are as a flame of fire—"I will fight against THEM," He says not, against THEE. The time had not yet come for visiting upon the Church as a whole the displeasure of the Lord. He has long patience, and indeed the Assembly as a body still held fast His name, and refused to deny His faith.

The Lord says, MY FAITH, not merely THY FAITH. This is deserving of careful attention in days such as these in which our lot is cast, when the teachers of the

people are playing fast and loose with the Word of God, and the rock foundations of the faith.

There were teachers at Pergamos leading them astray, and *against these teachers* the Lord would fight.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches: To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it" (ii. 17).

How the reward here meets the very condition of things that formed the special danger of the church of Pergamos! What encouragement for those who as individuals were striving to overcome the Devil's wiles, and to walk well-pleasing to the Lord.

The hidden Manna—association with Christ here in His rejection by the world, will in yonder glory lead to special communion with Himself in the remembrance of His blessed pathway of lowly grace, while walking as the humbled Man—the Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

There on the hidden bread
Of Christ—once humbled here—
God's treasured store—for ever fed,
His love my soul shall cheer.

A white Stone—this was the mark of approval, a well understood symbol in those times, a means of recording votes in favour of candidates to certain offices. How precious the thought that faithfulness here will meet with Christ's approval by-and-by.

A new name written—A special intimacy between the overcomer and his Lord; an assurance that encourages the heart while battling here amidst discouragements, disappointments, and misunderstandings, and yet with true desire to be well-pleasing to the Lord, that in *that* day we shall know from His own blessed lips what He thought of "leaving all to follow Him."1

Hence, besides that fulness of joy, which will be the common portion of all the redeemed, there will be special intimacies between the individual saints and Christ, which cheer the pilgrim here, even, by the very anticipation of their delight.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA.

Revelation ii. 18-29.

The history of the declension of the Church prophetically given advances rapidly. We have seen in EPHESUS departure from first love and threatened removal of the candlestick; in SMYRNA, a temporary brightening up of the general state through persecution; in PERGAMOS, danger through the snare of worldliness, and Balaam-teachers breaking down the barrier between the Church and the world.

In THYATIRA changes of the most instructive nature are to be noticed. In the first three addresses more or less passing phases are seen; here and in the three last a more permanent state of things is contemplated. In the four last churches we are carried right down to the end; for in each of them the coming of the Lord is introduced.

Furthermore, a remarkable change takes place in the position given to the seven-fold repeated formula,—“He that hath an ear to hear,” etc. In the three first this *precedes* the address to the overcomer, whereas in the four last it *follows*. Why is this? Is it not that the evil of the corporate system has so advanced, that the hearing ear at last can only be found amongst the overcomers?

“And unto the angel of the Church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass; I know thy works” (ii. 18).

THE DARK MIDDLE AGES.

If in Pergamos we see historically the days of Constantine, in Thyatira we find the dark Middle Ages of the Church, characterized by the idolatry and corruption of the Papacy.

In the Thyatira of the early days Satan introduced those principles of evil which brought about the matured diabolical wickedness of the Romish ecclesiastical system of the Dark Ages. Those were the days when the Church

was wielding the sword of persecution. No longer persecuted by the world, her Balaam-teachers had brought about such an unholy union with that world, that now, for the first time, a remnant of faithful souls was recognized.

THE REST IN THYATIRA.

Such were the Waldenses and others hidden here and there, and many of them martyred by that which claimed to be "the Church." How dear to the hearts of these persecuted saints was Jesus, the Son of God! For His sake they braved the horrors of the Inquisition, and the tortures of the stake.

The time is drawing near when all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life—here surely are included the martyrs of the dark ages of the Church—and, solemn words! "*they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment*"—yes, be they Popes or cardinals, whose guilty dust may lie beneath alabaster slabs or in marble vaults.

"But unto you I say, the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

"But that which ye have, hold fast till I come" (ii. 25).

In Thyatira we have *prophetically given* that period of the Church which existed during the Middle Ages; in other words, Rome before the Reformation. In the whole history of the world it would be impossible to find depths of more abominable wickedness and viler corruption in morals than that which was found in the ecclesiastical system which claimed to be the true Church—"the depths of Satan" it is here called.

There are several important features to be noticed in Thyatira:—

(1) *It goes on to the end.*—Here for the first time the Lord's Coming is introduced. Doubtless this is a hope that encourages the faithful soul amidst the wreck and ruin of the professing Church, but it is also an indication that what is specially in the Spirit's mind in Thyatira will go on to the end. Other phases of the Church follow no doubt in Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea; but Thyatira continues to the end.

Rome does not cease when Protestantism (Sardis) comes upon the scene. Rome is not the prominent thing in the Spirit's thoughts in the phases that follow, but nevertheless it is still there; and in the end it will pass on into BABYLON THE GREAT.

(2) *A remnant found for the first time.*—This is of importance to note. The remnant is distinguished from the mass of profession—"unto you I say, THE REST in Thyatira." But here we need to tread with caution. It has been the tendency in certain quarters to speak of the remnant as a specially faithful set of Christians amongst other Christians of a more worldly type. But we believe the remnant consists of the whole company of the truly converted in the midst of the mass of profession.

If we speak of Thyatira now *historically*, this remnant was no doubt to be seen in such faithful and persecuted companies as the Waldensians, Albigenses, and others. This simple and true-hearted people, while still forming part of the Roman communion, outwardly at any rate, for there was at that time nothing else, nevertheless utterly rejected the evil doctrine by which others had been seduced into that spiritual fornication with the world; they refused to eat that which was sacrificed unto idols, and suffered persecution and martyrdom in consequence.

To them all these things were "the depths of Satan," and faithfully did they bear their testimony against the idolatrous fables of the Mass, even if they had to burn for it, as large numbers of them did. ALL HONOUR TO THE MEMORY OF THOSE MARTYRS OF JESUS!

It may be that there was not the intelligence that is found to-day, but devotedness there was of no ordinary kind. There were not then Mildmay Conferences, Keswick Conventions, and Advent Testimony and Preparation Movements; but there were hearts that beat true to Christ. And in that day when all the hideous doings of the Inquisition, and the torture inflicted by cruel clerics pass in review before Him Whose eyes are like unto a flame of fire, and Whose feet are like unto fine brass, all this will come out, and a special crown will adorn the overcomer's brow.

"*That which ye have, hold fast till I come.*" What tenderness breathes in these words! No chiding, no crushing criticism, but everything to cheer and encourage. Through chosen and honoured instruments the light of the gospel was beginning to penetrate into the darkness of ecclesiasticism; wherever this gospel truth wrought, however feebly, it undermined the whole idolatrous fabric of Rome, and stirred hierarchical hatred. RECANT! RECANT! was the cry, or the faggots and the flame would be heaped upon men, women and children.

HOLD FAST . . . TILL I COME,"—that is all, no other burden!

"He that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

"And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of My Father.

"And I will give him the Morning Star" (ii. 26-28).

THE OVERCOMER.

How easy it is for us to write and read these words, but oh! what must it have meant to those beloved saints of God who trod their heavenward way in those days of ecclesiastical tyranny. What honour belongs to them, and what special dignity awaits them!

The so-called Church, that corrupt, idolatrous, and persecuting system of religion that had her chief seat at Rome, extended her sway over the nations of Europe. Kings knelt at the footstool of her legates, and parliaments were meekly submissive to her will, whilst she committed fornication with earthly potentates, she hounded to death the saints of God.

"*He that . . . keepeth My works unto the end*"—

It was not yet the time to rule the nations; it was the time to overcome and suffer.

The path of Christ was one of suffering; He did not come to take His great power, and reign; that day is not yet, but it is surely coming; then, according to Psalm ii., He will ask for the heathen (the nations) as His inheritance.

But power over the nations is not all; it is not even the best thing—"I will give to him *the Morning Star*." This is the Church's special portion, the coming of the Lord before the dawn of the millennial day. What grace it is

on the part of Christ, and how beautifully consistent with His love to His own, that He should encourage the hearts of His tried and persecuted saints with the thought of His own return. How many of those who were martyred during those dark ages, just before the Reformation broke out, must have longed and looked for their heavenly portion in association with Christ! Can we not well believe that to them the Morning Star shone with a clearer brightness than to us to-day who understand so much better the plan of prophetic truth!

The change is worthy of note that in Thyatira for the first time the appeal to hear what the Spirit says to the churches *follows* the address to the overcomers. The reason is evident. Not in the public body of the Church but in the remnant are found those who will take heed to the Spirit's voice.

Thyatira, then, describes *prophetically* what we now know *historically* as the state of Christendom before the Reformation when Rome held full sway.

Rome, the Papal system, will continue until the Lord comes, though it has ceased to be the prominent feature in connection with God's present interests on the earth.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHURCH IN SARDIS.

Revelation iii. 1-8.

It is very evident that we are on totally different ground here from what has preceded. Thyatira, as we have seen, continues to the end. Not that it is the special object of the Spirit's thoughts down to the end, but it *exists* as an ecclesiastical system, inasmuch as Rome (the Papacy) will be found at the end as "the great whore" sitting on the scarlet-coloured beast. This will come before us later on in our study of this marvellous Revelation of Jesus Christ. In spite of all the strenuous efforts of earnest and well-meaning Protestants, the Church of Rome is gaining ground, but its end is described in chapters xvii. and xviii. of this book.

PROTESTANTISM.

A mighty work of the Spirit of God took place at the time of the Reformation, and since then Rome (ecclesiastical) has ceased to be the prominent feature in God's Church history. If Thyatira depicts Rome, Sardis as truly answers to Protestantism. It is well to observe that we do not find here God judging His own work, for that He could not do; what He judges is the result of that work in man's hands. The Reformation was God's own work—Protestantism is the result as entrusted to man's responsibility.

In the Reformation God was, so to speak, making a fresh start. This is to a certain extent true in every revival. There had been a breach in the outward unity of the Church at the time of the separation between East and West. The Eastern portion continued in the state described under Pergamos, dwelling where Satan's throne was. The Western portion soon descended to deeper depths of Satan's influence; but CATHOLICITY THERE WAS NONE from the days of the scission between the Greek and Roman communions. Nor will there be again until the Roman Empire is fully revived and establishes, Nebuchadnezzar-like, a united religion. The reunion of the Churches, an idea so attractive to many minds to-day, would simply be an amalgam of Modern Rationalism and

Anglo-Catholicism, ignored by the Greek, and despised by the Roman section, out of which truly converted people would be driven. There are not wanting signs that this may yet take place on a large scale, if the coming of the Lord be delayed.

THE GREAT REFORMATION.

At the Reformation there was, as we have said, a fresh start, to be followed alas! by failure and decline. What we see in Sardis is orthodox Protestantism, but a total lack of spiritual power, an absence even of life itself. And is this to be wondered at when we consider the formation of *national* churches, not by living personal faith, but by what is called "baptismal regeneration."

But we cannot ignore the wonderful revival brought about through the instrumentality of the great Reformers. The vile corruption of the Romish hierarchy—popes, cardinals, prelates, and priests—had shocked the natural conscience of Europe. The iniquitous sale of indulgences to commit sin—and any sin was given its money equivalent—was the last straw; then God in His grace caused the light of His Word to shine, and everywhere souls became emancipated from the darkness and tyranny of ecclesiasticism. But, too soon, decline set in, and this it is that passes in review in Sardis.

A NAME TO LIVE.

"The respectable religiousness of Protestantism may pass muster with the world, but *before God* it is dead" (Hartridge).

Nevertheless all fulness of grace and blessing resided in Christ.

"And unto the angel of the Church in Sardis write; These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven Stars" (iii. 1).

The Sardis state of things runs on collaterally with Thyatira. We have noticed that there has been an apparently fresh start, and this we can easily understand the Reformation to have been. Hence there is a similarity to Ephesus, though at the same time a contrast in the way the Lord announces Himself.

In Ephesus the outward professing Church is seen in its undivided condition. It was what might be called the

Catholic Church, for denominationalism had not yet set in. There is much more of the ecclesiastical character in Ephesus; Christ there holds the seven stars in His right hand, and walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.

Here in Sardis, whilst still owning the assembly, it is not strictly ecclesiastical order which is prominent. We can well understand the propriety of this. The Reformation was not the reconstruction of the Church in its order, but rather a testimony from God to the individual conscience, and the recovery of truth which set the individual saint at liberty before Him.

How quickly a recovery of truth becomes a mere creed; for this it takes but a generation or two, and then the great danger is that what began in the full energy of a living faith deteriorates into a lifeless, even though orthodox profession. Such Protestantism became—"a name that thou livest and art dead." Oh, that every soul in the churches would take heed to these warnings so graciously and faithfully given by our God!

BE WATCHFUL.

We can understand how easily the mixture of dead and living, unconverted and converted, followed upon the Spirit's work at the time of the Reformation. No sooner was the first impetus of this blessed movement over, than Satan sought to undo all its real good. The Scripture, freely opened and read, released men from spiritual bondage; some it brought into the liberty of grace by the knowledge of justification and salvation; others it merely relieved from a yoke of ecclesiastical bondage and priestcraft which had proved to be an intolerable tyranny.

Even unconverted men groaned under the awful yoke, and gladly availed themselves of freedom, which soon they began to use for merely political purposes.

Still none can deny that Protestantism with all its failure is infinitely better than Rome. It were better to live under Sardis than under Thyatira. An open Bible, a more or less clear gospel, and consequent emancipation of heart, mind, and conscience are some of the blessings introduced at the Reformation, and not entirely lost in Sardis, which, as we see, continues collaterally with Thyatira right down to the end.

CHAPTER XII.

PHILADELPHIA.

Revelation iii. 7-13.

We have now reached a period of church history of the deepest interest.

In the historical and consecutive interpretation of the seven churches, we have seen in Thyatira the unmistakable traits of Rome. This will abide till the Lord comes, for the faithful remnant—"the rest in Thyatira"—are exhorted to "hold fast till I come." In the darkest days of Rome's degradation in morals and doctrine, God had His servants who writhed under the cruel bondage of the ecclesiastical system, and the iniquitous lives of Popes, Prelates, and Priests. These faithful ones had not "known the depths of Satan," and God was preparing them for His great deliverance at the time of the Reformation. This mighty work of God's Spirit was brought about through the circulation of the Scriptures which brought life and joy and peace to vast multitudes of souls.

But all that God does in His grace is soon spoiled by man. And in SARDIS we see the *result* of the Reformation when left to the responsibility of man. The Reformation was a work of God. Protestantism is the result in man's hands.

Up to Thyatira the Church was an unbroken entity. It might then in truth have been described as the Catholic Church. But in SARDIS we see "a collateral phase" consisting of the National and Free Churches of Protestantism. Rome is but one division of the professing Church, a powerful one from a worldly point of view, but no more catholic than is the most insignificant sect in Christendom.

Both Rome and the so-called Protestant Churches will continue till the coming of the Lord. In THYATIRA that blessed hope is the encouragement of the faithful, whereas in Sardis it is the solemn warning of the appearing of the Judge—"I will come on thee as a thief."

But in PHILADELPHIA we have something totally different. In Philadelphia the atmosphere is moral and spiritual. It is not the reconstruction of an ecclesiastical system, but the recovery of the soul's individual communion

with Christ, personally known as the Holy and the True.

All the great revivals that have taken place since the Reformation have partaken of this character. These spiritual movements have been largely individual, independent altogether of the ecclesiastical organisations with which these individuals had chanced to be connected, indeed, often bitterly opposed, even persecuted by them.

The records of the Society of Friends bear abundant witness to this. Apart altogether from methods employed or peculiarity of certain teaching, their indefatigable labour, their love for the Scriptures, their piety—all this attests the Philadelphian character of the movement in its early origin.

The Methodist Revival was another such. It began with but "little strength," but God set before those earnest souls an "open door." The key that unlocked those doors so that no power of ecclesiastical and clerical opposition could shut them was in the hands of the Holy and True. They fearlessly kept His Word, and were not ashamed to own His name. John Wesley's Journal describing those days of visitation from on high are an inspiration to the reader in these days of cowardice and compromise.

Then, too, the early days of the Brethren movement was characterized by intense loyalty to the Word of God and true-hearted devotedness to the Name which is above every name. The present writer in his early life was in close contact with many of the chief instruments in that great awakening. For deep-toned reality, for consecrated lives, for spiritual power, for sound scriptural teaching, the memory of those early days is as of heaven upon earth. This, if ever there was one, was an essentially Philadelphian revival. Indeed "Philadelphia" was a word that came to be frequently on their lips. Rightly, they aimed at the high standard of that last phase but one of God's church history. They saw that in Philadelphia, though there was but "little strength," yet there was nothing to condemn. In this respect Smyrna and Philadelphia stand together—the one near the start of the Christian dispensation, the other near its close. The trouble came when some began to think that "Brethren" and "Philadelphia" were almost interchangeable terms. In fact what began in spiritual power degenerated into an ecclesiastical system.

Other spiritual revivals have taken place more recently. The ever memorable 1859 awakening;—the Moody and Sankey revival—these specially for the conversion of souls. Then, the Keswick Conventions, and, now, the Advent Testimony and Preparation gatherings. All these are characteristic of the Philadelphian stage of church history, and each of them flowed from the recovery of long forgotten truths that took place during the early Brethren movement. At that time during last century not one special doctrine, such as justification by faith, as in Luther's day, nor the necessity of the new birth as under Wesley and Whitfield, but the whole range of evangelical truth, was revived in spiritual power for the blessing of the whole Church of God, the world over:—

1. The gospel in its fulness, giving the ground of peace with God, and the assurance of salvation.

2. The actual presence of the Holy Spirit, not merely as an influence, but as a divine and real person who came at Pentecost.

3. The heavenly calling of the Church as distinct from the earthly blessing of Israel.

4. The coming of the Lord as the hope of the Church, in contrast with death.

5. The whole range of dispensational truth, and prophecy.

These were some of the truths that became the common property of the Church of God in those ever memorable days of well-thumbed Bibles and patched trouser-knees—for they were men of prayer, as well as close Bible students.

THE MORAL FEATURES OF PHILADELPHIA.

Looking at these seven Churches as a forecast prophetically given of varying stages of church history PHILADELPHIA is of supreme importance to us at the present time. If the historical interpretation that we have suggested be correct, it is worthy of all note, and of our most serious consideration that *Philadelphia follows Sardis, and immediately precedes Laodicea*. As we shall presently see, the traits of Laodicea are now becoming so pronounced that this in itself is one of the clearest signs that the coming of the Lord for His saints is very close at hand.

Let us briefly dwell upon the characteristic features of this phase of church history.

In Philadelphia as in Smyrna there is no word of condemnation. There may be but little externally to commend. There is but little strength. The great days of Pauline energy were over. Still there were works, works that the Lord Himself knew, though others might despise and ignore them. In Philadelphia there is no reproof from the Lord. No wonder that earnest souls desire to be Philadelphians. That is right, but a *claim* to be Philadelphia comes perilously near to the Laodicean boast of being rich and in need of nothing.

WHO ARE PHILADELPHIANS TO-DAY?

The thoughtful reader acquainted with the history of the spiritual movements of last century may appreciate the enquiry now before us.

Can we discern any definite movement SINCE the Reformation, any movement that has specially, even if unwittingly, influenced the whole Church of God, that has distinctly occupied the mind of God's Spirit, and met with the approval of the heart of Christ?

Let us remember the salient points: Little strength, the Word of Christ kept and acted out at all cost, the name of Christ exalted above all other names, an opened door for service—a door that man would oft-times have shut; side by side with all this, a revival of Ritualism, and high-church claims, with pretensions to which a persecuting spirit always attaches. Let us weigh all this, and we cannot prevent the picture rising before our minds of that marvellous revival in the second quarter of last century. We do not hesitate to say that the movement which a rapidly diminishing number of those still alive witnessed in its early beginning is as clearly portrayed in Philadelphia, as Rome is in Thyatira, or Protestantism in Sardis. But if *that* was Philadelphia, who are Philadelphians to-day?

The moment Philadelphia becomes a *system* to which outwardly we can attach ourselves it is on the high road to Laodicea.

Has Laodicea begun already? Remember it is the last stage of Church history, and if we are now in Laodicea the only thing before us is the shout and trumpet blast!

THE WORD OF CHRIST'S PATIENCE.

There is such a peculiar fascination about the address to the church in Philadelphia, that before passing on to Laodicea we feel compelled to add a few words.

Philadelphia, as we have seen, is not an ecclesiastical position which some Christians may adopt in separation from other Christians. It is rather the true and real in contrast with the mere professing body.

Every true Christian will be kept out of the hour of trial that is coming on the whole habitable earth; and every mere professor, alive at the coming of the Lord, will assuredly have to pass through that awful time.

"Caught up" to heaven will be the portion of Philadelphia; unparalleled judgment here below will overwhelm Christless christendom, who are indeed the true *dwellers upon earth*. Later on we shall see how this expression, "them that dwell on the earth," is characteristic of that special class, who having had the offer of heaven, deliberately make choice of the earth.

We cannot but feel that we are drawing near to the close of the Christian dispensation. The Church as an outward system is in ruins, and it is hopeless to look for any restoration. But Christ remains in spite of all our failure.

THE WORD OF MY PATIENCE.

The truth of Christ's person is the great touchstone for these times of apostasy and false doctrine, when many deceivers are entered into the world who confess not Jesus Christ come in flesh (2 John 7).

"Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from (or, out of) the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (verse 10).

It is not merely that WE patiently wait for the glory that shall be revealed, but CHRIST IS WAITING, seated on the Father's throne; and we wait in sympathy with Him. Thus there is communion between the heart of Christ and His people. The coming of the Lord is not a mere doctrine, but a living hope. Having completed the work by which He presents us before God, He has taken His seat on high; He is expecting until His foes

are made His footstool (Ps. cx.). We are not His foes, we are His friends; and first of all He will come into the air and gather His friends together into the Father's house, before He comes to the earth to execute judgment on His foes. Christ is waiting, and we are waiting, hence it is "the word of MY patience."

THE HOUR OF TEMPTATION.

But there is more—"I also will keep thee." There is a time of trial coming upon the whole habitable earth—not an hour of sixty minutes, but a period. No country will be exempted, no corner of the earth excluded. It is coming after the Church period is over, after "the things which are." This hour of temptation seems to extend over a larger surface than the great tribulation, or "time of trouble" that shall overtake the Jewish people (Dan. xii; Matt. xxiv.).

Wherever men dwell, wherever they may attempt to hide, the "hour of temptation" will find them out. This period appears to be the time immediately following the rapture (Rev. vi.), and all that is now developing amongst the nations seems to be rapidly preparing the way for it. What uneasiness and fearfulness will take hold of men as judgment after judgment begins to be poured upon the earth. From all this the saints that compose the Church will be kept. It is not only that they will be preserved amidst it, but they shall not even pass through it—"I will keep thee *out of* the hour," etc.

The saints of God are not dwellers on earth; their citizenship is in heaven, and before this time of trial they will be caught up to heaven, their true and proper home. This will be true of all believers, not only the specially faithful ones, who of all others should be the last to claim it on the ground of merit. But how gracious of the Lord here to link the present keeping of the Word of His patience on their part, with their being kept on His part out of that hour!

CHAPTER XIII.

LAODICEA.

Revelation iii. 14-22.

"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God" (verse 14).

We come now to the last message from the Lord to the Church, and bearing in mind its character, how solemn to think it follows immediately upon that to Philadelphia. *There*, all was praise; *here*, all is rebuke. In the one though there was but little strength, humility and fidelity were found; in the other, boastfulness and utter indifference to Christ.

We have noticed that there is an historical succession in all the seven Churches. Each one gives place to the one that follows, while not absorbing those that go before. Especially is this the case with the last four, which, as has often been said, run side by side down to the end.

Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea all continue to the end, though each gives place to the one that follows, in so far as being the *special* subject of the Spirit's dealings for the time.

Few who give any serious attention to the subject fail to see that in Thyatira we have the Church of the Middle Ages, Rome before the Reformation; in Sardis, the Protestantism that followed the Reformation before the havoc wrought by infidelity and free thought—there is a name to live, but death.

In Philadelphia we see times of most wonderful revival that followed upon the stagnation that succeeded the glorious work of the Reformation. Here we find ourselves specially in the last century and a half, amidst the various and somewhat frequent awakenings that took place, brought about invariably through the preaching of the Word. We do not hesitate to say that the days of the Wesleys and George Whitfield, and other such devoted servants of the Lord were thoroughly Philadelphian in character.

But at the same time we believe that the movement of God's Spirit about the middle of last century, restoring

the gospel in its clearness, reviving the hope of Christ's return, and recalling the people of God to the all-sufficiency of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as the gathering centre, the Holy Spirit as the controlling power, and the Word of God as the directing light to our path—this movement we believe was foretold by the Spirit in Philadelphia.

LAODICEA THE LAST STAGE.

As a movement that forms the special subject of the Spirit's attention, we believe that Philadelphia is passed never to return, but as a movement it has affected the whole world, and influenced the spiritual life of the whole Church.

Taking the view that is now generally accepted by those who have given much attention to the subject, that these seven churches present to us seven distinct phases of the professing Church in historic succession, Philadelphia must cease in order to give place to Laodicea. Laodicea is terrible, but it **MUST** come before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to take the true Church to glory; and in this sense there is something thrilling to the soul when we become assured that Laodicea is upon us. We are in the closing pages of Church history, we stand at the very end of the dispensation, we are on the brink of that blissful moment, which baffles all power of language to describe, which transcends our utmost efforts to conceive.

The coming of Christ and the removal of the saints to glory is at hand.

We have noticed the special prominence given in Philadelphia to the blessed hope of the coming of Christ: there is nothing about this in Laodicea. The Lord is speaking in Laodicea of what He is about to do in judgment, and it is the Church itself—the professing Church, of course—which He is about to judge, and spue out of His mouth.

Lukewarmness, self-complacency, and indifference as regards Christ—these are the main features of Laodicea. Are not even true Christians in danger of imbibing its spirit?

“I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed . . . and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see” (ver. 19).

Three things were lacking: *gold*, the emblem of divine righteousness in which the believer stands before God; *white linen*, or the practical righteousness of the saints, lived out before men; and *eye salve*, the well-known type in both O. and N.T. of the Holy Spirit—all these marks of the true Christian were lacking, and Laodicea knows it not. The need of conversion is not felt, and when pressed is even denied and resisted, and that in so-called churches.

"Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him" (ver. 20).

There are so-called churches in Christendom in which it is hard to think a single truly converted person is found. Apostates from the faith occupy many pulpits to-day, men who do not believe the Bible to be any more inspired than Shakespeare, men who deny the deity of Christ, and His atoning sacrifice at Calvary. And what about the people to whom such ministry is attractive and acceptable?

This is the last phase of the history of the professing Church. Is it not an exact description of the very days in which we live? And Christ is still knocking, but are not those who hear becoming fewer and fewer? When the last one responds, then the shout in the heavens, the catching up in the clouds, the translation to glory!

Laodicea will have ripened to its final judgment; the professing Church, every true Christian being removed, will be finally and absolutely rejected by the Lord as His witness—spued out of His mouth.

What becomes of it we shall see in our after study of this marvellous book.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DOOR OPENED IN HEAVEN.

Revelation iv.

It is important to remember that when written the whole of the Book of Revelation was prophetic; it was given to shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass, and the time was near.

The division of the Book into three sections we have already pointed out from chapter i. 19.

WRITE—

1. The things which thou hast SEEN.
2. The things which ARE.
3. The things which SHALL BE after these things.

We have been considering the second of these, unfolded in chapters ii. and iii. We come now to the third—chapter iv. to the end.

The “things which are” cover a period of time which has already lasted nearly nineteen hundred years. It is that period during which the Church is on earth. It began soon after the days of the Church’s birthday at Pentecost; it will end when the Lord will catch up His people to glory, and utterly reject the mass of unconverted profession. We are more and more convinced that the time of His coming is near at hand. Church history is about to close.

THE DISPENSATION IS NEARING ITS END.

Every dispensation has its commencement, it continues for a certain time, and then closes. Moreover, every dispensation ends with the complete failure of those who are the subjects of God’s dealings during its course. It was so in the case of Israel of old; it will be so in the case of the Church during the continuance of “the things which are.”

The present dispensation began with the descent of the Holy Ghost at the day of Pentecost; it will end by the coming of Christ into the air, and the removal of the

true Church in the twinkling of an eye. This is what is meant by THE RAPTURE, or the "catching away" (1 Thess. iv. 17, "*caught up*"). From that point onward there is nothing upon earth which Christ recognizes as His Church, nor to which the Spirit can address Himself as the Church of this place or that.

That there will be a vast religious system on earth after the true Church is removed is clear. Laodicea with all its boasting will merge into Babylon the Great. The whole of Europe will come under the tyrannical control of this vast ecclesiastical system, until the oppression becomes so intolerable that the ten kings and the Beast will combine to rid themselves of her.

During the Philadelphian revival of last century, some of the choicest of God's servants were led to see the true nature and unity of the Church of God as revealed in Scripture. They saw that the divided condition of the Church was not the will of God for His people in this dispensation. Rightly or wrongly they set before them the Pentecostal picture of an undivided Church, and aimed at its restoration. Beautiful in its inception, it was not suffered to continue through human infirmity any more than in the early days of Pentecost. But the thought was right, and in the mercy of God has been continued for the blessing of His people, though in a somewhat modified manner, by means of such Conventions as Keswick, and now the A.T.P.M., which gathers true Christians together for mutual edification, worship and service.

But a very different movement has lately sprung up under the title of the REUNION OF THE CHURCHES. If successful, and there is every reason to think it will be, the Church of Rome will have the final word to say. But this will mean *absorption*, rather than reunion. We believe that Revelation xvii. predicts this very thing. The passage requires no exposition. The Spirit of God has there unveiled the future of Rome political (the Beast), and Rome ecclesiastical (the Great Whore). And who are the daughters of this Mother of Harlots?

Not Protestantism, but infidelity (the Beast and ten kings) will at last deal the death blow to the Papacy. Moreover, this will take place, not during the period of

"the things which are," but during that which follows after (Rev. xvii.).

"After this (or, **after these things**) I looked and, behold, a door opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard (chapter i. 10) as it were of a trumpet talking with me: which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter (or, **after these things**)" (chapter iv. 1).

Twice over in this verse we get the expression "after these things." It is exactly the same as the one we have already noticed in chapter i. 19; it marks the commencement in this book of the third section, which begins when the present Church dispensation comes to an end.

The last phase of Church history has been described in Laodicea. Every day confirms us in the solemn conviction that we are already in the closing days of Laodicea. The theological colleges are hurrying our young men down the way that leads to the predicted apostasy. With exceptions here and there churches are becoming little more than worldly clubs. The bulk of the population in all ranks of life never attend any religious services. The Anglo-Catholic movement is, we believe, a desperate effort to bring men back to some form of religious belief. Processions may frequently be seen in our cities with clergy and choristers in their robes, with crosses and thurifers, chanting as they wend their slow and solemn way to church.

And what about Italy? Mussolini, who, until quite recently, was credited with being without any religious belief, even of atheistical tendency, now coquetting with the Vatican.

A COMPLETE BREAK.

All these are signs that we are rapidly nearing the end of this dispensation, and that end takes place between chapters iii. and iv. of this marvellous book of Revelation. With chapter iv. comes a complete break; the dispensation changes. Grace that has been reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. v. 21)—grace that through the gospel which first began to be preached at Pentecost and has continued until now, pleading with sinners to be reconciled to God—this grace is here seen to be over, and God's government and judgment are about to take its place.

God's patience with man's rejection of His mercy will soon be exhausted. His long-suffering unto salvation (2 Pet. iii. 15) so long despised is about to cease, and the trampled rights of God and of His Christ are about to be vindicated.

How striking is the phraseology of the Holy Spirit in this marvellous verse! There is no spinning out of words; it is the fulness of divine wisdom in condensed form.

BEHOLD !—A DOOR !—OPENED ! IN HEAVEN !

And then a trumpet blast. The time has come for God to speak in tones that command and demand attention. It was so at Sinai—"the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud," and "all the people that was in the camp trembled" (Exod. xix.). God's voice then shook the earth, but He has declared that He will presently shake not only earth but heaven (Heb. xii.), and at the point we have reached in our studies we stand at the dividing line between the dispensation of grace, and that of judgment. In all that is happening in the world to-day we hear, as it were, the rumblings of rapidly approaching and long predicted judgment.

"For thus saith the Lord of hosts; yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;

"And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts" (Haggai ii. 6, 7).

A door, then, is opened in heaven, and the Seer is about to be transported in vision from earth to heaven. The Spirit had been occupying him with varying phases of the Church upon earth, but from this point of the Book there is a total disappearance of the seven churches.

Now the voice that John had first heard (chap. i. 10) calls upon him to enter the heavenly precincts, that he may become familiar with the sights, the surroundings, and the inhabitants of the glory land.

CHAPTER XV.

A THRONE SET IN HEAVEN.

"Immediately I was in the Spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne" (Rev. iv. 2).

Once again the prophet comes under the controlling influence of the inspiring Spirit. In chapter i. 10 "the great voice as of a trumpet" had called behind him, and thus made John look back and review the history of the professing Church; but now, that history being closed, he is to look on to see the terrible judgments that are to introduce the last of God's dispensations, the dispensation of the fulness of the times (Eph. i. 10), otherwise called the Millennium (Rev. xx.), when all things shall be headed up in Christ, "both which are in heaven, and which are on earth."

GOD'S DIRECT INTERFERENCE.

And first, John sees a throne set in heaven. Twelve times the throne is mentioned in Rev. iv. It implies God's direct interference with the earth. As in Ezekiel i., the throne above the firmament controlled all the movements of the living creatures on earth that were carrying out the mandates of Jehovah in connection with his earthly people Israel, so in Revelation, when the events are to take place on earth that are to introduce the kingdom of the Son of man, we are shown how the throne of God is the centre of all authority and power. All moves in harmony with its decrees. It will help us much in the understanding of Revelation to make ourselves familiar with Ezekiel and Daniel.

GRACE OVER—JUDGMENT SET.

"He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald" (verse 3).

Up to this point in the book we do not find special acts of judgment. They will be seen to a certain extent com-

mencing under the Seals, and reaching their climax under the Trumpets and Vials. We have come here to the broad fact that grace is over and judgment set. There will be souls saved afterwards as we shall presently see (Rev. vii.), but the day of grace, such as we know it now, will be over. The sealed ones from the tribes of Israel, and the countless multitude from the Gentile nations will be saved during the time that God's judgments are upon the earth.

THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS.

"Next to the importance of the central throne and its divine occupants, and the attendants of its majesty, comes the wondrous announcement of twenty-four thrones in its immediate vicinity. Thrones in the presence of the Throne of God Himself! Far too wonderful to contemplate were it not God's Word we have before us. These twenty-four thrones are described by the same word that expresses the central throne, and we dare not make less of them than God does. But who are the sitters thereon? Twenty-four elders, clad in white garments, and having on their heads crowns of gold. How came they there? First, they must have had a title; secondly, an invitation; and both divine. No creature whatever, man or angel, can be in God's presence without both. An angel may be elect, and a minister. A redeemed man is elect, and appointed king and priest."—(Hartridge).

And round about the throne were four and twenty seats (thrones): and upon the seats (thrones) I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold" (iv. 4).

The word "seats" in our A.V. does not give the true meaning; these twenty-four elders were sitting on thrones, they were a reigning company of kings. They were priests as well, for they are here seen clothed in white and crowned with gold. They were kings and priests. Does this not remind us of Rev. i. 6? And does it not help us to an understanding of who these twenty-four elders represent? They are the blood-washed company of Rev. i. 5.

Clearly it is a symbolic number which suggests a comparison with 1. Chron. xxiv., where we are shewn

twenty-four courses of the Aaronic priests. Just as there were the earthly priests under the Levitical law, divided into twenty-four courses, so there will be the heavenly priests in glory.

But who are included in the twenty-four elders? All the saints raised and changed at the coming of the Lord for His own—Old Testament saints as well as the Church, or the saints of this dispensation.

“And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunders and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God” (verse 5).

All heaven is here seen preparing for the outpouring of the terrible judgments of the last days, but amidst this awe-inspiring scene the twenty-four elders sit unmoved at perfect peace and without fear. Even here on earth we know the perfect love of God through Jesus Christ that casts out all fear from our hearts. And by-and-by when the judgment day begins, “peace, perfect peace” through the blood of Jesus will still be the enjoyed portion of our souls.

THE SEVEN SPIRITS.

The fulness of the Spirit will then be exercised in judgment—seven lamps of fire—even as it is now known for the proclamation of grace. Then the time will come for the Rod out of the stem of Jesse to do its “strange work” of judgment—

“The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord;

“And shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears: .

“But with righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth, and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked (or, the Wicked One)” (Isaiah xi. 2-4).

This sevenfold presentation of the Spirit does not militate against the truth that there is but “one Spirit.” The thought here is the fulness (seven) of the Spirit’s discernment and power in judgment.

THE CRYSTAL SEA.

"A sea of glass—not of water, for that would indicate cleansing *needed*. The remembrance only was needed, the fact was accomplished"—(Hartridge).

"And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne and round about the throne were four beasts (living creatures) full of eyes before and behind" (verse 6).

When we reach our heavenly home there will be no need for the washing away of defilement, for in those glorious courts there will be none to contract. In the scene here described it is not a question of how we are to approach the throne. No altar of sacrifice is there found, and no brazen laver wherein to wash. The elders are already seated around the throne. Their title to be there had been possessed while still on earth, they had swept through the pearly gates "washed in the blood of the Lamb." But they are a holy priesthood, and this the crystal sea bears witness to. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord, and in that day holiness will have become a fixed condition.

The throne is there seen as a throne of judgment, and not of grace, and all its accompaniments speak of power and majesty—lightning, and thundering and voices.

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES.

Besides the elders we are now introduced to another symbolic company.

"And when those living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to Him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,

"The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (verses 9-11).

"None of the terrors of the throne, nor the symbols of judgment, move the elders. They sit peacefully on their thrones. But as soon as the living creatures give glory, honour, and thanks to Him that sits on the throne, *that* moves them directly. They fall down; they worship; they cast their crowns at His feet" (Hartridge).

The expression "living creature" is here used instead of "beast" as the A.V. gives it, for it is important to distinguish them from the four beasts of Daniel vii., and the two beasts of Revelation xiii. The "beasts" of Daniel's vision were "wild" beasts—a fitting symbol to describe the Gentile powers that owned no moral relationship with God. But these living creatures, like those in Ezekiel i., are in close relationship with the throne; they are in the midst and round about the throne. Their every movement is connected with the throne of God's government and judgment.

They are full of eyes, too, before, behind, and within, expressive of the full ("before" and "behind") intelligence, and moral ("within") perception with which the government of God in that day will be executed. It will *then* no longer be a riddle to explain God's acts of government, for each one will be seen to be in direct connection with His character.

These living creatures present the double characteristics of the Cherubim and the Seraphim. The subject is a large one, and a deeply interesting one to pursue in all its connections in the Scriptures; we cannot do more here than state the net result that the Cherubim present the idea of the *government*, and the Seraphim that of the *nature* of God with special reference to holiness (*cf.* Isaiah vi. with Rev. iv. 8). This government will be carried out with perception ("eyes"), with swiftness ("wings"), with strength ("lion"), with endurance ("calf"), with intelligence ("man"), and with bold celerity ("eagle").

All this is symbolic, and it would be impossible to conceive of anything in nature bearing any resemblance thereto; but grouping all the ideas together we can see a marvellous picture of what God's government of the earth will be during the short period that will follow the Church dispensation, leading up to the Millennium, and beyond this to the eternal state.

WHO ARE THE LIVING CREATURES?

We have raised the question in order to suggest that the question itself is inappropriate. We see in the living creatures the *characteristics* of God's government, and not the *agents* of it. These latter may vary at different times. They may be angelic as in the Old Testament;

they may be unseen principalities and powers; they may be the glorified saints (1. Cor. vi. 3); it may be the Lord Himself (Heb. ii.), and in this connection we are reminded that the veil of the tabernacle, representing, as it did, the "flesh" of Christ, contained Cherubim woven into it.

In the chapter now before us (Rev. iv.) the living creatures celebrate the holiness of the unchanging God, who "was, and is, and is to come"; they celebrate Him according to His Old Testament names of Jehovah, Elohim, Shaddai. *That* God is our Father, but He is not here revealed in that character, nor anywhere else throughout this book.

Another noticeable point is this—the elders, here and all through the book, are able to give the reason for intelligent praise; they worship with understanding. If even here on earth the Spirit gives to the saints divine intelligence in worship, how much more so when all that grieves Him will have passed away.

The living creatures celebrate God's holiness; the elders fall down and worship, ascribing glory to Him that liveth for ever and ever, giving here the reason for it, not redemption as chapter v., but creation—perpetual worship rising up to God the source of all blessing in perpetual power and freshness.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE THRONE AND THE BOOK.

Revelation iv. and v.

The two chapters we are now considering hold a most important place in the Book of Revelation, unfolding the glory of Christ before the judgments commence to be poured forth upon the earth. Chapter iv. brings clearly before us the rights of God's throne in *creation*; chapter v., the rights of the Lamb in *redemption*.

In the words of another:—"We adhere in some sense to the interpretation of the book of Revelation which makes the body of it—the nineteen chapters upon which we are entering (chaps. iv.-xxii.)—apply to what is still for us future. Those who so apply it, whatever differences in detail there may be amongst them, are on this account called 'Futurists' in contrast with the large school of 'Historicists,' who find in it a progressive history of the Church from the beginning, and interpret it naturally by that history.

"They are usually and strongly opposed to one another, as might be expected, although there is no *necessary* opposition in the views themselves. Both may be held, and have been held together, by some who think that there may be an incipient, real, though incomplete fulfilment of divine prophecy, as well as a final, exhaustive one; the first being often an assurance and help to the meaning of the latter.

"But while I thus would keep in mind and seek to profit by this double interpretation, the latter is what I desire, as God may enable me to develop and insist upon, and this for more reasons than one, but especially just because it is that which is alone complete and final, and still lying in the future for us; whereas the historical interpretation occupies us largely with the past—a past still fruitful for us assuredly, but less full of personal appeal."—[Grant.]

THE SEVEN-SEALED BOOK.

"And I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back side, sealed with seven seals" (Chap. v. 1).

Here a notable change takes place. The Lamb is brought definitely before us as the one about to claim the possession of His purchased inheritance. The throne in all its majesty and glory is still before us. The One sitting thereon now holds in the right hand of His power a seven-sealed book, written within and on the back side. It was not a book such as we use to-day, but a roll or scroll.

"According to ancient usage, a parchment roll was first written in the *inside*, and if the inside was *filled* with writing, then the *outside* was used, or back part of the roll; and if that also was covered with writing, and the whole available space was occupied, the book was called *opisthographos* ('written on the back side')"—[Wordsworth].

These ancient rolls of parchment were written on, and as each portion was completed, it was sealed and then rolled round.

John here sees a seven-sealed roll, "completely filled with writing, which is, however, completely hid from sight. It is the book of the future, already and completely foreknown and settled in the divine counsels: no room for anything to be afterwards supplied." [Grant.]

"And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" (v. 2).

A MIGHTY CHALLENGE.

The vaults of high heaven ring with a mighty challenge. It is a scene of majestic grandeur. Earthly courts of judicial and royal splendour fade into insignificance beside this scene of heavenly glory, as the strong angel with a voice that reaches every corner of heaven, earth, and hell raises the challenge—Who is worthy to open the book?

There is no haste, for judgment is God's strange work, and the opening of those seals portends acts of judgment of fearful and increasing terror for this Christ-rejecting world. Sufficient time is given to prove the

utter impotence of all above and below to break those seals. Countless multitudes of those glorified saints had proclaimed while here on earth the glad tidings of salvation, coupled with solemn warnings of judgment on those who despised God's grace and preferred the paths of wilfulness and sin. Yet not one of these dare step up to open that book, nay, not even to look thereon.

The challenge sounds not only amidst the celestial throng of saints and angels, it rings throughout the earth—Who there are worthy? Who there had power to unlock those seals? Not one.

Under the earth? Amongst the wicked dead would any dare to open those seals? When here alive on earth they may have scoffed at the sound of a coming judgment. Now that the moment had come for its execution, first upon the living, then, a thousand years later upon the dead, would any venture to open those seals that contained the secret of how God would bring all into subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ? Not one.

Then must God's counsels for this earth remain for ever sealed up? Can no means be found whereby to bring about the inheritance of Him Who has been set over all the works of God's hands? Must the usurper for ever hold possession, and He Whose right it is be for ever excluded?

"And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon" (v. 4).

The thought was too sad for the prophet, and heaven itself would be filled with sorrow if earth remained for ever the sporting ground of sin and Satan. Nay, this could not be. The challenge, "Who is worthy?" is about to be taken up, and John is bidden to dry up his tears, awful as the means may be to bring about the kingdom of the Son of man.

"And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof" (v. 5).

The prophetic announcement made by Jacob long centuries before (Genesis xlix.) is now about to be fulfilled.

"And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days."

THE LION OF JUDA.

The last days are here in full view, and the saints in glory have divine intelligence of that which Jacob foretold by the Spirit. The time of long-suffering and patience is over, the Lion is now seen couched for the prey, and the sceptre is in the hands of the One who was here despised and rejected of men.

"And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, stood a Lamb, as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth" (v. 6).

Little did Jacob foresee that Judah's Lion would be a slain Lamb! But this it was that gave Him title to open the seals. All heaven acclaims Him as the only worthy One. The Greek word (*ἀφνίον*) here translated "Lamb" is peculiar to the Book of Revelation; it conveys the thought of weakness—

"By weakness and defeat
He won the meed and crown,
Trod all our foes beneath His feet
By being trodden down."

"And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and four-and-twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints" (verse 8).

The ground of His worthiness lies in the very fact of his abasement and humiliation. He became obedient unto death, and that the death of the cross, a death of such ignominy and shame, but a death by which God has been glorified, sin expiated, and guilty sinners who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ redeemed. WHEREFORE God hath highly exalted Him (Phil. ii. 9). Never in heaven amidst those scenes of glory and light will it be forgotten that the Lamb was slain!

THE NEW SONG.

"And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation:

"And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on (or, over) the earth" (verses 9, 10).

Another has said that the song was new in heaven, but centuries old on earth. Angels did not sing that song. It was the song of the redeemed, and "the redeemed from

among *men* will be the choir of heaven" (Lowe). One by one we learn to sing it here, as grace makes known a Saviour's worth. Companies of God's people may join together in worship here, but the full chorus awaits the completed glorified host at the coming of the Lord.

WORTHY IS THE LAMB.

The Lamb once slain is now seen possessed with fulness of power (seven horns) and perfect intelligence (seven eyes). He alone is worthy to break those seals; the inheritance is His, and the right of redemption belongs to Him (Read Jer. xxxii.).

The time for which believers are now waiting is here seen about to be inaugurated. They have received the earnest of the Spirit, and they are Christ's co-heirs. He purchased the possession, which had been alienated by sin. He created it by His power, and purchased it by His blood. He *bought* the field (this world) for the sake of the treasure (His people) that was in it (see Matt. xiii., and Eph. i. 14). Angelic hosts subscribed, as it were, the evidence; all heaven attests the payment at Calvary of that mighty price; the evidence of that purchase has remained sealed for nearly 2,000 years, but, we believe, the time has now almost arrived for the redemption of that purchased possession.

All heaven is astir with praise—the glorified are here seen just caught up to their heavenly home singing the new song. Every harp has been tuned, every voice is in harmony. The praise begun by the redeemed will be echoed by angelic hosts—their number will be "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands"—myriads, saying (not singing, for only redeemed sinners sing the song). The angels are here seen as a separate company,

"Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength. and honour, and glory, and blessing" (verse 12).

Redeemed creation takes up the acclamation of praise and re-echoes it throughout the wide universe.

"Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever" (verse 13).

In the words of another:—"Before the tribunal of God a great trial is in progress. The cause awaiting settlement is, To whom shall this world belong? Christ and Satan are the litigants. 'The world is mine,' says he who is called its prince, 'man has sinned and fallen, and the soul that sinneth it shall die.' 'The world is mine,' replies the Lamb of God: 'man has sinned and fallen; but I have died.' Jehovah gives decree; the world is Christ's. And so with the fresh marks of His passion in hands, and feet, and side, our Lord who had passed through the creature ranks, took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne. The world by deed of gift and right of purchase belongs to Emmanuel."

But judgment must first take its course on earth, and this the following chapters will unfold. In heaven throughout this whole period, is peace and rest, interrupted only by the activity of worship.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE OPENING OF THE SEALS.

Revelation vi.

In chapters iv. and v. we have been given a sight of heaven, its inhabitants, and their occupation. It is a description of the heavenly scene which will continue throughout the whole period between the rapture and the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lamb in the midst of the throne will be the centre, and the glorified redeemed will be at rest and peace. Nothing that will be taking place on earth will disturb the unruffled repose of heaven.

In chapter vi. we are brought down to earth in prophetic vision.

"And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the voice of thunder, one of the four living creatures saying, Come." (vi. 1).

Immediately upon the Lamb's taking the book, the seals commence to be opened. The book, as we have before noticed is the book of the inheritance (Eph. i. 14). It is by judgment executed on earth that the Lamb takes possession.

The vain and futile theories of modern theologians are here apparent. It is not by a long continued process of evolution and social reform that the Kingdom is to be introduced, but by acts of divine judgment after the removal of the Church at the coming of the Lord, increasing in severity under the trumpets and vials, and which will reach their climax when the Son of man will appear with power and great glory in the clouds of heaven.

The seals are not, properly speaking, a description of these judgments; they are providential and preparatory. Until the seventh seal has been opened the book itself cannot be said to be opened. *The contents of the book commence with the trumpets.*

The circumstances described under the first four seals are an intensified form of God's previous dealings with men. Such things have often been in the history of the world, but at this apocalyptic period they will assume a severer form than ever before. The voice speaks with *thunder*, saying, Come. The best manuscripts leave out

the two following words—"and see." The difference is this, that "come and see" would be a call to John to behold, whereas the word of command, "Come" is addressed to the rider on the horse.

THE FIRST SEAL.

Writing on the seals in 1910, four years before the Great War, we then said—

"In a remarkable letter recently written by an American Admiral to the British press, a letter of warning as to England's deterioration of naval power, it was stated that *in recent years several great European wars had taken place!* That these wars had been fought and won without one drop of blood having been shed. We do not enter into the arena of political strife, but this letter gave us food for much reflection and sent us to this very scene described under the first seal.

"The Admiral's contention was that matters of strife are continually cropping up, relations are continually becoming strained between the European powers. These critical moments pass and threatened wars are averted. *Not at all*, says the writer (the late Admiral Mahan). The war has been fought, not on the battle field, but in the War Office, the Admiralty, or the Cabinet. The weaker has recognised the futility of holding out against the demands of the stronger. The battle has been fought and won without one drop of blood being shed. It is this that the first seal describes—*bloodless conquest*.

"A power will arise—it may even now be in process of rapid formation—so strong in comparison to its neighbours that it will only require to dictate its terms. It is not for us to prophesy which amongst the European powers this will be, but, nevertheless, there are not wanting indications for those who have eyes to see. And believing, as we do, that the coming of the Lord is near at hand, it is impossible to view the outstanding features of the political horizon without sentiments of profound interest."

At that time, Germany was making her great bid for power and world domination, and we are free to admit that at the back of our mind we had the thought that she might possibly prove to be this very power. Then came the war, ending in Germany's defeat. God's time had not quite come.

BLOODLESS CONQUEST.

"And I saw, and behold a white horse, and he that sat on him had a bow; and he went forth conquering, and to conquer" (vi. 2).

Some have thought that the rider on the white horse was Christ Himself, linking this with chapter xix. 11. But this can scarcely be, for Christ is the one that calls to the rider to come, and Christ it is Who holds the sealed book in His hands and breaks the seals.

Whoever the rider may prove to be, he is the agent appointed by Divine Providence to bring about this state of *bloodless* conquest. From the brief account here given it would appear that very shortly after the rapture of the saints at the coming of the Lord, changes of a startling and notable nature will take place amongst the powers of the world.

It is said that "a crown was given unto him." The particular time of this gift is not here specified; he may have been marked out beforehand for this place of pre-eminence amongst the nations. Then, the colour of the horse is to be noted—white.

"A white horse—a horse denotes *strength* (Read Job xxxix. 19-25). White, meaning human righteousness that God can own. The united symbol denotes a powerful one going forth with a righteous cause owned of God" [Hartridge].

It may be asked where can such a power be found in Europe to-day? It is not for us to say, but quoting again—

"The first judgment, therefore, that falls upon the earth, after the rapture of the saints, and the short interval indicated by chapters iv. and v., is the calling forth of some mighty one, who, like the first Napoleon, carries his conquests everywhere. Being appointed by God for this purpose, nothing can resist him. Such a thing has occurred before, although never on such a grand scale" [Hartridge].

We are now witnessing the rising of the Roman Empire. In its final phase it will be under Satan's control, but in its initial stage, as we now see it, it is ranging itself on the side of law and order, under Mussolini's directing hand. And this is doubtless the reason for the sympathetic attitude of Great Britain towards Italy to-day.

White seems to suggest a cause which is just. We do not press this interpretation, but merely suggest.

THE SECOND SEAL.

"And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, Come.

"And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another; and there was given unto him a great sword" (verses 3, 4).

Whether or not the first seal alludes to the reviving Roman Empire in its initial stages, the controlling influence of law and order will soon prove inadequate, for at this period we must remember that the Hinderer has been removed.

The second seal vividly describes the outburst of anarchy, the dread of which is even now a nightmare to contemplate. Civil war seems here the special thought. And it is not confined to any one country, nor is it war breaking out between two or more powers. The whole earth is shewn in commotion.

It is not exactly a new kind of disaster, for civil wars have already taken place in the world at different times. As we now write, Russia looms horribly before the mind. China is now awakening and about to throw off all foreign influence. That vast empire of 400,000,000 is now dividing into separate military camps, and blood may soon be flowing in rivers. Then, India has its internal strife between its own populations of Islam and Hindu. Wherever the eye turns on the map of the world the "red" horse seems careering without bridle. This will rapidly increase in fury and intensity, and in universality until peace will be taken from the earth, and men will slay one another unmercifully.

We see in all countries to-day principles at work which will bring all this about. Socialism, Communism, Bolshevism are with us to-day setting class against class. Instead of diminishing this will increase, until goaded on by bitter hate, men shall slay one another in all parts of the earth, the ordinary forms of human government being powerless to repress the carnage.

We may not be able to specify who is intended by the rider on the horse, but it is an agent providentially raised up of God at that particular time to carry out His will.

The Lenins, the Trotskys, and the Stalins, and monsters of that sort may yet be found in all parts of the earth. To-day in this acceptable time of grace, God raises up instruments to carry out His purposes of grace, but then, the day of grace being over, He will raise up those who shall bring to pass His acts of *preparatory* judgment; we say, preparatory for the great day of His wrath will even then be future.

THE THIRD SEAL.

"And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, Come. And I beheld, and lo, a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.

"And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures say, A measure (chœnix) of wheat for a penny (denarius), and three measures of barley for a penny, and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine" (verses 5, 6).

Famine in the material sense seems here evidently portrayed. We see no reason to spiritualize it as some have done by reference to Amos viii. 11. Certain it is that in those days there will be that spiritual famine of hearing the words of the Lord. But under the third seal we see the natural result of a time of desperate civil war, when there will be forced cessation of all agricultural work, destitution and want, with all the horrors of famine.

And it is to be observed that this famine will specially affect the "masses" as distinct from the so-called "classes." The chœnix measure equals a quart, the denarius was the ordinary day's pay for the labourer as we see in Matthew xx., where the penny of our A.V. is really a denarius. Under ordinary circumstances the denarius would purchase *eight* quarts of wheat, so that great scarcity in the necessities of food is here implied. The luxuries remain unaffected, the oil and the wine were not touched. It is not difficult to understand their exception. For, after all, Socialism, while it aims its deadly blows at wealth, in fact will bring misery first of all to the very people whom the agitators pretend to befriend. The strikes that are now becoming so alarmingly frequent and widespread involve chiefly the masses in want and misery.

Famine is a terrible thing which happily has not so far been experienced in Western lands, as it has been in India and China, where millions have died from its ravages.

Quoting once more—

“We have seen something of the dire effects of famine, but nothing to the extent in which these judgments set it forth; for after the great slaughter of the previous seal, the bread-winners will be few, and the sufferings of hunger are immediate, and urgent, and cannot be met by the spared luxuries of life,—for the oil and the wine are not to be hurt.

“A painful view is seen of the despondency and misery of those who, not long before, were wont to shew their self-will in confederacies, and could in great measure rely on the bounties of others. Under these judgments things will be greatly changed. A vast amount of relief during this present day of grace springs from the mixed motives of those who profess Christianity; some doing their utmost for Christ's sake; others, to recommend themselves to God's mercy and forbearance. But in that day these motives will have changed. Christ's own will have been taken to heaven, and the others who will have been left among the ‘earth dwellers’ will have found out the hopelessness of good deeds that get no credit—EACH FOR HIMSELF, is the natural language of the human heart, and the judgment will but intensify these sad traits. Left without a motive!—Alas, for those who cry for aid from such in those days!” [Hartridge].

THE FOURTH SEAL.

“And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, Come.

“And I looked and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth” (verses 7, 8).


All here described follows naturally upon the civil and international wars of the previous seals—hunger and pestilence constantly follow in the wake of famine and slaughter. But it is well to remember that these four seals describe what will be visitations from God upon a world increasing in violence and corruption after the removal of the Church. They are preparatory and providential, and not the direct judgment of Christ's personal and manifested advent, which will take place later on. They will be wide spread, affecting the fourth part of the earth, and are

we not witnessing to-day in every corner of the globe, and amongst all peoples, Oriental as well as Occidental, the symptoms introductory to such tragedies?

“Man wants his own way, and nothing else. To do as he likes, to have the earth for his own possession. It was for this the Jews and Gentiles joined hands in crucifying the Son of the Blessed. ‘This is the Heir; come, let us kill Him, and the inheritance shall be ours.’ Nothing can cure this, for Satan pulls the strings of the rebel heart. Seals, trumpets, vials, Lake of Fire, must run their course ere the rightful Heir comes to His own” [Hartridge].

Here we are reminded by the reference to Hades, that death of the body is not the whole question at issue. Men have souls as well as bodies, and these judgments here described are but the forerunners of a far more awful judgment before the Great White Throne (Rev. xx.), when body and soul shall be cast into the Lake of Fire.

Oh, if men to-day would only read the Revelation ! Better still, if they would hear and keep its solemn warnings. For we are convinced that we are now rapidly nearing the time of fulfilment of these things. God has given us His light before the darkness settles upon the earth. The darkness of that day will be, as another has said, “the darkness not merely of absent, but REJECTED light.” [Grant.]



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FIFTH SEAL.

Revelation vi. 9 to 11.

As we have already pointed out the first four seals describe acts of judgment of a preparatory and providential nature which will affect a limited part of the earth—a fourth part (vi. 8). Some have thought that this expression has special reference to Europe, where the Christian religion has been taught, but from which Europe by apostasy will have fallen, as it is rapidly doing to-day.

But from the fifth seal we learn that God will during that period have His witnesses upon the earth.

“And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held” (vi. 9).

The judgments poured out upon the earth under the first four seals are “judgments which are the necessary result of the rejection of Christ, now completed by the refusal of the gospel for so many centuries of divine long-suffering.” [Grant.]

A NEW DISPENSATION.

In order to understand who are referred to under the fifth seal, we must bear in mind the exact period that has been reached in the development of the ways of God. The Church period is closed, therefore these martyrs are not the martyrs of the Christian dispensation.

All the martyrs of the Church, whether slain by Pagans, Jews, or Inquisitors, will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air at His coming. That coming, as we have seen, takes place between chapters iii. and iv. The martyrs of the Church period are included in the company of the glorified saints seen enthroned, robed in white, and crowned with gold, at rest and at peace in the heavenly courts. Then followed the commencing acts of judgment upon the inhabitants of the world, or at any rate, a limited part thereof (vi. 1-8).

But God will still have His witnesses upon the earth, and these will become the objects of the bitter hatred of those who to-day refuse the Christ of God, despise His word, and reject the gospel of His grace. Many of these

witnesses will be put to death for the Word of God, and the testimony which they hold.

Some may be surprised and ask, Who can they be, seeing that all the saints of this dispensation will have been caught up before this time commences? They will be Jewish martyrs. The Psalms make many allusions to this faithful remnant (see Psalms xlv., lxxix., and lxxxiii.). They will stand for the truth of the Word of God in the midst of an apostate Judaism and Christendom. After the first panic that will follow the removal of the Church has begun to die down, a feeling of relief may come to those left behind. Their conscience will cease to be troubled by the testimony of those who believe the Scripture. When suddenly and quite unexpectedly a band of witnesses will spring forth who will declare their faith in the Word of God, and their belief in the Messiah-ship of Jesus.

A DIFFERENT TESTIMONY.

The Word of God in our own days, is practically a dead letter so far as the mass of profession is concerned. The Written Word is being as definitely rejected by Christendom, as the Living Word, the Christ of God, was rejected by the Jewish nation of old. During the time of the fifth seal, the Jewish remnant will be the only ones who will bow to its authority, and publicly own its truth. They will witness for God at a time when faith will have abandoned the earth. Their testimony will be a different one from that which it is our duty and privilege to render as Christians. The Christian testimony, while insisting upon God's claims over men, lays special stress upon the truths distinctive of this present dispensation. These are clearly unfolded in the epistle to the Ephesians, and were faithfully exhibited in the life and ministry of the apostle Paul—

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

“And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery” &c. (Eph. iii. 8-21).

The breaking down of the middle wall of partition between believers from amongst Jews and Gentiles, and the union of the Church with a glorified Christ, was a

testimony specially confided to Paul, and for this he suffered untold persecution. Not that his testimony was confined to these things. It was of a most comprehensive nature; repentance towards God, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel of the grace of God, the preaching of the kingdom of God, and the declaration of all the counsel of God (Acts xx. 21-27).

But the Jewish remnant after the removal of the Church will take up again the testimony of the disciples before the Cross (Matt. x.), and announce the coming of Christ to take to Him His great power and reign. The Old Testament, both in Prophets and Psalms, is full of predictions of this coming kingdom when the earth will be blessed under the direct rule and personal reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That these are not martyrs of the Christian dispensation is made further evident by the verse that follows (vi. 10).

How different this is from the intercessory prayer of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Stephen's prayer breathes the spirit of the grace of the gospel message, whereas these martyrs are in line with such appeals for judgment as are found in the imprecatory Psalms. It is ignorance of dispensational distinctions that would put the language of the Psalms into the lips of Christians as expressive of their thoughts, feelings, and desires. Infidels exclaim against the inconsistency of Christians repeating fervent desires for the destruction of their enemies; in this they are right, though they do not see that these very Psalms with all their appeals for judgment will be the just and proper language of the remnant of Israel in a coming day. There is all the difference imaginable between the heavenly saints and the Church on the one hand, and the earthly saints with Israelitish hopes on the other. The Church will be taken out of all her troubles in a moment and caught up to heaven at the coming of the Lord, whereas Israel cannot enjoy her earthly inheritance until the coming of the Son of man in judgment.

"And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled" (vi. 11).

In saying that the souls of these martyrs were seen under the altar, it is not implied that they were at that moment in a disembodied condition. It is of course symbolic language, for there was no literal altar there. Another has said, "Their being under the altar means simply that they had offered their bodies, as sacrifices for the truth, to God" [Grant]. It is beautiful to note that though they are a united band of martyrs, yet they do not lose their individuality, for "every one of them" comes into remembrance before Him who is not unrighteous to forget their work and labour of love which they showed toward His name at a time when loyalty to Christ meant a violent death.

These same martyrs are mentioned further on in the Revelation (xx. 4) amongst those that have part in the first resurrection. Clearly at that time they will be in their resurrection bodies though the Holy Spirit still speaks of them as "souls."

THE FIRST RESURRECTION.

We must remember that the first resurrection is a *period* of time, and not a mere *point* of time. At the coming of the Lord into the air all the dead in Christ up to that point will arise at one and the same moment, but those who died by martyrdom after that, we believe, will one by one receive their resurrection bodies, and pass in amongst the already glorified throng. Heaven will thus be astir with triumphant joy and praise, as one overcomer after another joins the worshipping company, at the same time that earth will be seething with corruption and violence.

But the time of avenging the blood of these martyred Jews must be delayed a short time longer. When it comes it will be "on them that dwell on the earth," that this vengeance will fall. This expression, as we have already pointed out, is a moral one, and refers, not to all the inhabitants of the world merely, but to apostate Christendom, who have rejected God's offers of heaven made to them in the gospel, and deliberately chosen the earth. The wrath of God will be their portion when the Lord comes out of heaven in person to execute judgment (Rev. xix. 11-21).

There were others yet to be martyred of whom we shall read further on (Rev. xiii.), and who are found sharing in the glory of the first resurrection (Rev. xx. 4), martyrs under the revived Roman Empire.

And we are nearing the fulfilment of these prophecies ! The Christ-rejecting Christendom of to-day may yet in their living bodies witness the unrolling of these events preparatory to the coming of the great day of the wrath of the Lamb.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SIXTH SEAL.

Revelation vi. 12-17.

It will help to a right understanding of the portion now before us to bear in mind the two seasons of persecution referred to in verse 11.

Again let us emphasize the fact that these martyrs do not belong to the Church period. They are called to lay down their lives for their testimony after the coming of the Lord, when the saints of this and previous dispensations shall have been caught up to meet Him in the air (1 Thess. iv.).

The first effect of the coming of the Lord and the sudden removal of the saints will be a state of panic. When it becomes realized that the door is shut, many will seek to enter in, and a wail of despair will arise as it becomes evident that it is now TOO LATE.

"Lord, Lord open unto us" will receive the awful answer, "I know you not whence ye are." The appeal that follows, "We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets," brings forth the emphatic reply, "I tell you, I know you not whence ye are," and then the sentence of doom, "*Depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity*" (Luke xiii. 24-30).

This seems to describe the effect upon the religious portion of Christendom; but there are masses of people in our lands, who are as utterly without the knowledge or fear of God as any pagan; they know nothing about the inside of the Bible, they rarely, if ever, see its covers. Upon these the panic would have little effect, and that but a transient one. Other things will quickly sweep away from their thoughts all recollection of Christian teaching, which had never entered their hearts, and had rarely even fallen upon their ears. The startling events referred to under the first four seals will absorb the frightened attention of all such, and they will join in the violent persecution of those Jewish witnesses for God that will then be raised up. These we have noticed under the fifth seal.

A LITTLE SEASON.

As we have already observed, there will be two periods of persecution with just "a little season" between them.

This interval, then, appears to be a brief one. Can we form any idea when it will take place? Undoubtedly we can. In Rev. xx. 4, after mention has been made of the martyrs under the fifth seal, another company are described distinct from these, namely, those—

“which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands.”

These have part in the first resurrection, consequently they have previously died, not a natural death, but one of violence. They are those mentioned in Rev. xiii. 15, and will be put to death by Antichrist for their refusal to worship the image of the Beast to which he has given breath. The first beast of Rev. xiii. is the head of the revived Roman Empire, whereas the second, noticed in verse 11, is the Antichrist, or Man of sin. This may be disputed by some, but we believe will be borne out by patient investigation of the Scripture.

Bearing this in mind, helps us to see that the sixth seal does not actually bring us to the great day of the wrath of the Lamb. For the second of these two seasons of persecution so clearly distinguished, and separated by a brief interval, has not, at the time of the sixth seal, yet taken place. Men terrified by all the events then transpiring, with alarmed and guilty consciences, imagine that the great day of the Lord has come, but in this they will be mistaken.

THE SUPERNATURAL BEGINS.

“And I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood.

“And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

“And the heavens departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places” (vi. 12-16).

The question here arises, Are these signs to be taken literally or figuratively? That there will be portents of the most startling nature during the short interval that separates the rapture from the day of Christ's appearing may well be supposed. They are even now assuming a startling frequency in all parts of the earth and heavens.

There has never been a time when earthquakes were so widespread and devastating; then, too, storms, floods, tornadoes of the most sudden and destructive nature; signs in the heavens, too, meteors, fire-balls, accompanied with great sights in the heavens, and rumbling noises—these things are being recorded every day in our newspapers. Increasing in severity they will reach their climax immediately after the great tribulation, and just before the sudden appearance of the Son of man.

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven” (Matt. xxiv. 29, 30).

The appearance of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven is the commencement of the Day of the Lord, and we are told in Joel ii. 30, 31—

“I will shew wonders in the heaven and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come.”

But the time of the sixth seal precedes the period of the great tribulation, and is removed from the Day of the Lord by an interval of time filled with the most stupendous events. That there will be physical signs is perfectly clear, portents both in the heavens and in the earth. There have been such even in the past, which have led frightened men and women to imagine that the end of the world had come; but during the short period of Daniel’s seventieth week these portents will assume the most appalling character.

POLITICAL UPHEAVALS.

Coupled with these things, there will be notable changes in the political world. These may take the form of tremendous revolutions. Every form of government will be shaken to its very centre. Everything that men have placed their confidence in for the support of order and security of life and property will collapse. The sun, moon, and stars are figurative of the powers of government, and the heavens represent the seat of authority. All will be involved in one vast cataclysm.

Much of this was written some years before the War, and so much of what was then foreseen has apparently

been fulfilled, that it has led some to ask, Are we not already actually in the period of the seals? We do not think so, for reasons already given in preceding chapters. But things of a similar nature both in the physical and political realms are taking place before our eyes to-day. When the Church is removed, as we believe it may be at any moment, they will burst forth in an aggravated form.

These convulsions of nature, and political and social disturbances, may in part be God's answer to the cry of the martyred remnant under the fifth seal; not yet the complete answer, for their fellow-servants have yet to be slain. But the terror awakened in the breasts of all men, from the highest to the lowest, leads them to call in their dismay upon the mountains and the rocks to fall on them, and to hide them from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne. Overtaken by one common disaster, they will forget their class distinctions and bitter class hatred which are to-day becoming so accentuated by means of Socialistic agitators.

"And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

"And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

"For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (vi. 15-17).

As a matter of fact they were mistaken in their alarm, for the Lord does not appear at this moment, nor for some while afterwards. And when that great and terrible day arrives, the kings of the earth will have lost their panic-stricken fear, and will be found in open revolt (Rev. xix.).

Again we remind the reader that these days may be much nearer than many suppose, and that, should the coming of the Lord for His saints soon take place, the men and women who are now alive may be those who in their living bodies shall witness these startling events.

Should any unsaved person be reading these lines, we would most earnestly appeal to them to enter without delay the only ark of refuge, even the Lord Jesus Christ. Let Him be their hiding-place before these woeful times arrive!

CHAPTER XX.

A PARENTHESIS OF MERCY.

Revelation vii.

In approaching this deeply interesting and instructive chapter we would invoke the aid of the Holy Spirit in its right interpretation for the present time. We say for the "present" time for without doubt the generations of God's people that have preceded us have learned therefrom and derived solid hope "through patience and comfort" of this as of all other parts of the Scriptures (Rom. xv. 4).

The Scriptures are "living" oracles as each succeeding generation of God's people has proved. We have before pointed out that a legitimate application of a passage of Scripture is one thing, but a correct interpretation is another.

ARRESTED JUDGMENT.

It will be observed that there is a break between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals. The course of judgment is for the moment suspended, and we are let into marvellous secrets of divine grace.

"And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree" (vii. 1).

In earlier days when God spoke by types, an inkling, as it seems to us, was given of these very secrets which might in truth be called a PROLONGATION of the day of grace.

THE FEASTS OF JEHOVAH.

In Leviticus xxiii. we are given in type a marvellous outline of God's ways commencing with that grand illustration of deliverance from judgment, the Passover in Egypt. Seven great feasts of Jehovah are described, the complete Jewish year, complete, too, in typical teaching:—

1. The Passover—verse 5.
2. The Feast of unleavened bread—verse 6.
3. The Sheaf of Firstfruits, typifying the resurrection of Christ—verse 10.

4. Pentecost—verse 15.
5. The Feast of Trumpets—this alludes to the gathering of Israel for blessing after the church period (Pentecost) is ended—verse 24.
6. The Jewish day of atonement, when they shall look upon Him Whom they had pierced (Zech. xii.) and mourn in repentance—verse 27.
7. The Feast of Tabernacles, or the Millennium—verse 34.

All ending with the *eighth day*, type of eternity—verse 36.

Now in verse 22 we read—

“And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleanings of thy harvest: **thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger:** I am the Lord thy God.”

Placed just between the type of the Pentecost period of grace and the trumpet call for the gathering of the nation of Israel as a whole, we have this most striking and suggestive type of grace sparing the corners of the earth before judgment does its terrible work.

Have we not in Revelation vii. the “poor” remnant of Israel, and the Gentile “stranger” sharing in this special suspension of judgment? When the gospel harvest of salvation will be over, the Jewish and Gentile corners remain to be gathered in. However this may be, it is clear that by angelic intervention God will at that time hold back the hurricane of devastating destruction just about to sweep like a mighty tornado over the whole earth, with special violence upon Palestine and the seat of the revived Roman Empire.

ANOTHER ANGEL.

“And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea,

“Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads” (vii. 2, 3).

As we have pointed out this chapter describes an arrestment in the course of judgment described under the first

six seals, separating it from the severer visitations under the trumpets.

It may be asked, Who is meant by "another angel?" Some have taken it to refer to Christ Himself, and it is quite consistent with the general outline of the book of Revelation, that at this stage He appears in angelic form, for not until we reach chapter xix. 11, does He appear in manifested glory. Others find difficulty in so interpreting from the expression "the servants of OUR God"; but we must remember that at this stage the heavenly saints are already seen in glory, and may it not be that they are seen in association with Christ—"Behold I and the children which God hath given Me." It is not a point on which any should dogmatize, but a prayerful study of Hebrews i. and ii. may help us to a right understanding. A great line of important truth opens up before us, shewing the difference between the heavenly saints already "caught up," and the earthly saints between the rapture and the appearing. But this is more a matter for our private study of the Word.

THE SEALED OF ISRAEL.

It seems difficult to understand how in the face of verse 4, any should assume that this sealed company should be anything but Israelitish.

Those who have followed us in our study of the book of Revelation will at once dismiss from their minds any such teaching as that prevalent amongst the so-called Catholic Apostolic successors of the late Edward Irving. The 144,000 are sealed, not during the Christian era, but after the Church has been removed at the coming of the Lord. Judgment indeed has already commenced to fall upon the earth (Rev. vi.) when this sealing takes place. The 144,000 are sealed for special earthly blessing and not for heaven. Besides, no language could more conclusively prove that they are a distinctly Israelitish company, for the sealed were from the tribes of Israel, not figuratively but literally.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NUMBER.

It is evident that all Israel are not included, but a remnant, clearly defined and accurately limited. The sealed ones hold a place of special service to God, being

called "the servants of our God." The time of their service is clearly after the removal of the heavenly saints to glory, and before the setting up of the millennial reign of Christ. May they not be "these my brethren" of Matt. xxv. 40? or at any rate a similar company, called to special service amidst circumstances of peculiar trial.

They are a remnant, but not the whole remnant of Israel, for another similar company is found later on (Rev. xiv. 1). Moreover they are what might be called pure-blooded descendants of the different tribes. To man, that presents an insuperable difficulty, for where could we to-day find any number, great or small, who could trace their descent or prove their genealogy? It is well known that the Jews we meet to-day are quite unable to say to which tribe they belong. But when the time is come when God shall require it, He Who knows where they are scattered in every part of the earth will Himself bring them unmistakably to light.

The number so emphatically repeated is made up of "twelve" and "ten," the former having to do with God's *manifested government* of the earth (twelve tribes of Israel), the latter with the measure of human *responsibility* (ten commandments). They are sealed with the seal of the *living* God, to be preserved in life for a position of special association with God's government of the earth at that time.

It is well to remember that *at the rapture*, saints of this present dispensation alive on earth when Christ comes into the air, will enter their heavenly sphere of blessing without dying, and *at His appearing* a multitude of saints alive at that time will pass into their earthly, millennial sphere without dying either. This chapter describes two companies of these latter.

WHY IS DAN LEFT OUT.

This question has given rise to endless speculation, some affirming with absolute certainty that it is because the Antichrist will be of that tribe. Personally we have never been able to agree with this for reasons which will presently be laid before the reader.

But first of all the omission of Dan proves that the 144,000 are but a portion of the Israelitish remnant, and not the whole company of saved Israel, who will enter

the Millennium, for in the final blessing of the tribes Dan has his place. (Ezekiel xlviii.)

It is not to be supposed that there is no significance in the fact that Dan is left out in Rev. vii. As we have said above, some have argued that it is because the Antichrist may come out of Dan. But it is not always noticed that Ephraim *as well as Dan* is omitted. Now Antichrist cannot come of *both* these tribes.

It may be *argued* that Ephraim is included under the name Joseph, yet the fact that his name is omitted weakens the argument concerning Dan.

Indeed, we cannot help thinking that Antichrist will be of the tribe of Judah, for how else could he so successfully deceive the Jews? Is it not clear that Christ came of the tribe of Judah? The prophecy of Micah was to this effect (Micah v. 1), and "all the chief priests and scribes" at Jerusalem were well aware of that (Matt. ii. 6). Is it likely that the claims of anyone not of that tribe would be listened to?

But be this as it may, other reasons must be sought for the omission, not of Dan only, but of Ephraim as well. We only suggest leaving our readers to search for themselves, for there may be more reasons than one. In Hosea vii. 1, we are told of "the iniquity of Ephraim," and if the whole book be read, it seems clear that this iniquity was the sin of *idolatry*—"Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone" (Hosea iv. 17).

Now a principle of immense importance is found in Hosea vii. 2:—

"They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness; now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face."

"I remember" says Jehovah (Hosea vii. 2, viii. 13, ix. 9), and does not Christendom need to have awakened in her conscience God's horror of idolatry? Men, and least of all God's people, cannot trifle with God's claims with impunity—"God is not mocked."

For similar reasons it may be that Dan is left out of this special place of blessing in the short interval that immediately precedes Israel's final restoration. Added to the slackness of Dan to take possession of their inheritance in the land, comes the awful history of heartless and cruel idolatry recorded in Judges xix. Was it love

of worldly gain that prevented Dan for so long a time from seeking "an inheritance to dwell in?"

"For unto that day all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel" (Judges xix. 1).

We cannot say, but this is evident that at a time when there was need for every man to be at his post in the hour of Israel's danger, Dan had to be chided thus:—"Why did Dan remain in ships?" (Judges v. 17). The ships of commerce seem to have been more to their taste than the battle's front. *A woman did the work and got the credit* (Judg. iv. 9). It is a lesson we need to learn thoroughly that whatsoever a man soweth that he also reaps.

But be this the reason for the omission of Ephraim and Dan or no, we have in the 144,000 sealed ones an Israelitish company preserved alive on the earth for the service of God at a time of unexampled danger and difficulty.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WHITE-ROBED MULTITUDE.

Revelation vii. 9-17.

The section now before us is of surpassing interest. It is an entirely fresh revelation with reference to those mentioned in Rev. iii. 10. There the promise is made to the assembly of Philadelphia that it will be kept OUT OF the hour of temptation or trial. The Church, then, will not pass through that hour; she will be removed at the coming of the Lord (*parousia*) *before* that hour arrives. But that hour will come upon *all the world*. In Rev. iii. 10 it has a wider aspect than the great tribulation of Matt. xxiv.; this latter has to do with the Jewish people specifically, and is called the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. xxx. 7).

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands" (ver. 9).

If the Church, composed of the saints of this dispensation, is kept *out of* the hour of temptation, other saints will have to pass *through* it, and a multitude of them, thank God! will come through it without having yielded up their lives. These are the ones, we believe, here seen clothed in white.

The white robes imply their acceptance. They stand before the throne, which in this book is always the throne in its *judicial* aspect. They have a right to stand there, and their title is based upon the precious blood of the Lamb (ver. 14). Their sufferings and trials had been great, but these did not afford them their ground of acceptance before the throne. The Lamb was there, and they stood before Him; they had but to point to their robes made white in the blood of the Lamb. They had palms in their hands, for they were now at rest, and in the undisturbed enjoyment of victory.

STANDING BEFORE THE THRONE.

It has often been supposed that this white-robed multitude are the whole saved and redeemed company in heaven. But, we submit, that this is not so. They are saved and redeemed ones from amongst the Gentiles, but they are not ALL the redeemed even of this class. They are not the redeemed from amongst the Gentiles of past or present times, but exclusively of a time still future, and that a very specific time. This is clear from verse 14—"these are they that came OUT OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION." This is not tribulation such as all saints in every period may have tasted. The language used is very forcible—"the tribulation, the great one." It refers to that yet future period when the four winds of the earth shall be no longer held back, but will sweep as an awful tornado of destruction and judgment over the whole habitable earth, but with special violence over the land of Palestine.

We know from Matt. xxiv. 29, 30 that the time of great tribulation will be immediately followed by the appearing of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven. It will be a time so awful that from the beginning of the world nothing has ever been known like it. Those days will be shortened by God's grace, otherwise no flesh would survive. Twice over (Matt. xxiv. 22) are we told they will be shortened, and that for the elect's sake. The "elect" (Matt. xxiv. 22, 24, 31) doubtless refers to the elect of Israel during that terrible coming crisis. The 144,000 sealed ones of Rev. vii. will be some of these spared ones. But the white-robed multitude are Gentiles, not Jews. They will not succumb under that tribulation, but they will COME OUT OF IT, that is they survive, they come out of it alive.

AN EARTHLY COMPANY.

Remembering that the tribulation is IMMEDIATELY followed by the coming of the Son of man from heaven, and that when He so comes He will sit upon the throne of His glory, and all the nations—living nations—will be gathered before Him (see Matt. xxv. 31) enables us to understand the position of this palm-bearing multitude. There is not a word about their death or resurrection.

We believe they will be an earthly company of saints, who will pass into the millennial kingdom in their natural bodies. Suddenly, possibly unexpectedly, set free by divine intervention from the agony of that awful time of trouble, with exultant joy they will cry with a loud voice—

“Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” (vii. 10).

How beautifully Psalm xcvi. describes the joyful outburst of praise and worship—

“Sing unto the Lord a new song; sing unto the Lord all the earth. Sing unto the Lord, bless His name. . . . Declare His glory among the Gentiles, His wonders among all people.”

DIFFERENT CIRCLES OF RELATIONSHIP.

It is to be observed that there is no mixing up of different relationships in this scene. Each stands out in its own distinctness, and occupies its own God-given place. The 144,000 in the beginning of the chapter are an exclusively Israelitish company, secured for blessing upon the earth, sealed before the great tribulation commences in order to endure to its end (Matt. xxiv. 13). Distinct from these are the white-robed crowd of Gentiles preserved for a special place of earthly blessing. Distinct, again, from these are the angelic hosts around the throne, and these last, also distinct from the elders or glorified saints.

We have, then, distinct and different kinds of glory. “The glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another” (1 Cor. xv. 40). There are earthly and heavenly saints, and even in the heavenly courts there are the angelic hosts, and the different circles of glorified saints. The Church holds a special and separate place, nearest of all, as the body and bride of Christ. Not that the Church is distinguished as yet in the book from the other groups of risen and glorified saints; that will come in its proper place.

“And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four living creatures, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

“Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen” (vii. 12).

WHAT ARE THESE?—WHENCE CAME THEY?

Touching questions are these when we consider to whom they refer. Think of the unevangelised masses of humanity in darker Africa, inland China, and throughout Asia, dying in millions without joy in life, without hope in death—may we not also add Russia?

The wail of anguish sounding across the seas to those who have for centuries enjoyed the peace and consolation of a known salvation in and through Christ; the staggering thought of unfulfilled responsibility on the part of those who long since received the marching orders of their risen Lord—

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

The appalling sight of the desolating scourge of Islam rolling along—Sovietism, too—like an overwhelming flood of even deeper darkness, cruelty, and despair—all this, and far more than any pen could adequately describe, has moved the hearts of earnest Christians with compassion at the cry of despair and cruel oppression rising from those vast continents of mental and moral gloom, and multitudes of honoured men and women have gone forth to spread the fame of Jesus amongst them. God speed their unselfish efforts to reach these perishing peoples before it be for ever too late!

Might not the scourge of atheistical Sovietism be the very instrument of the great tribulation out of which this vast crowd of Gentiles shall come? In Isaiah x. 5 we are told that the Assyrian will be the rod of Jehovah's anger against His people Israel. Now the Assyrian stands in the first place for the future king of the north, and ultimately for Gog of Ezekiel xxxviii. and xxxix.; and the religion of that north-eastern confederacy of nations is a savage, cruel, malignant atheism, which the Soviets are spreading in China, India and the Far East. Events are moving with extraordinary rapidity. One holds one's breath in awe as one sees the signs of Christ's return.

For the day is nearer now,
 Far nearer;
 And the signs of His approach
 Far clearer.

This white-robed company, then, are saints distinct from saved Israel, distinct from the Church, distinct also, from

the saints of the millennial period, for they have come out of the great tribulation which follows upon the removal of the saints of the present dispensation, and which immediately precedes the millennium.

A SPECIAL PRIESTLY CLASS.

"Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them" ("spread His tabernacle over them" (vii.15—R.V.).

What matchless grace is here! May not these words spur on the missionary amidst his lonely toil! To think that members of benighted races, for whom life's ease and pleasures have been forfeited, for whom often life itself has been laid down amidst disease and martyrdom, shall yet be born again, and through redemption be introduced to such a place of special nearness. They will be born again *before* the millennium, and *during* the millennium will occupy the place of priests having access to God in His temple day and night. This is not in heaven but on earth. The multitude of millennial worshippers will be in the courts outside, but these will be priests within.

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

"For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (verses 15-17).

How suited are these consolations to those whose lot it had been to suffer hunger and thirst, and to shed scalding tears of grief and pain beneath the yoke of cruel slavery! How refreshing to their gladdened hearts to be led by the waters of quietness, and to be in special nearness to the Lamb Who had suffered and passed through tribulation greater than theirs, but was now exalted!

A similar company out of ISRAEL are mentioned in Isaiah xlix. 9-11, on whom a similar reward will be bestowed (see Isaiah lxvi. 20, 21). This is a remarkable passage which should be read in connection with Isaiah iv. 5, 6. But both Isaiah and Revelation agree in foretelling the taking out of a priestly company whether from Israel or from the Gentiles, an offering unto the Lord in "a clean vessel" for special service brought into

the house of the Lord, washed in the blood of the Lamb. Over these, He Who sits on the throne will spread His Tabernacle, even as His Shekinah cloud of glory rested on the Tabernacle in the wilderness.

These are some of the scenes of joy and gladness that this weary, tired earth is yet to witness, fruit of Calvary's toil.

“BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD THAT TAKETH AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD.”

CHAPTER XXII.

SILENCE IN HEAVEN.

Revelation viii.

And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour." (ver. 1).

The Lamb having opened the seventh seal, the book of God's counsels with regard to the earth now lies open.

His eternal counsel with regard to the Church is a mystery already revealed (Eph. iii.), that the Gentiles "without Christ, and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel," who were strangers from the covenants of promise, and had no hope, and were without God in the world—that these should, in the riches of God's grace, become fellow-heirs with believing Jews, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel—that they should be brought nigh to God by the blood of Jesus, that they should be reconciled to God in one body by the Cross of Christ, and that they should possess peace with God and be enabled to draw nigh to Him as Father, with the Spirit of adoption dwelling within them,—these are parts of that

ETERNAL PURPOSE

which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, and which will be consummated when the Church will be seen in glory with Christ; this eternal purpose has already been revealed.

But the book of God's counsels with regard to the putting of this earth into subjection to Christ was a sealed book, until the Lamb, Who alone was worthy to open them, unclasped each one of its seven seals.

Terrible visitations from God have been described under the first six seals. The things unfolded under the sixth seal are themselves so terrible that the alarmed consciences of men lead them to think that the great day of wrath has come, and that God's final stroke has fallen. But this is not so, as is clear from the fact that the seventh seal had yet to be opened.

THE SEVENTH SEAL.

The seventh seal introduces dealings of such severity that God in mercy intervened to preserve a measured company from the tribes of Israel, and an unnumbered host out of all Gentile nations (Rev. vii.).

The vaults of heaven had been resounding with praise; the redemption song of the glorified saints, and the acclamations of myriads of angels had made those "eternal arches" ring with melody, when suddenly all is still—a hush of awe.

No silence on earth! there all was noise and turmoil and violent commotion, as we have seen under the seals. But in heaven there is a pause as though of solemn suspense. A storm is about to break forth, and the silence describes in vivid figures the stillness that precedes its outburst—"there was (ἐγένετο) silence" (or "silence took place")—it took place at that time, and it took the place of the praise that was heaven's active occupation.

"And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets" (viii. 2).

In heaven all is order, if on earth all be commotion and confusion. The angels stand before God, the trumpets were given into their hands. All is in readiness in God's thoughts, though awaiting the exact moment of performance. The time has now arrived for heaven's direct interference with the earth.

"And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers—or, give efficacy to the prayers—of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne" (ver. 3).

It is clear that this angel is far more than a mere creature, for no mere created being could give efficacy to the prayers of others. It is none other than the Lord Himself, the Angel of the Covenant, so frequently mentioned in the Old Testament. The time is not yet arrived for Christ to take His place in direct and personal execution of judgment, hence the more distant angelic form is assumed. It is the same blessed Person Who at the incarnation took manhood into union with Deity. Having once become man, He never ceases to be man; nor can He ever cease to be God. But as necessity arises, He assumes

whatever appearance is suited at the time, and here it is the angelic, as was often the case in the past:

THE PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS.

What saints are these? They are not dead saints praying FOR the living whose help Rome would have us seek, nor are they living saints praying TO the dead, as many alas! are doing to-day. These are living saints in their natural bodies of flesh and blood, passing through times of awful tribulation and persecution. In their distress they cry to God. United in dire need, they are united in supplication—THE PRAYERS OF ALL SAINTS.

“And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand.

“And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake” (verses 4, 5).

On the cross Christ interceded for His enemies; now in heaven He intercedes for His people, but in the time we are here considering His intercession will bring down judgment. On the Cross He cried:—

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke xxiii. 34).

This intercession had chiefly the Jewish people in view. Blinded by sin and Satan, in their unbelief they were crucifying the Lord of glory, their own Messiah. The blessed Saviour intercedes for His unhappy people, and God answers in the marvellous proclamation of the Gospel sent to them after the day of Pentecost through the preaching of Peter in Acts iii.—

“Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him doth this man stand here before you whole.

“This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts iv. 10-12).

This offer of salvation and forgiveness, fruit of Christ’s atonement on the Cross, and His prayer of intercession,

went forth at Pentecost to the whole world, but beginning at Jerusalem.

Christ is not now interceding for sinners. He is interceding for believers, and through His ceaseless service as their High Priest, they are kept amidst the ten thousand dangers of their pathway through this world, in spite of their own weakness. He ever lives to make intercession for us, hence it is that we shall be kept to the end, saved to the uttermost (Heb. vii. 24, 25).

FIRE OF THE ALTAR.

But at the period we are now considering, His intercession will bring down judgment on the earth. The fire of the altar implies the consuming judgment of God. Christ had to endure this on the Cross. He was there made sin for us, He Who knew no sin; and all the fire of God's wrath against sin was poured forth upon His sinless soul. He was not spared, but, blessed be His holy name! He bore for us, "the Almighty's righteous ire."

That same judgment will, in a coming day, be turned against this earth; and that which had been as a burnt offering to God of a sweet smelling savour, will become to sinful and Christ-rejecting men the very ground of their judgments, accompanied with all the marks and signs of God's power—voices, thunders, lightnings, and an earthquake (viii. 5). The earthquake is added here (*cf.* Rev. iv. 5) in token of the increasing intensity of God's visitations.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FOUR FIRST TRUMPETS.

Revelation viii. 6-13.

"And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound" (ver. 6).

There is something awe-inspiring and majestic in the slow movement of God's processes in judgment. There is no haste, for God is slow to anger. The angels appointed to sound forth His wrath stand prepared, trumpets in hand until the last moment. Further delay would be heaven conniving at earth's wickedness.

HAIL AND FIRE MINGLED WITH BLOOD.

"The first angel sounded and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth; and the third part of the trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt" (ver. 7).

The symbols here given imply the most solemn outpouring of wrath from heaven upon men on the earth. Psalm xviii. describes this dealing of God in judgment—"hailstones and coals of fire." The earth shakes because of His wrath; the Lord thunders from the heavens and gives His voice in terror—"hailstones and coals of fire" (*cf.* also Joshua x. 11). It is the wrath of God from heaven poured down upon men; but not only this, it is mingled with blood, which means destruction to life, death by violence. Some have suggested that moral death, and not physical, is meant, and that the hail and fire may be figurative. At one time we used to think it might be so, for hail and fire from heaven seemed a thing well nigh incredible.

But may it not be that the very weapons that men are preparing to-day, God will very shortly allow them to use in destruction of life. God will allow men presently to destroy one another, even as they are preparing to do. It will be none the less the judgment of God. Man will thus become the rod of vengeance in the hands of God, in spite of the League of Nations and all such efforts.

TREES AND GREEN GRASS.

The judgment falls upon the THIRD PART of trees and ALL green grass. Trees seem to imply man in his pride and lofty exaltation. In Isaiah ii. 12, speaking of the day of the Lord, the very day that in Revelation is being introduced, the proud and lofty and lifted up ones are to be brought low; these are the cedars of Lebanon and oaks of Bashan—the loftiness of man, and the haughtiness of man.

In Isaiah xxxvii. 24-28, we get similar figures used, the tall cedars and choice fir trees being the great men, the dignitaries, whereas the grass shews us the masses, the common people. This trumpet affects specially the lower classes, though there is a commencement of the collapse about to come upon the governing classes—the THIRD PART of trees, and ALL green grass.

It is well-known that the next war will be a war from the air, and a war of extermination of the civil and non-combatant classes. Communists are to-day using every effort to spread sedition amongst the military and naval forces by means of propaganda and lying pamphlets. Even if they were to succeed in their nefarious efforts, this would not prevent the destruction of life that every intelligent and loyal leader of the government plainly foresees and rightly dreads, for it will not be a case of Infantry and Cavalry and Dreadnoughts, etc., but poison gas and bombs from the sky. This we believe may be what is likely to fulfil the conditions described under the first trumpet.

THE THIRD PART.

Added to the above interpretation, and by no means contradictory thereto, it has often been suggested that a very precise meaning attaches to this fraction so frequently repeated. It is often taken to mean the Roman Empire in its Western portion. The Roman Empire in the past extended far wider than many suppose; it had an Eastern portion (Syria, Arabia, Egypt), a Central (Greece, Illyricum), and a Western (Italy, Britain, Spain, etc.). It is this Western portion that is yet to revive, and this it is that appears to be the thought in the *third part*, viz., the *European* portion.

The Eastern portion of the ancient Roman Empire will be included in the Assyrian of prophecy which will extend to the Far East. The Beast (Rev. xiii. and xvii.) and the Assyrian will be opposed to one another.

A BURNING MOUNTAIN.

"And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood;

"And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed" (verses 8, 9).

That the dissolution of government hinted at in the first trumpet should lead to revolution need not surprise us. This agitation and unrest amongst men is implied by the use of the symbol of the *sea*. The great mountain burning with fire, implies some great earthly power in volcanic eruption. Babylon of old was such a power (Jer. li. 25), and in a coming day history will repeat itself in an aggravated degree.

The history of the French Revolution gives us a little picture of what it will be. Some great European power which seemed firmly established and as solid and secure as a mountain, will suddenly be overthrown. Already do we see revolt against monarchy and government generally. These fires of revolution will presently burst forth in a quarter least expected because of its apparently secure and powerful condition. A reign of terror will ensue, and trade and commerce will be paralysed.

We have an object lesson in RUSSIA to-day. Bad as that is, we believe worse is to come after the removal of the Holy Spirit when the saints are caught up. What would be the effect upon humanity if ENGLAND were to collapse? Every thoughtful man is well aware of the efforts now being made by advanced Socialists and Communists to bring this about. Moscow is using all her hellish designs against Great Britain. The Strike as everybody knows was engineered by the Soviets for this end, and India is being set aflame to bring about the downfall of England.

Whether it be England or not that will fulfil the conditions described by the great mountain burning with fire

cast into the sea, the result will be disastrous to all the nations in anywise connected therewith.

FALL OF A GREAT STAR.

"And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters: "And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter" (verses 10, 11).

In this we see the fall of some great ruling power. By comparing the passages in Old and New Testaments where "stars" are symbolically used we are led to think that a ruler in a spiritual sense is here implied. Under the second trumpet we get the collapse of civil government, here it is the strong delusion of *apostasy*.

Whatever interpretation of this star may be given along historicist lines we are persuaded that the final fulfilment is not yet. Some have thought it may be the first appearance of Antichrist. Certainly all the principles that will reach their climax in the Man of sin are actively at work around us. Socialism and Atheism are closely linked together to-day. Under the third trumpet some great spiritual leader will apostatise, and bring about by his fall the embitterment of the springs and streams of human happiness. Still further, moral distance from God is the result. Apostasy will plunge men into mental and spiritual anguish. Oh, that men to-day would learn what an evil and bitter thing it is to turn away from the living God and His living Word! The cross of Christ makes bitter waters sweet (*cf.* Exod. xv. 25). Apostasy will turn all into bitterness.

"And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise" (ver. 12).

The apostasy begun under the third trumpet, increases under the fourth, until all the spiritual powers become darkened under God's judgment throughout Europe.

If the interpretation of the "third part" we have hinted at be correct, the first four trumpets would seem

to affect the Western nations of Europe. The next two, as we shall see, have specially to do with the East.

“And I beheld, and heard an eagle (R.V.) flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound” (viii. 13).

How vividly is here depicted the rapid course of events that follows upon the fourth trumpet. The eagle is a symbol of rapidity of motion, swooping down upon the prey, for “eagle” here it should be instead of “angel.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FIFTH TRUMPET.

Revelation ix.

The four first trumpets affect specially the *circumstances* of men; the fifth and sixth, the *men themselves*. Then again, the four first trumpets have specially to do with Europe and the Western powers; the fifth and sixth affect nations of both the Near and the Far East.

"And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fallen from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit" (ver. 1).

Already under the third trumpet a star had been seen to fall from heaven, and this star, it would seem, is here under the fifth trumpet seen as fallen. It is not the act of falling, but rather the fact that it had already fallen. These are the early days of Antichrist, and, as we shall presently see, the land of Palestine is here specially in view; whereas under the third trumpet, as we have before suggested, the Roman Empire in its Western portion ("the third part") is the sphere of the darkening influences of apostasy.

Whether this fallen star be the actual Antichrist or no, we cannot say, but this is clear that he is an apostate ruler, one who had been put governmentally in a place of responsibility to rule and bless. He ought to have shone with the light of heaven, but instead became the instrument of Satanic energy upon the earth.

"And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit" (ver. 2).

The key of the pit was given to this fallen star, and all the powers of hell are by him let loose. The darkening influences of apostasy will then make themselves felt, not in Christendom merely, but in Palestine. It is awful to see these things at work to-day in so-called Christian lands. Many pulpits are even now completely given up to Satanic teachings. These things have been distinctly foretold in the Scripture, but we see them to-day assuming shape with the most appalling rapidity. Under Anti-

christ's apostate rule all heavenly light and order will be darkened by the smoke of the bottomless pit.

"And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

"And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads" (verses 3, 4).

THE SWARM OF LOCUSTS.

These must no doubt be taken in a figurative and not a literal sense. In Joel i. they are most probably literal, for there the trees and pasture are withered, but here these are specially said to be exempt. The scourge, whatever it is, falls, not upon the material grass which is the natural food of literal locusts, not upon the circumstances of men which grass would mean taken figuratively, but upon the men themselves, and these men those who had not been sealed on their foreheads. This last allusion indicates that the sphere of activity of these locusts is to be the land of Palestine (*cf.* Rev. vii.).

TORMENT AWAITS THE JEWS.

The Jews are going back to Palestine to-day in unbelief; their number is daily increasing; large tracts of land are being colonised by them. Since the Balfour Declaration so great has been the influx that Palestine is rapidly becoming a Jewish State, and Hebrew is becoming a living language. A people without a language is a lifeless people, but Zionism has restored to the people the very language they had forgotten for nearly 2,000 years.

"And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when it striketh a man" (ver. 5).

This passage gives us a terrible insight into the sufferings that await them in their own land. It must be remembered that the time of their great tribulation is not here alluded to. Bad as this one will be, the latter will be greater far, the greatest that ever has been, or that ever will be. The great tribulation will last forty-two months, whereas this one is limited to five. But they will be months of torment, not physical, but mental and spiritual. It will be the 'torment of apostasy, and what

agony is greater than that of the soul that has given up God? The anguish of the apostate people of Israel in the last days is alluded to in Isaiah viii. 19-22, and their efforts to supplement the loss of God and faith, by turning to necromancy and spiritism. All these things are preparing in our own days.

HATH GOD SAID?

Infidelity is Satanic in its origin. It began with the Serpent's question in the garden of Eden, "Hath God said?" Multitudes to-day are playing with it, encouraged by the shallow glamour of "Higher Criticism" and "New Theology." The day is fast approaching when an army of false teachers will overrun the earth, insinuating the tormenting poison of diabolical unbelief.

"And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them" (ver. 6).

The increasing number of suicides in our time is largely the result of religious unbelief. The unsettlement of faith, the ignoring of all the claims of God, the abandonment of all belief in a hereafter, either of heaven or hell—all these influences tend to give loose rein to men's sinful lusts and passions, the resulting remorse, disappointment, and self-loathing drive them to despair, and, as they say, to "end it all." But it is *not* the end, for *after* death, the judgment! But under the fifth trumpet, strange as it may be, the imagined relief of death will flee from them.

"And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men.

"And they had hair as the hair of women" (verses 7, 8).

It is not actual war, of course; *that* had been already spoken of under the seals, and will take place at an earlier part than this of the interval between the rapture of the saints and the appearing in glory of Christ for judgment. War there will be at the close of that interval. At the commencement of it the wars will be international, but at the close all nations will be gathered together against Christ.

Here, however, these moral locusts bear the semblance of a conquering host; the appearance as of crowns of

gold indicate that there will be that about them which will tend to inspire their dupes with a superstitious sense of their having received a righteous commission from God. But the test of all teaching, the Word of God, having been slighted and ignored, there will be nothing whereby to judge of doctrine on its approach. The appearance in front is of masculine energy, intelligence and power, but seen from behind is weak and subject—the faces of men, but the hair of women.

“ Their teeth were as the teeth of lions and they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.

“ And they had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months ” (verses 9, 10).

How different the emissaries of this Satanic energy from the bottomless pit, from those who in this present dispensation have to wage war with spirits of wickedness in the heavenlies! Our breastplate is one of righteousness (Eph. vi.)—practical righteousness. Without this we cannot stand for one moment before the fiery darts of the Evil One.

The shield of faith, and the breastplate of righteousness are indispensable portions of the panoply of God. But Satan's servants have teeth of lions, relentlessly to tear and destroy. The breastplate of iron shows how completely heart and conscience will be steeled and rendered incapable of appreciating the utter torment of mind and soul which their hell-inspired doctrines spread through the world. “ I want no Jesus Christ to stand between me and God—I want no blood of Jesus to give me title for heaven,” said a preacher recently from the pulpit of a so-called Christian church, adding with a blasphemy that makes one tremble to record—“ I claim it as a right, and if the man Jesus should dispute my title, I would appeal to God against—.” Oh, the horror of this smoke from the abyss! Whole congregations of the young are to-day being carried away with these darkening Satanic influences.

POWER IN THEIR TAILS.

Under the fifth trumpet it will not be isolated cases, but great armies of such teachers, false prophets—“ the

prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail" (Isa. ix. 15), with power, or authority (ἐξουσία) to hurt men five months. Whence does this power come?

"They had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon (destroyer)" (ver. 11).

The power is that of the abyss, that is the place where during the Millennium, evil is shut up and chained; this must not be confounded with the lake of fire, where evil is punished, and that eternally.

"In the Hebrew tongue, Abaddon"—during the time of the fifth trumpet, the Jewish people, once beloved for the father's sakes, will be given up of God to these Satanic delusions. The early chapters of Isaiah (viii.-x.) no doubt allude to this time when Jehovah's anger is not turned away from the guilty people, but His hand is stretched out still in judgment.

There is no king ruling in hell. Satan is now called "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. ii. 2), and the wicked spirits against whom we wrestle are "rulers of the darkness of this age" (Eph. vi. 12). Now, Satan is going about seeking whom he may devour; during the Millennium he will be chained and shut up in the bottomless pit; during the awful period of apostasy which precedes the Millennium he will marshal all his human forces both in Europe and Palestine, making of men his direct instruments of spiritual darkness, moral destruction, and cruel mental torment. The destroyer's name is given both in Hebrew and Greek. Whether it be the Antichrist himself or no we cannot say, but Antichrist will combine in his own person the apostasies of Judaism and Christianity (see 1 John ii. 22, 23).

One word only can describe this state of things—WOE ! A word of unspeakable terror, coming as it does from the mouth of God.

"ONE WOE IS PAST; AND, BEHOLD THERE COME TWO WOES MORE HEREAFTER"—or, after these (ver. 12).

This first woe, then, seems to fall upon the land of Palestine, upon the unsealed portion of the Israelitish people.

CHAPTER XXV.

TWO WOES MORE.

Revelation ix. 12-21.

"One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more" (ver. 12).

For the interpretation of these woes we must look on to the future, and not back to the past. We must ever bear in mind that from chapter iv. onward in this book we are in the midst of scenes and judgments which will find their fulfilment in that short period that follows the removal of the Church at the coming of the Lord. We do not deny that certain historical events bear a kind of analogy to what is given in this chapter, but that is an *application*, and not the *interpretation* of the passage.

The first woe has been called SATAN'S woe, for the pit of the abyss and the angel of the abyss are prominent features of the scourge that is to fall on apostate Israel, "the men who have not the seal of God on their foreheads" (*cf.* chapter vii.). This second woe is MAN'S woe, for human instrumentality is conspicuous.

"And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,

"Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates.

"And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.

"And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand; and I heard the number of them."

THE GOLDEN ALTAR.

Two things seem prominent in connection with the golden altar—atonement and intercession. When the Lord gave instruction to Moses with reference to the making of the tabernacle, he was enjoined to burn incense upon the golden altar morning and evening; there was to be a "perpetual incense before the Lord" (Exodus xxx. 8).

In Revelation viii. 3 this incense was to give efficacy to the prayers of the saints.

We are also told that the blood of the sin offering was to be placed upon its horns once a year on the great day of atonement (Exod. xxx. 10; Lev. xvi. 18). Besides this the blood of the special sin offering for "the priest that is anointed," and for "the whole congregation" was to be placed upon the horns of the golden altar (Lev. iv. 7, 18).

How solemn to find that the voice comes from the horns of this same golden altar, no longer now speaking of intercession and atonement, but releasing the four angels of judgment which were bound at the great river Euphrates. Another has written:—"We have no record in the Word of the binding of these four angels until here recorded; but we know from Peter and Jude that the angels who kept not their place and dwelling—tampering with humans, as humans now do with demons—are kept in eternal chains until the final reckoning; four of these being, as we here find, bound at the scene of crime, the river of Babylon. Here we find them loosed for the appointed time... The function of the four angels is to kill the third part of men, with an army of cavalry numbering 200,000,000." (Hartridge.)

If under the fifth trumpet we find ourselves in connection with Palestine, under the sixth our attention is called to the Far East. These two trumpets correspond by way of contrast to the two companies saved during the parenthesis of mercy in Revelation vii.—the one from the tribes of Israel, the other from amongst the Gentile nations.

It is to be noticed that these four angels were "prepared." Only now was the time ripe for the execution of this particular judgment, but known unto God are all His works, even works of judgment, and this judgment will fall specially upon Europe.

THE EUPHRATEAN HORSEMEN.

Whatever application may be made of this inroad of Euphratean horsemen along the lines of the historicist interpretation of the Apocalypse we believe that the complete and final fulfilment lies in the future, but that future seems now to be very near at hand.

Those who interpret it according to the futurist method have limited the sphere of execution of the judgment to

Western Europe, in other words to the Roman Empire. They have done so by confining the expression "the third part" to the Western portion of the Empire as it existed in the past. Personally we are coming more and more to the conviction that more is to be taken literally than hitherto we have been disposed to do. Twice over is the expression used—"to slay the third part of men" (verse 15)—"by these three was the third part of men killed" (verse 18).

This is awful to contemplate—a wholesale destruction of humanity. Before 1914 it would have been incredible that as the result of a war something like 100,000,000 lives would be lost. Since then the war-like spirit amongst the nations of the whole earth, East and West, has increased a hundred-fold, and methods of destruction have been invented more terrifying than before. The Far East is being organized for the approaching conflict. China alone possesses a quarter of the population of the earth. Then there are Japan, India, Russia. All these lands are seething with unrest. Humanity is digging its own grave. Psalm ix. is yet to be fulfilled—

"The nations are sunk down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken."

Under the fourth seal, the fourth part of men is slain as the result of their own wicked devices (Rev. vi. 8). We are told that the population of the earth is about 1,600,000,000 (sixteen hundred million) If a fourth part are slain, twelve hundred millions would remain. The seals and trumpets follow in quick succession during the brief interval of seven years between the rapture of the saints and the appearing of Christ with all His saints, so that we may take 1,200,000,000 to be still roughly the population of the earth at the time of the sounding of the sixth trumpet. Under this trumpet a "third part" of men will be killed, that is, a third part of what is left, or 400,000,000.

This seems too awful to be true, but let us remember that the army of invasion will be 200,000,000 (Rev. ix. 16), and this number is emphasized. *I heard the number of them.*

THE ASSYRIAN OF PROPHECY.

If in the first part of the chapter we find the early actings of Antichrist in Palestine, here we seem to be brought in contact with the commencing activities of the Assyrian of prophecy. There is to be a great north-eastern confederacy of nations, the Gog of Ezekiel, and the Assyrian of Isaiah and Micah. At the close of the career of the Assyrian, before he falls on the mountains of Judea, he comes in special contact with the land of Palestine as the King of the North of Daniel xi. But here in Revelation ix. it would seem that the Assyrian's early activities are in Europe, the yellow peril of which we have been hearing so much of late.

What are we to understand by the hour and day, and month and year? Besides the fact of the period of judgment being a limited one, may it not also suggest that there may be a succession of attacks, increasing in severity?

Hordes from the East are to overrun the West. This is what God has distinctly foretold in the prophetic Scriptures, and things politically are working steadily and surely towards this end. One of the earliest and most remarkable prophecies of the O.T. makes this clear—

“Asshur shall carry thee (i.e., Israel) away captive.

“And he took up his parable and said, Alas, who shall live when God doeth this!

“And ships shall come from the side of Chittim and shall afflict Asshur. . . . and he also (i.e., Chittim) shall perish for ever” (Num. xxiv. 20-25).

Chittim lay west of Palestine, and seems to refer to the Roman Empire, and shows how prophecy anticipated history.

In the description which follows we may see much that is figurative. It does not follow that literal horses are meant, but rather the rapid and onward progress of the evil. Irresistible, too, is the Satanic energy symbolized by the fire, and smoke, and brimstone. Along with military invasion in overwhelming numbers will come the blinding and Satanic influences of false doctrine. In Europe where the gospel of God's grace has achieved its mighty results in blessing in the past, there the apostasy of rejected light and welcomed heathen darkness will destroy all moral link with God. Even to-day in favoured

England are to be found Moslem mosques and Buddhist temples.

"And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone; and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone.

"By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths.

"For their power is in their mouths, and in their tails; for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt" (ix. 17-19).

Apostate Christendom filled with violence, corruption, and idolatry will find no place of repentance, but will seek relief from the torment of infidelity in demonology and spiritistic investigations. Compare Saul and the witch of Endor (1 Sam. xxviii.); and also the anguish of the apostate people of Israel in the last days (Isaiah viii. 19-22); only here in Revelation ix. it is Europe that is in question.

"And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood; which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk.

"Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornications, nor of their thefts" (verses 20, 21).

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LITTLE OPEN BOOK.

Revelation x.

As in the case of the seals there was an interruption between the sixth and the seventh, so here we find a similar break between the sixth and seventh trumpets. For the sixth trumpet would seem to conclude with the last verse of chapter ix., and the seventh is not sounded until chapter xi. 15.

In each case it is mercy staying the course of judgment, for God loves mercy, and judgment is His strange work.

"And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire" (x. 1).

There seems little doubt that "another" angel, both here and in chapter viii. 3 is none other than the Lord Himself. It is not yet quite the time for His public manifestation as Son of man in judgment, but nevertheless that time is rapidly approaching, and the Lord seems to be dealing more directly with the course of events than He did by the providential judgments that have preceded.

All the symbols used in verse 1 point unmistakably to the Lord Himself. He was clothed with a *cloud*, which is the well-known sign of Jehovah's presence, hidden, but not yet revealed. There was a *rainbow* upon His head, reminding us of God's faithfulness towards creation. His countenance as the *sun* tells of His supreme authority (Rev. i. 16; Matt. xvii. 2), and the *pillars of fire* indicate the firmness and searching character of His judgment.

"And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot upon the earth,

"And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices,

"And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not" (verses 2-4).

There is a change here from chapter v. *There* the book was sealed, and must have remained so had it not

been for the suffering unto death of Him who glorified God with reference to sin (chap. v. 9).

The seals that one by one were opened by the Lamb tell of providential occurrences, which being but severer forms of events that have often happened throughout the history of this world, none would necessarily have known them to be positive interventions on the part of God.

THE OPEN BOOK.

But here the book is *open*. It is no longer mysterious and symbolic, but direct dealing of God in connection with Jerusalem and the Jews, and those Gentiles immediately linked with them, as we shall see in the next chapter (Rev. xi.).

It is not only open, but it is a *little* book, for the time is now drawing very near its close, and the sphere of God's acting is getting more restricted; the temple of God, the altar, the court are more exclusively in view. At the same time, He who descends from heaven, invested with all the signs of divine majesty, plants His feet upon the sea and the earth, shewing that all belongs to Him, and that He has universal claim over heaven, earth, and sea.

The SEA may represent the unformed masses of mankind, outside the limits of the prophetic earth—the EARTH being that portion where ordered government prevails, and direct testimony has gone forth. We must remember that we have nothing to do here with the church and the heavenly saints, who are already with the Lord, but with the Jews alive on earth, and specially with Jerusalem.

The loud voice, the lion's roar, the answering thunders, all convey the thought of the awful outburst of divine judgment which was about to take place. Much of the imagery of the Book of Revelation is found likewise in the Old Testament, and here the fervid denunciation of God's people of old through the lips of Amos comes irresistibly to the mind.

"The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" (Amos iii. 1-9).

The imposing majesty of the scene fills the soul with awe. The roaring of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah,

about to take possession of the inheritance through acts of long-delayed but justly merited judgment—heaven's complete answer—SEVEN thunders—in full accord with this solemn announcement. John was about to write, but heaven forbade. The time was now so short, that the details must not be communicated.

NO LONGER DELAY.

"And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven,

"And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things that are therein, that there should be delay no longer" (R.V. *margin*).

"But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared the good tidings (R.V.) by his servants the prophets" (verses 5-7).

Here, then, we have the declaration of the Lord's right over all creation, along with the announcement that there should be no longer delay in asserting and enforcing that claim.

Many have imagined that the reading of our A.V.—"that there should be time no longer"—implies that the time condition of things was just about to cease and eternity to commence. But this is not at all the case. Much had yet to take place before eternity could begin, but there was to be "no further delay" in the execution of judgment.

The mystery of God was about to terminate. Evil was no longer to be triumphant, Satan no longer to have his way, as alas! is too often the case now. It is often an inexplicable mystery how God Who loves righteousness and hates iniquity should allow evil to have the upper hand, and for so long. But soon all will be explained, and His wisdom, love and power fully vindicated. Christ, too, will be glorified in the eyes of the whole universe, and all the blessed promises made beforehand, and the glad predictions of Old Testament prophets will be fulfilled.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD.

Some have thought from the expression "the mystery of God" that the Church was in question. But the

mystery of the Church, its union with a glorified Christ, its composition of believing Jews and Gentiles, baptized by the Holy Ghost into one body, with the middle wall of partition broken down—this mystery was not declared either to or by His servants the prophets in O.T. times; it was then kept secret and not made known until “revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets (*i.e.*, of the N.T.) by the Spirit,” and especially through Paul (Eph. iii. 4).

We need to weigh carefully the passages where the word “mystery” occurs.

We are told that in the dispensation of the fulness of times God will gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth. This is called “*the mystery of His will*” (Eph. i. 9, 10). God has made known to us what He will one day accomplish for the glory of Christ. In spite of the rage of Satan against God, in spite of the ruin wrought by man’s sin, everything in heaven and on earth will be gathered up and united in blessing under Christ.

The Church will be given a place of association with Christ in manifested glory. Christ will be *head* over all things. He will be head not only *of* the Church but *to* the Church. This is a twofold headship. This is *the mystery of His will* which He has purposed in Himself—a mystery which is even now made known to believers, but which will be manifest to all, in the Millennium, and in a special sense during eternal ages.

“And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book

“And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book

“And I took the little book out of the angel’s hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and as soon as I had eaten it my belly was bitter” (verses 8-10).

FURTHER PROPHECIES.

The voice again speaks to John and bids him take the little book out of the mighty angel’s hand. But the prophet must eat it up and thus thoroughly digest its contents. The announcing of the terrible judgments of God upon this guilty world must not be undertaken in a light or merely intellectual manner.

No earthly judge worthy the name is ever known to pass sentence upon a criminal however contemptible in his guilt, without keenly feeling the painful nature of his duty. So he that is called of God to bear witness to his righteous judgments must meditate in all seriousness and sobriety on all that that judgment implies. It is sweet to the taste to think that soon all evil will be put down, and that a King shall reign in righteousness and peace. But when we consider what is in store for rebellious and unrepentant sinners, not only of bodily judgment here, but of eternal perdition hereafter, it fills the soul with bitterness and grief.

"And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings" (verse 11).

John is told that further witness is yet to be borne of judgments that are to affect the living nations and kings, for here it is not the judgment of the dead that is in question.

CHAPTER XXVII.

GOD'S FINAL TESTIMONY.

Revelation xi.

The time is now drawing to a close, and Christ is about to set up His Kingdom. The Church having been caught up to glory, the Jews are once more the objects of God's interest on earth.

"And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein" (chap. xi. 1).

A JERUSALEM REMNANT.

We see from this a recognition on God's part of a remnant from amongst the inhabitants of Jerusalem. These are different from the sealed ones of Rev. vii. There the tribes scattered abroad were in view, here a narrower and more restricted sphere occupies the mind of the Spirit. As the brief interval between the rapture of the saints (1 Thess. iv.) and the appearance of Christ in glory rapidly speeds its way, Jerusalem becomes more and more the focus of God's dealings both in grace and judgment.

It is in Jerusalem that the power of evil will at that time be rampant, and there above all places on the earth will the difficulty of true and faithful testimony be experienced. But there will be a remnant even there who will worship God, and that, too, in a public manner. God will take special account of these; He will measure the place where they assemble to serve Him; He will measure those who worship. Not one will be lost sight of.

In Ezekiel (chap. xl.) and Zechariah (chap. ii.) the same action on God's part is taken notice of, but that will be at a later date, when the Millennium itself will be set up. Consequently there, not the temple only, but the city of Jerusalem and the whole land of Palestine are measured out as God's own peculiar possession.

"But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles; and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty-and-two months" (verse 2).

THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES.

From this we learn that the times of the Gentiles have not yet ceased. Some have thought that when the Turks were driven out of Jerusalem and Palestine, and Great Britain received the Mandate, that then the times of the Gentiles came to an end. This is not so. The Church is still upon earth: Israel's condition of Lo-ammi—"not My people"—still exists.

Though Great Britain has been used of God for the immediate deliverance of Palestine from Turkish oppression, yet she is a Gentile power. But this chapter anticipates the time when the Beast will be in possession of Jerusalem—a time which may be much nearer than many suppose.

JEHOVAH'S HIDDEN ONES.

At any rate here we see that the enemies of God and His people are in Jerusalem, and have access into the very court of the temple. As we have seen before, the Jewish remnant will at that time be the only witnesses for God on the earth. The Psalms make mention prophetically of these times. Psalm lxxiv., for instance, shows that the enemy at that time will do "wickedly in the Sanctuary." The heathen, that is the Gentiles, will be come into Palestine, the land of God's inheritance (Psalm lxxix. 1). They will defile God's holy temple, which at that time, it seems, will have been rebuilt. The atheism and hatred of all religion which has already taken hold of large masses of the population of our own dear land, as well as other European countries, under the influence of Communism and Bolshevism will lead them to try and destroy those who worship the true God.

All over the land of Palestine they will burn up the synagogues, but God will take care that in Jerusalem, as well as elsewhere, in spite of reproach and blasphemy, a little feeble band of hidden ones will be preserved. Many will be slain, as Psalm lxxix. tells us; their blood will be shed like water round about Jerusalem. See also Psalm lxxxiii. But this time of oppression and persecution will be limited to forty-two months. It will be the time of the Great Tribulation.

THE BEAST FROM THE ABYSS.

We have elsewhere alluded to the remarkable prophecy of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel ix. We cannot here enlarge upon it, but would point out that these forty-two months are the second half of the last or seventieth week. Soon after the removal of the Church at the coming of the Lord a great power will arise, mentioned for the first time in this book in chapter xi. 7. As all our readers are well aware this is now forcing itself upon the attention of the whole world. It is the revived Roman Empire which will be ruled by a prince of Satanic energy and power.

Another has written—"In anticipation of this dread concentration of evil, it may be well to remark that 'beast' as a symbol means an Imperial Power rather than an individual, although the directing power or head of such Empire, being an individual, would be called 'beast' also. The term 'beast' is used as indicating a power or a person totally devoid of conscience, and therefore amenable, without compunction of any kind, to Satanic influence. The world will fall under the cruel power of this scourge"—[Hartridge].

THE PRINCE THAT SHALL COME.

According to Daniel ix. 27, this prince will confirm a covenant with the apostate portion of the Jewish people. Some have thought that this covenant was the new covenant made by Christ, but this is not so. We must not confound "Messiah the Prince" of verse 25, with "the Prince that shall come" of verse 26. This latter is the Roman Prince; he is the prince of the people that destroyed the city in A.D. 70.

"And he shall confirm a covenant with [the] many for one week"

for thus the passage should run. It is a covenant with death and an agreement with hell (Isaiah xxviii. 15). The apostate people in Palestine will be so thoroughly under the power of Antichrist that he will make them enter into this alliance with the head of the Roman Empire.

At first, all goes well, the Jewish ritual and sacrifices are revived, but in the midst of the week this prince breaks his covenant with the Jewish people, and causes their sacrifices to cease. But those who in the midst of

this abounding wickedness, really worshipped God, the remnant of "hidden ones" (Ps. lxxxiii. 3) now stand out boldly and publicly.

THE TWO WITNESSES.

From amongst these, two individuals seem to stand forth more prominently than the rest.

They become the objects of Satan's bitter and cruel persecution, and for forty-two months, or three and a half years (namely, the second half of this seventieth week) they have to bear the full brunt of his fury, and that of the enemies of God.

"And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth" (ver. 3).

Not only will there be the public worship of God on the part of the remnant, but there will also be a prophetic testimony. It will not be, as now, a testimony of grace to lost and ruined sinners, but of judgment soon to fall upon a guilty and apostate world. It will be a testimony borne in sorrow, for these witnesses are seen clothed in sackcloth. It will be a testimony adequate in degree, for there are *two* (Deut. xvii. 6). It will be a testimony that will continue throughout the whole period of the last half week, for 1260 days make 42 months or $3\frac{1}{2}$ years, the Jewish year containing 360 days.

God takes account of their faithful witness for Him, nor do they slacken or abate their active testimony for a single day during that awful period.

What we find then in the first three verses of our chapter is (1) a company of accepted Jewish worshippers, worshippers who have a priestly character, for they have access to the temple and the altar (no doubt the altar of incense); (2) the Holy City desecrated and given up to Gentile oppression (*cf.* Luke xxi.); and (3) at the same time adequate prophetic testimony.

THE TWO OLIVE TREES.

"These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth" (ver. 4).

No doubt there is in this a reference to Zechariah iv. This latter passage looks on prophetically to the time of Israel's full blessing in their own land under Messiah's presence and government. Revelation xi. is a partial

pledge and foretaste of what will be enjoyed in its fulness during the Millennium.

It will be noticed that in Zechariah iv. 2 there is but one candlestick with seven lamps, signifying the perfect display of the Spirit's power in Christ. There are two olive trees, symbolical of Christ's twofold office in that day as Priest and King. At the time that Zechariah prophesied, Joshua and Zerubbabel were the two anointed ones who typically represented Christ in His millennial glory, the one as Priest (Joshua), the other as King (Zerubbabel). Likewise the two witnesses in Rev. xi. are a testimony in the midst of apostasy that all rule belongs to God—the earth is His, He is THE GOD OF THE EARTH. When Christ takes His power and reigns during the thousand years, this will all be seen in its perfect order, beauty and power.

GOD'S FINAL TESTIMONY.

Verses 5 and 6 describe the character of the testimony of these two witnesses. As we have already seen it will be *prophetic*. It will be God's last word of testimony to an apostate world. Christ will not yet have made good His power on earth. Though He will have come for His bride, the Church, and will have taken her to the Father's house, He will not yet have returned to take His earthly Kingdom. But these two witnesses keep on day after day asserting His rights, and announcing the fact that He is coming to rule and put down all rebellion. This draws down upon them the bitter hatred of the world, at that time fully under Antichrist's power.

'And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed'

"These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will" (verses 5, 6).

It will be a dangerous thing to interfere with these witnesses. They will possess extraordinary God-given power in judgment. Not only fire from their mouths, but power like Moses to turn the waters into blood and to smite with plagues, and like Elijah to shut up heaven from rain. There is no limit to this power; they can smite the earth with plagues *as often as they will*; but

this power will be exercised only in time of need, and that to maintain their testimony during the time appointed by God. There will be nothing vindictive about it, for it is borne in sorrow and sackcloth.

A FINISHED TESTIMONY.

At length their testimony, though rejected, will be finished.

“And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them” (ver. 7).

We must not suppose from this that the Beast only comes up from the pit at the moment that their testimony will be finished. We doubt not that the Beast had already been exercising his power for seven years, the full seventieth week of Daniel ix. It seems clear that only the last half of this week is reckoned in the Book of Revelation; and during this last half week, as we have seen, the two witnesses are prophesying continuously day by day.

But their testimony will be rendered in Jerusalem whereas the seat of the Beast is at Rome, the city of seven hills (*cf.* Rev. xvii.). The Beast is not Antichrist, though these two men will be in close league at this time. Antichrist will be at Jerusalem reigning as the false king of the apostate nation; the Beast will be at Rome, as chief of the revived Roman Empire. But tidings of the persistent prophetic witness to the coming King, accompanied by the miraculous powers of the world to come, at length so infuriate the Beast that he launches all his hell-born hatred against Christ at these His two witnesses. God's time has come, their testimony is complete, they are slain.

“And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their (R.V.) Lord was crucified” (ver. 8).

This clearly shows that Jerusalem is the scene of the conflict—a very Sodom for its corruptions and moral wickedness, and an Egypt for its oppression of God's little remnant.

But, oh, these will be awful times! Jerusalem will then be the great metropolis and meeting-place for the great and wealthy of all nations. Even to-day, where are the greatest hatred of Christ and scorn of His people to be

found? Is it not amongst those whose lives of sin and shame are sternly rebuked by the Word of God? Add wealth and luxury to all this corruption, and no words can describe the venomous hate that fills the breast at everything that would bring God and His claims before the mind.

Such people to-day scorn and scoff at all religion. If they do not scoff they ignore it all, and so contrive to live their lives with no sound of the "hereafter" to trouble them.

But it will not be so in Jerusalem at that day.

ADVENT TESTIMONY WILL NOT CEASE WITH THE REMOVAL OF THE CHURCH.

It will be heralded by a different band of witnesses—Jewish, not Christian. It will have a different character—not the coming of the Bridegroom for His bride, but the coming of the King to deliver His people, Israel, from their great tribulation under Antichrist—not the coming into the air *for* His saints (1 Thess. iv.), but the coming to the Mount of Olives *with* His saints (Zech. xiv.).

The witnesses day by day will assert God's claims, and announce the coming King.

Is it any wonder that they will be hated? What a relief when they are actually slain! One special class are full of delight.

"And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put into graves.

"And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth" (verses 9, 10).

Notice the difference between verses 9 and 10. "They that dwell upon the earth" are a class all by themselves; they are often mentioned in the Revelation, and we believe represent highly favoured Christendom that during this day of grace keeps persistently rejecting all God's offers of heaven. They *choose* the earth, and are therefore "earth *dwellers*," not merely inhabitants of the earth. *They* had been specially tormented by the witness of these two prophets.

Can we not imagine that the removal of the Church, after the first panic is over, will be a relief to worldly

minded Christendom. Quickly falling under Antichrist's influence, they will settle down again to enjoy the intoxicating pleasures of sin. An immense impetus will at this time be given to commerce. Babylon the Great, with all her dazzling religious splendour, will make the earth-dwellers drunken from her golden cup filled with idolatry and corruption.

As there has been in ages past, so will there be during the brief period between the rapture and the return of Christ in judgment, only in far greater degree—the combination of religion and moral corruption called by the Spirit of holiness, “the depths of Satan.” When, lo! once again the witness goes forth.

CHRIST IS COMING !

Coming, not this time to take the saints to heaven, but to take His great power and to reign. The earth-dwellers had thought that with the departure of the Church all such unwelcome sound had died away. What torment to their guilty consciences will result from this faithful testimony, and that, too, from the city where “our Lord was crucified!”

But when the tidings are flashed over Europe that these two witnesses are no more, that at length their lips are sealed in death, that their dead bodies are even lying unburied in the streets of Jerusalem, what unholy rejoicings! What hellish delight! what congratulatory sending of gifts one to another! But the triumph is shortlived.

“And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them.

“And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them” (verses 11, 12).

GOD'S CHARIOT OF GLORY.

What dismay will fill the breasts of those who witness this special act of God's power in public acknowledgment of His faithful witnesses? It is not exactly resurrection of the dead, nor is it the changing of the living, as at the coming of the Lord (1 Thess. iv.). Spirit of life from God enters into them, and they stand upon their feet there in the very place where they had been slain, and before the eyes of the very men who had rejoiced at their death.

We are not told that the witnesses uttered one word. Their days of sackcloth prophesying were over. No voice of sorrowful testimony is now heard on earth, but a great voice from heaven,

“COME UP. HITHER,”

and two living men ascend to heaven in the cloud, God's chariot of glory.

“And their enemies beheld them.” No merry-making now! no mocking at the messengers of God! This was too manifestly the hand of God's power, too evidently a forerunner of greater woe.

“And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of names (R.V.) of men, seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted and gave glory to the God of heaven” (ver. 13).

But fear is not conversion; an earthquake will produce the one, but only submission to the testimony of God's Word will produce the other. This testimony has been rejected. God's claim to the *earth* had been refused. It was now too late to own Him as the God of *heaven*. True repentance and conversion are evidenced by submission to and reception of God's testimony of the special time. Jerusalem, recently visited by an earthquake more severe than any known since its destruction under Titus in A.D. 70, will be the scene of the awe-inspiring occurrences described in this chapter. This does not mean that there will not be at the same time circumstances of as great terror taking place in other parts of the earth. Later on in this book we shall see that such is the case, but here the great city is Jerusalem. A tenth part of it lies in ruins, and seven thousand whose very names are known to God are slain.

The rest are affrighted, as well they may be, and in order to save themselves, still unrepentant and ignorant of God's Word, endeavour to claim a relationship in which He no longer stood to this poor world. The God of *heaven* had ere this withdrawn from all such links with the earth.

THE SECOND WOE IS PAST: AND BEHOLD,
THE THIRD WOE COMETH QUICKLY.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE THIRD WOE.

Revelation xi. 15-18.

The *first* woe (Rev. ix. 1-11) has been called SATAN'S woe, for the prominent feature in all the horrors then enacted will be the pit of the abyss.

The *second* woe has been designated MAN'S woe, for the Euphratean horsemen speak of the great inroad of the eastern hordes. This will come before us again in chapter xvi.

Other things had been described as happening during the period allotted to the second woe, events of a startling character. God's last testimony to a lost world just before the setting up of the kingdom has been given, but utterly rejected in the slaughter of His two witnesses.

The *third* woe alone remains, GOD'S woe, and what pen can give even the smallest conception of the terrors of this last one, the greatest of all? This at least is clear, that the time for mercy, a mercy long displayed but contemptuously despised, is now for ever at an end. The time for judgment has now fully arrived, and this no longer in an indirect and providential manner, such as by famines, wars, pestilences, and social upheavals; it is Christ Himself present to execute the righteous judgment of a holy God. And it is solemnly said—"the *third woe cometh quickly*."

Why quickly? Is there not even in this rapidity an act of God's mercy? For why prolong a hopeless condition? To-day God's long-suffering means salvation, but then this will no longer be the case, for as we have seen so great will be the blinding influence of Antichrist that men WILL NOT REPENT (chap. ix. 20, 21).

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever" (xi. 15).

The angel with uplifted right hand had declared that there should be no longer delay (x. 6), but that in the days of the voice of the seventh angel the mystery of God should be completed, and the glad tidings announced by His servants, the prophets, be fulfilled. This doubtless

refers to the setting up of Christ's millennial Kingdom of peace and righteousness.

SEVENTY-FIVE DAYS.

Can we form any idea of the length of time covered by the word "quickly?" The "quickly" of this present period of Christ's absence has already extended over nearly two thousand years. Will the "quickly" of Revelation xi. 14 extend over as long a while as that of Revelation xxii. 20?

We believe that seventy-five days, LITERAL DAYS, will be the utmost limit of the time between the passing of the second woe and the completion of the third; and as we now turn to the Scriptures of truth to see what light they throw upon this most solemn subject, may we remember that just as Christians now alive may be caught up *without dying* to meet the Lord in the air, so worldly men now alive may in their living bodies witness the terrors of these days of woe.

FORTY-TWO MONTHS.

In the early part of this chapter (verses 2 and 3) mention has been made of a period of time spoken of as lasting forty-two months, or 1260 days. That this must be taken literally we have no manner of doubt. The 1260 days and the forty-two months are the same period. We might well have wondered what they meant were it not for the book of Daniel, but Daniel and Revelation must be read together.

TIME, TIMES AND AN HALF.

In the book of Daniel no mention is made of the 1260 days, nor of the forty-two months. That is to say the period of time covered by these expressions is not spoken of in terms of days or months. What we do find in Daniel is "a time and times and the dividing of time" (Dan. vii. 25). This expression we also find in Revelation xii. 14, and by comparing with verse 6 of the same chapter, we learn that the 1260 days is that very period. Putting all the passages together we are forced to this conclusion that—

1260 days	} all mean the same period.
42 months	
3½ times	
Half a week	

IT IS THE LAST HALF OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK OF DANIEL IX. 27.

During these 1260 days the two witnesses will be sounding forth their solemn testimony of coming judgments, and with their death the second woe is past and the third comes quickly—and how quickly!

THE END OF THESE WONDERS.

Looking back for a moment to Daniel xii. a very similar scene presents itself to that of Revelation x. In answer to the question, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders? the man clothed in linen raises both hands to heaven, and, like the angel in Revelation x., swears by Him that liveth for ever and ever that it shall be for "a time, times and an half."

Here then we have the 1260 days. He who inspired Daniel of old likewise by the same Spirit inspired John to write of the same times and events five hundred years later in almost identical language. But there is this difference that whereas in Daniel's day "the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end" (Dan. xii. 9), to John it is said: Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for

THE TIME IS NEAR—Rev. xxii. 10.

Daniel prophesies with special reference to his own people the Jews, whereas the Christian prophet is announcing the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ for the enlightenment of saints of this Church period. Both together will no doubt be studied with prayerful and reverent earnestness by the Jewish remnant suffering under Antichrist during the Great Tribulation of the last half week. Then it will be that that which was sealed up in Daniel's day will be understood by "the wise" at the time of the end (see Daniel xii.).

1335 DAYS.

Now at the close of Daniel xii. the 1260 days are extended to 1290, and these again to 1335. These extra days we believe are literal days—they are the short period of the third woe, during which events of the most awful nature will take place in many parts of the earth—Jerusalem and Rome especially—resulting in the full

earthly blessing of Christ's kingdom when the mystery of God will be finished, according to the glad tidings long since declared to His servants the prophets (Rev. x. 7). These events are not described in Rev. xi. 15, they are alluded to in the after part of the book.

In the words of another—

“The third woe is the coming of the kingdom. Yes, that to greet which the earth breaks out in gladness, the morning without clouds, the day which has no night, and the fulfilment of the first promise which fell upon man's ears when he stood a naked sinner before God to hear his doom—the constant theme of prophecy now swelling into song, and now sighed out in prayer, that kingdom is yet, to the ‘dwellers upon earth,’ the last and deepest woe”—[Grant].

“And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God” (verse 16).

HEAVEN ASTIR.

The saints in heavenly glory are all astir. Whether it be the acknowledgment of the rights of God's throne in creation (Rev. iv. 10), or the rights of the Lamb in redemption (Rev. v. 8), or the rights of Christ in judgment (Rev. xi. 16), the twenty-four elders who always possess the spirit of intelligent adoration, fall down before God in worship.

To the “dwellers on earth” the setting up of the kingdom means woe, to the saints in glory, one more theme for worship. They say—

“We give Thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, because Thou hast taken to Thee Thy great power, and hast reigned” (verse 17—R.V.).

Notice the omission of the clause “who art to come,” for at this point the Lord had actually come and was present. The days of the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ were ended; it was now the kingdom in power.

Quoting again:—

“The rod of iron is now to smite, and omnipotence it is that wields it. . . . The earth that has rolled from its moral orbit is reclaimed; judgment has returned to righteousness; He Who has learned for Himself the path

of obedience in a suffering which was the fruit of tender interest in man, has now Himself the sceptre; nor is there any power that can take it out of His hand"—[Grant].

Verse 18 is the fulfilment of what had long centuries before been foretold in the second Psalm. There we get the counsels of God with reference to Messiah, the Christ. Though Peter is inspired to apply it to the rising of sinful man against Christ at the Cross, yet its full accomplishment will only be in the last days, days that in Revelation xi. are fully in view.

"And the nations were angry, and Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that Thou shouldest give reward unto Thy servants the prophets, and to Thy saints, and them that fear Thy Name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth" (verse 18).

ANGRY NATIONS.

The sounding of the seventh trumpet finds the nations seething in impotent rage against God and His Christ. How often during the Gospel period had sinners been warned to flee from the wrath to come; but all such warnings had been despised except by the few whose consciences had been awakened to a sense of sin, and who had found in Jesus their Deliverer from that coming wrath. While the day of grace lasted that wrath was "to come," but here it is seen as actually come—"the nations—were angry and Thy wrath is come."

At Pentecost the announcement went forth that Christ was exalted to God's right hand as Prince and Saviour to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins (Acts v. 31). This introduced the day of salvation, which has continued ever since. But apostasy is rapidly hurrying men on to a final rejection of all God's overtures of mercy, and Rev. xi. 18 shews us Christ exalted, not as Saviour but as Judge. In spite of all the anger of the nations He is set as King on God's holy hill of Zion to rule the nations with a rod of iron.

THE TIME OF THE DEAD.

How vain and useless, then, is all this anger! His wrath is come, and THE TIME OF THE DEAD.

Despisers of Christ and rejecters of the Gospel may to-day seek comfort from the vain hope that the dead will be annihilated, but not so. The "time of the dead" is at hand, and that time means judgment. We do well to consider these things seriously. Men despise God's mercy and patience, and think that any time will do to repent and believe the Gospel, but here we are solemnly warned that salvation's day will pass away, and the day of God's wrath and judgment take its place—wrath upon those living in rebellion, judgment on the dead.

No doubt "the time of the dead to be judged" includes the judgment of the Great White Throne at the end of the millennium, though here the prominent thought is that which takes place at the beginning of that period, namely, the giving of reward to His servants the prophets, to the saints, and to all who had died in the fear of God—not one will be forgotten from the smallest to the greatest. It is interesting and instructive to find the same expression used at the opening of the Kingdom with reference to the saints, that is used at the close with respect to the—wicked dead (Rev. xx.)—"small and great."

THE MYSTERY OF GOD FINISHED.

Here, then, is the winding up of God's ways with the earth, the mystery of God is finished.

Verse 18 takes us down to the close of the earthly kingdom. Verse 15 makes allusion to both the earthly and eternal kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ—"the kingdoms of this world are become those of our Lord and of His Christ," this is Christ's earthly millennial kingdom; and "He shall reign for ever and ever," this is the eternal kingdom, when as Son of man He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, and God in the plenitude of His being—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—shall be all in all (1 Cor. xv. 24-28).

In Revelation xii. to xix. the Spirit of God goes back to enlarge upon the description of the powers of evil at work on the earth, in Palestine, Europe, and the East, during the time immediately preceding the appearing of Christ in judgment.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A GREAT WONDER IN HEAVEN.

Revelation xi. 19—xii. 1-7.

"And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in the temple the ark of His testament (or, covenant): and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail" (Rev. xi. 19).

This verse links itself with what follows rather than with what precedes. In chapter xii. Israel comes prominently before us, and so the mention of the temple is readily understood. But it was seen opened in *heaven*; failure on man's part was complete, but the faithfulness of God endures in spite of all.

The temple had been destroyed, and all its goodly vessels scattered (see 2 Chron. xxxvi. 36); and though it had been rebuilt—first in Ezra's day, and then by Herod—yet the ark was no more heard of.

The ark was the symbol of Jehovah's presence in the midst of Israel; but it was gone from earth for ever, and no effort on their side could ever restore it. In the coming day of Israel's restoration to the land in full blessing—

"They shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more.

"At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem," etc. (Jer. iii. 16-19).

Some people wonder where the old ark that was in the temple can be. They ask, Will it ever be found? We do not believe it ever will. Certainly it will not be in the temple in which Antichrist will sit and make himself worshipped as God. The ark of old was the visible token of Jehovah's presence in the midst of His people; but all this was swept away when Nebuchadnezzar took the city and carried away the vessels of the house of God, "great and small" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 18). Then the Lo-Ammi condition of Israel began and has continued ever since.

But here (Rev. xi. 19) we learn that however man had failed, God's purpose concerning Israel remained unchangeably the same. On earth all had broken down; in heaven all was secure, and that security depended upon God's own character of holiness and truth; it was "the ark of HIS covenant." What a comfort is this to faith when all around seems crumbling to pieces! The terrors of God's throne of judgment may fall upon the earth, but the temple where He is adored contains the ark of His covenant with His people that nothing can touch, and seen not by the natural eye but by faith. The Jewish remnant of that day will prove the sustaining power of this great fact. But the carrying out of God's plans meets with the hostility of man, and hence it is accompanied by an outburst of divine judgment—"lightnings, voices, an earthquake, and great hail."

STRIKING SYMBOLS.

In these verses (xii. 1-7) three things stand prominently forward—the woman, the dragon, and the man-child.

"And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (verse 1).

We must not suppose that the woman was herself in heaven. The prophet had himself been caught up there in the Spirit (iv. 1) and now beholds these wonders of events soon to take place on earth in connection with the mind of heaven.

There should be no difficulty in deciding who is meant by the woman, for the child she brought forth was "to rule all nations with a rod of iron" (ver. 5). It is Israel and not the Church. The Church is the Bride, and will be manifested in glory as the Lamb's wife, but here the woman is seen as a mother. Isaiah ix. 6 and Romans ix. 5 come forcibly before our minds—

"For unto us (i.e., Israel) a child is born, unto us a son is given," etc.

"Of whom (i.e., Israel) as concerning the flesh Christ came."

We may also add Micah v. 2.—

"Bethlehem Ephrath . . . out of thee shall He come forth."

1. THE WOMAN CLOTHED WITH THE SUN.

The woman, Israel, is seen clothed with the sun. Though in herself nothing but weakness, she is seen according to God's own mind toward her. It is the purpose of God concerning her, the sun symbolizing supreme power and glory. And so it will be for Israel in that day when Christ, the Sun of righteousness, will arise and associate Israel with Himself in that work of judgment on the wicked and subsequent blessing for the millennial earth (Micah iv. 1-3).

The Church's connection with Christ is as the Bright and Morning Star; Israel has to do with Him as the Sun of righteousness.

But not only this, the moon is under her feet. The moon speaks of derived and reflected light—inferior, too, and subordinate to the sun. May we not see in this a symbolic fulfilment of such predictions as we get in Deut. xxviii.—

"The Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth. . . . And the Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath" (verses 1, 13).

The crown of twelve stars reminds us of the twelve tribes, which though scattered now through the government of God, will, in His faithfulness to His own promise, be seen filling their appointed places when Jerusalem will be builded as a city that is "compact together"—

"Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord" (Psalm cxxii. 4).

However, the next verse takes us back to the past, to the time of the birth of Christ.

"And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered" (verse 2).

A careful comparison of this verse with Isaiah lxvi. 5-10 and Micah iv. 10, v. 3 leaves little room for doubt that the time of Zion's travail is here in view. It seems impossible to confine Rev. xii. 2 to the birth of Christ historically. Old Testament prophecy seems to connect Zion's travail, specially with the period of Judah's great tribulation just before the full blessing of the kingdom.

But Rev. xii. passes over the whole period of the present dispensation and links together the time of Christ's birth with the time of Jacob's trouble. The death and resurrection of Christ, with all that these involve of blessing to the believer to-day, is not the subject. His birth and rapture are alone mentioned.

Some have seen in the rapture of the man-child an allusion to the rapture of the saints of this dispensation at the coming of the Lord. It is perfectly clear from Scripture that the saints of the Church period, along with those that died before Pentecost, will be "caught up" before Israel again becomes the object of God's dealings, but we question whether the words "caught up unto God, and to His throne" can be applied strictly to any but Christ Himself. Who but a divine person could sit upon the throne of God? We have not forgotten Rev. iii. 21, but there the distinction is drawn between Christ's own throne and that of the Father.

2. THE GREAT RED DRAGON.

"And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

"And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born" (xii. 3, 4).

Though the language is symbolic it is easy to interpret; verse 9 tells us that the dragon is that old serpent, the devil. But he is seen here in connection with the great empire of the last days, as we shall see later on. In Rev. xiii. 1 it is the Beast that is seen with seven heads and ten horns, and remembering the part that the Beast will play in the near future it is awful to think that the revived Roman Empire will be a sort of incarnation of Satan. It was the Roman Empire, under Herod, that sought to destroy Christ at His birth (Matt. ii.). It was Pilate, the Palestinian representative of that Roman Empire, who finally gave the word for His crucifixion (Luke xxiii. 24). But all the counsels of God were centred in Him.

3. THE MAN CHILD.

It would be impossible to read verse 5 without seeing that Christ is meant by the man-child—

“And she (i.e., Israel) brought forth a man-child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to His throne.”

Some have tried to prove that the man-child was a certain class of Apocalyptic saints. But we have only to read Psalm ii. to be assured that Christ is meant, for He it is that is to rule the nations with a rod of iron. True the overcomers in Thyatira (Rev. ii. 27) are promised association with Christ in the day of His power and rule.

But these overcomers under the Thyatira state of the professing church include the whole company that God can recognize as His own—“the rest in Thyatira.”

Another has written:—

“The child is Christ; it is also the Church as associated with Christ. Like Christ she is to govern the nations (see Psalm ii. and Rev. ii. 26, 27). The Church receives this power from her being associated with Christ; she will be also active in heaven. When the Lord Jesus comes again, it will be in the display of His authority, for He shall rule all nations with a rod of iron, and the Church will be with Him. It is what Christ will do when He has taken possession of His inheritance, and He will make the Church to be partaker with Him in the possession of the world.

“The man-child, then, is Christ, the head of the church which is His body. The man complete is Christ and the Church and they are hidden in God (‘caught up’). The woman, on the contrary, who was clothed with the sun, remains on the earth, and is in the desert. As soon as we are obliged to seek the woman on earth, it can be none else but the Jews.”

This first section of our chapter (xii. 1-5) is a most remarkable passage and calls for a careful and prayerful study. The life, death and resurrection of our Lord are not here in question, for the object that the Holy Spirit has before Him is not to establish the great doctrines of grace that are elsewhere abundantly taught in Holy Scripture. Nothing is here stated as to Christ but His birth at Bethlehem (Matt. ii.) and His ascension from the Mount of Olives (Acts i.).

In like manner the whole period of the Church on earth is passed over in silence. The main subject of the chapter is "The woman," and this, we have suggested, is the Jewish people—

"And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and three score days" (verse 6).

4. THE DRAGON AND THE WOMAN.

"The mighty drama of the last half week is given in a general sketch" (Hartridge), and the parties are described that will be involved in the happenings of the great Tribulation which many believe the spiritual and political movements of our time are rapidly developing.

The Devil is the great opposer of all God's purposes, and he is here seen to be the deadly foe of Israel in the last days. He will stir up all the nations of the earth against her, but "they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they His counsel."

"And thou, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion ;

THE KINGDOM SHALL COME TO THE
DAUGHTER OF JERUSALEM"

(Micah iv. 8).

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL AND THE DRAGON.

Revelation xii. 7-17.

The fifth verse of our chapter (xii. 5) has carried us on to the time of Christ's present exaltation to glory. The Church period, as we have seen, is passed over in silence, and verse 6 links on the time of Israel's tribulation in the future with Herod's persecution in the past. It is most important to see this parenthesis of nearly 2,000 years.

It was Israel that was prominent in the days when Christ was born at Bethlehem. It is Israel that will be in full view when Christ comes to this earth the second time. It was the Roman Empire that was in power when He came the first time; it will be the same Empire resuscitated that will be wielding Satanic power when He comes the second time. Again, we say, the present Church period is passed over in silence, for in truth at this stage of the Apocalypse the Church is already in heavenly glory.

"And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and three score days" (verse 6).

This carries us down to the last half of Daniel's seventieth week.

WAR IN HEAVEN.

The first six verses give us a continuous history from the birth of Christ right down to the end of the seventy weeks of Daniel ix. A new division in the chapter commences with verse 7, but must not be taken as following on verse 6 in consecutive order.

"And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels.

"And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven" (verses 7, 8).

Before the great tribulation on earth for the Jewish people there is war in heaven. Satan, who could not keep the heavenly saints out of heaven, no, not one of

them, will strive by all his power to prevent the accomplishment of God's purpose with regard to His earthly people.

In the words of another—"The grand main-spring is here dealt with, the hidden secret of all evil, the opposing force to all God's purposes of blessing to man, His creature, formed for the purpose of being the exponent of Himself and His ways in heaven and earth. This opposing force has occupied the heavenly places. Thus Isaiah xxiv. 21—

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones on high."

"This is here seen as accomplished (Rev. xii. 7, 8). And as Daniel xii. 1 puts it:—

"At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince that standeth for the children of thy people" (the Jews).

"It takes place at this point; there is war in heaven" [Hartridge].

It may to some seem strange to hear that Satan is in heaven. But let us not forget that even now the Christian has to wrestle—not with flesh and blood (as was the case with Israel in Canaan), but—with wicked spirits in the heavenlies. Yet this "war in heaven" is quite distinct from the conflict which every Christian is called to wage with the rulers of the darkness of this age (Eph. vi.).

This is the time when Michael, the Archangel, will stand up for the children of Daniel's people, the Jews (Dan. xii. 1). The time has now been reached when the great deceiver of the world, and the accuser of the saints must be cast out. It had been foreseen by the Lord Himself when the seventy with joy described the results of their mission and the subjection of Satan to the claims of Christ. This was a foretaste of the powers of the world to come.

"And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke x. 18).

The initiative seems to be taken by Michael, and on behalf, not of Christians, but of the Jewish people. In Daniel x. 21, we read of "Michael your prince," and here in Rev. xii. we are in the midst of the circumstances of the great time of trouble for the Jews.

REJOICING IN HEAVEN.

The conflict is sharp, strong, and decisive. The Dragon and his angels fight, but to no purpose.

"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (verse 9).

A loud voice is now heard calling attention, as elsewhere in this book, to a great public fact. The announcement is made of the setting up of the kingdom in power and glory (*cf.* Rev. xi. 15). Satan is cast out of heaven, never more to be found there again, and this immense change calls forth the praise and gladness of the inhabitants of heaven.

"And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night" (verse 10).

It is interesting and important to enquire who are those that speak these words. That they are a company of saints in heaven is clear. They speak out of the consciousness of their own relationship to God—for they say "our God." They have brethren still upon the earth—"our brethren." Some have thought they are the saints caught up at the coming of the Lord, the saints of this period, glorified and associated with Christ as part of the man-child. Personally we do not think so. The Church is not seen in Rev. xii. as a distinct and separate company. So far as the saints of the rapture period are concerned the utmost that can be said is that they are in some mystical way to be seen in the catching up of the man-child in verse 5.

MARTYRS UNDER THE FIFTH SEAL.

But in verse 10 we find a well-defined group of saints in heaven owning a special link with other saints on earth. Are they not the martyrs under the fifth seal? In Rev. vi. 11 these are distinctly told to wait until "their brethren" should be killed as they were. We suggest that these are at any rate some of those very "brethren."

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (verse 11).

Clearly these brethren on earth are a band of martyrs for they loved not their lives unto the death. This forms a powerful link with the martyrs already glorified, mentioned in the earlier part of this book. Their victory was a moral one; though slain, they were victorious.

"Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (verse 12).

There is joy in heaven, though terrible things are about to take place on earth. When Christ came the first time there was the blessed proclamation of peace on earth and goodwill to men. That having been refused and Christ rejected, now the moment has come for the once despised King to reign. This moment is foreseen in Luke xix. 38—

"Blessed is the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven and glory in the highest."

The Devil cast out of heaven, and all his angels—oh, what a deliverance for heaven! The Devil came down to earth—what unspeakable woe to earth!

It is an awful thing to contemplate the contrast between the presence of the Holy Spirit of God in this day of grace, and the presence actually on earth of the Devil in that day. The Holy Spirit fills hearts with love, joy, and peace; but the Wicked One urges on to hatred, murder, and violence of every kind; and this Evil One it is that for the short period of the last half-week will stir up every kind of iniquity amongst even the men of this world—filled with wrath because he knows his time is short.

Satan, though not omniscient as God is, has more knowledge than mere man. Satan KNOWS the Bible more than most men. Satan BELIEVES the Bible more than most men. He quoted it at the temptation of our Lord in the wilderness. Satan has been attacking the book of Daniel so violently—and never more than in our time—using professed Christian ministers as his tool. We verily believe he understands the "seventy weeks" prophecy of Daniel ix. far better than the bulk of those who occupy the pulpits of the land. When he is cast out of heaven "he KNOWETH that he hath but a short time"—only 1260 days!

We have already referred to that remarkable verse in Isaiah xxiv.—

“It shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth.”

Both parts of this verse will be seen fulfilled when the great drama of Rev. xii. is accomplished. The Devil who stirred up Herod and Pontius Pilate, and the Jews and Gentiles to try and slay the Babe of Bethlehem that was born King of the Jews, will at the end incite the Beast and ten kings and all their armies against the Lamb, but all in vain, for—

THE LORD OF HOSTS SHALL REIGN IN MOUNT ZION, AND IN JERUSALEM, AND BEFORE HIS ANCIENTS GLORIOUSLY.

“The inhabitants of the earth”—Who are they? We suggest it is a symbolic way of describing those that occupy the more ordered scene of earthly government, the nations and peoples more immediately in connection with Europe and Palestine. “The inhabitants of the sea”—are these not the general mass of nations outside the limits of settled and established principles of government? All, both earth and sea, will be thrown into violent consternation and affliction—Devil-driven.

FLIGHT INTO THE WILDERNESS.

And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man-child” (verse 13).

Remembering that the heavenly saints composing the Church are at this time in glory, and that the woman represents Israel, we here see that the Jewish people will become the object of Satan's malicious and violent hatred. This is the time of the beginning of the tribulation, which will terminate by the appearing in glory of the Son of man.

At this point it is most interesting to compare chapters xi. and xii. In chap. xi. 3 we have seen that at this very time, namely, the 1260 days there will be a persecuted and martyred remnant inside Jerusalem itself. But in chap. xii. it is the Jewish remnant outside the city that is in view. We read of this Judean remnant in Matt.

xxiv. 15-21. This remnant it is that flees into the wilderness; and this is not an accidental flight, but one ordered by the Lord Himself, and to a place prepared of God.

"When ye therefore shall see the Abomination of Desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whoso readeth let him understand):

"Then let them which be in Judea (note, it does not say **Jerusalem**) flee unto the mountains," etc.

God intervenes on behalf of this remnant, and grants them a rapid escape.

A PLACE PREPARED OF GOD.

"And to the woman were given two wings of a (or, the) great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent" (verse 14).

Here we have symbolic language denoting a powerful and rapid means of escape, like to that which God wrought at an earlier stage of their history when on eagles' wings He brought them to Himself (Exod. xix. 4). We must not imagine that this in any way whatever refers to the Roman eagles, as some would have us believe!

An interesting question here arises, What is this place prepared of God in the wilderness where the woman will be fed for 1260 days? The Jews had already returned in unbelief to Palestine, even as they are doing in large numbers to-day. But at this particular moment the persecutions of Antichrist and the Beast become so intense that those who are able to do so, flee from the fields of Judea, and apparently find a refuge in deserts around Jerusalem to the north, east, and south.

In Psalm cxx., which describes the distress of the Jewish remnant in those last days, we find some dwelling in Mesech (Russia) to the north, and Kedar to the south of Palestine, whilst in Isaiah xvi. 4, God calls upon Moab to the east, to be a covert to His "outcasts" from the face of the spoiler.

It has been thought by some that the wonderful rock-hewn city of Petra in the land of Moab may yield protection of absolute security from attack to large numbers. At any rate there stand these massive halls and chambers hewn out of the solid mountain of rock, *at present tenantless*. Be this as it may God has prepared a place

of hiding from the fury of the dragon, where not only security but sustenance will be provided (verses 6, 14).

"And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood" (verse 15).

This flood is symbolical of masses of people (Isa. lix. 19)—"when the enemy shall come in like a flood." But in some way known to God the effort of the adversary will be frustrated.

PALESTINE, ROME AND RUSSIA.

We know from prophecy that the Assyrian will invade Palestine at the end crisis (see Isa. viii. 7-22). The Assyrian stands for the vast hordes of the north and east of Palestine under the leadership of Russia (see Ezek. xxxviii., xxxix.) and this is likened to the waters of a river, strong and many. The Serpent will launch at the Jewish people this flood, but—

"The earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth" (verse 16).

The earth we have suggested, in prophetic language stands for those countries where order and civilization have for long existed. Palestine is fast becoming the centre of all international interest. Italy is rapidly extending her influence towards the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, and covets control of Palestine. It seems probable that should any direct move be made on the part of Russia or the Far East to take possession of Palestine and all the wealth of the world which will soon be concentrated there (see Isaiah lx. 9, 17), the Roman Empire will step in. It will be a conflict between "the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea." We are not here told how it will be done, whether by military protection or diplomacy. God will have His own way of doing it, even as He will have His own time for doing it. It may be by the conflict in which the king of the north will be engaged in the neighbourhood of Palestine at this very time (see Daniel xi. 40-45).

"And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (verse 17).

Foiled and baffled in his effort to destroy the Jewish people, which the devil has all down the ages been seeking to do, he alters his method of attack. It is not now against a whole nation, using other nations as his tool, but against the remnant of her seed that he wages a war of persecution.

God will not leave Himself entirely without witness. Both in Jerusalem, exposed to the full brunt of the persecution, and in the wilderness hidden away by God Himself, He will have faithful, obedient, godly witnesses. Many of these will join the martyr band.

"Heaven receives them in delight (ver. 12) as those of whom the earth was not worthy,—a gleanings after harvest, as it were, of wheat for God's granary,—a last sheaf of the resurrection of the saints, which the twentieth chapter (Rev. xx. 4) sees added to the sitters upon the thrones, among 'the blessed and holy' now complete. How well are they cared for who might seem left unsheltered to Satan's enmity! They have lost the earthly blessing, they have gained the heavenly; their light has been quenched for a time, to shine in a higher sphere for ever. Blessed be God!" [Grant].

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BEAST OUT OF THE SEA.

Revelation xiii. 1-10.

It may be well to recapitulate the closing verses of chapter xii.

First, Satan as the Dragon full of wrath is cast into the earth; he turns his whole energy against the Jewish people in bitter persecution (verse 13).

Then God intervenes on their behalf, giving them power to flee. In this present dispensation we are bidden to resist the devil and he will flee, but at that time the Jews are to flee and not resist; they will be nourished during the terrible tribulation of the three years and a half in a prepared place, hidden away from the serpent (verse 14).

The serpent will then seek to overwhelm the woman by means of armies inspired by him to carry out his will. This will doubtless be the commencing activity of the great north-eastern confederacy of nations, Gog and Magog (see Ezek. xxxviii., xxxix., and Isa. viii. 7, 8). For this the Far East is rapidly preparing by all that is now taking place in China, Japan, India and Persia, to say nothing of Russia. Soon the East will be one vast armed camp (verse 15).

But God will not allow His people, the Jews, to be destroyed—"the earth helped the woman"—the earth, that formed system of things found in Europe in contrast to the Oriental people. It will not be to the interest of the European nations to allow the Jews to be crushed, diplomacy will intervene on their behalf. It does not appear to be an armed conflict between the nations; it is not yet the Armageddon that even men of the world are now dreading. The West will not allow the East to seize Palestine and exterminate the Jewish people. From a human point of view it will be a triumph of diplomacy, but in reality, God's providential ordering of the affairs of His earthly people (verse 16).

The dragon's wrath still remains, though it be impotent in the direction of national extinction; his persecution assumes an individual character, the whole brunt of his wrath falls now on the faithful remnant who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus (verse 17).

THE GENTILE SCENE.

The working of Satan is now turned in another direction, and in chapter xiii. we are introduced to the Gentile scene, as in chapter xii. we have had the Jewish.

"And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the names of blasphemy" (xiii. 1).

In the opening verses of this chapter we are given a description of the great Gentile power of the last days. As in Daniel vii., so here, the beast rises out of the sea. The sea in prophetic and symbolic language denotes the state of confusion and unrest of nations—everything in tumultuous upheaval. Is not this what characterises the world at large to-day? Socially, politically, and religiously all is in confusion.

"The tumult of those that rise up against Thee increaseth continually" (Psalm lxxiv. 23).

This state of tumultuous unrest is bound to increase, and out of it will suddenly emerge a great ruling power, a Gentile power, the last of the four described in Daniel vii., viz., the Roman Empire. This is what the prophetic Scriptures have foretold both in Daniel and Revelation more than 2,000 years ago, and as we write that very Empire is rapidly rising out of its age-long condition of disintegration.

It would be almost impossible for anyone to read Daniel vii. along with Revelation xiii. and xvii. without being convinced that the Old and New Testament prophets are describing the same world-power.

The remarkable thing about this last great Gentile power called "the beast" is that whereas it existed as a united Empire in the past, it has ceased thus to exist, but is destined to be revived. Revelation xvii. 8 makes this perfectly clear—"the beast that was, and is not, and yet shall be." This we may leave until we reach that portion of the prophecy, but it is necessary to remember this threefold description in order to have a clear understanding of our chapter.

We are now living in the non-existent stage of the fourth beast. That is to say, the Roman Empire is broken up, and no longer exists as a united world power.

The different countries that now constitute a large part of Europe are but the broken fragments, but without the cohesion that existed in the days of the Cæsars. But the time is drawing near when in the ways of God it will revive. Indeed we may say that this revival is rapidly taking shape.

The present state of unrest and confusion in the world, so aptly described by the tumultuous movement of the sea, will be the *providential* origin of this great European combine of nations. In chapter xi. 7, as also in chapter xvii. 8, we are told what will be the *moral* origin of this last political power. It will ascend out of the bottomless pit, an awful thing to contemplate. And so it is that it is described as having seven heads and ten horns, thus being closely identified with the dragon of chapter xii. 3.

The same figure is used here as in Daniel to describe the empire—it is a wild beast still. Unlike man, a beast has no knowledge of God, and owns no allegiance to Him. This essentially characterises the state of the heathen (Psalm lxxix. 6), but here at the close not only ignorance of God, but the ignorance of apostasy marks the beast—"upon his heads names of blasphemy."

THE HEADS AND HORNS.

The heads seem to imply varying forms of government that have held sway amongst the Roman people, and that are known to all readers of Roman history—triumvirs, decemvirs, consuls, dictators, etc.; whereas the horns represent separate kingdoms which will go to form the revived empire, united together as we know they will be under one imperial head.

The empire itself is called the beast, though sometimes this term is limited to the great head of the empire—see, *e.g.*, Rev. xvii. 16, where we should read: "the ten horns which thou sawest AND the beast," not "upon." In our chapter the horns are seen to be crowned, for it is the last phase of the empire that is in view; ancient Rome never had this division into ten kingdoms.

Names of blasphemy are seen on the heads of the beast, not on its horns; by this we are given to understand the terrible character of this power. It will be the government of the day, and God will be entirely ignored, not only ignored but blasphemed—not necessarily by each of

the ten kings, for there may still be some remains of outward acknowledgment of God by individual kings, but the empire as a whole in the ordering of its affairs will leave God out entirely. Do we not see the world preparing for this to-day? Though Russia will be entirely outside the geographical limits of the Roman Empire, yet we have an object lesson there of the unspeakable horrors of a nation given over to atheism, blasphemy and the caricaturing of religion. Even in our own beloved land is not all respect for God, His word, His day, and His claims rapidly disappearing? What will it be when "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" the true Christians are removed?

"And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were like unto the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion; and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority" (verse 2).

In some remarkable manner this great instrument of Satan's energy will combine the various qualities of all the Gentile powers of the past (compare Daniel vii.). They are enumerated here in their reverse order, for we are looking *back* from the point reached in our chapter. The rapidity in conquest of the leopard (Greece), the voracity of the bear (Persia), and the overpowering strength of the lion (Babylon) will be united in this last phase of the Roman Empire, which will come upon the scene *before* the dragon is cast out of heaven.

A COVENANT WITH HELL.

We see from Daniel ix. 27, that the chief of this empire will confirm a covenant with the Jews for the last week, whereas it is during the last half of this week that the dragon, cast out of heaven, persecutes the woman. The dragon will find in the beast a ready instrument for his wicked devices. This coincides with Daniel ix. 27, where we read that the Roman prince will break off his covenant with the Jews in the midst of the week and force idolatry upon them. This covenant is called a covenant with **death** and an agreement with hell (Isa. xxviii. 15).

"And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast" (verse 3).

Even to-day, and that amongst so-called Christian ministers, the fact of Christ's literal and bodily resurrection is called in question. At that day Satan's imitation of the resurrection will fill the world with wonder. In the early days of Christianity there were found some who explained away the fact of resurrection, saying that it had passed already (1 Cor. xv.), and so undermining the whole Gospel in its foundation, and in its effect for the believer. In days that are coming Satan will travesty the resurrection, and make capital out of it for his own ends, and for the entangling of the world in his toils.

"And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with Him?" (verse 4).

It would seem that the power of the revived empire may have even begun to wane. It will have received a deadly wound in one of its heads, probably the imperial form of government, when the dragon cast down to earth from heaven, and filled with hell-born hate to God and His Christ, will instil a fresh energy of evil into the beast, heal its deadly wound, and inspire it with "great authority." Awful thought! Diabolically inspired, wondered after for a little while by the world, worshipped in common with the dragon, it will go into perdition, as we shall see later on (Rev. xix.). For this brief period of 1,260 days its power will be irresistible; apostate Christendom will be found worshipping Satan and his human tool.

"And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power ('authority') was given unto him to continue forty and two months.

"And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven" (verses 5 and 6).

THE LITTLE HORN.

The beast from the sea of Rev. xiii. and the little horn of Daniel vii. 8, 20, are evidently the same individual. Proof of this is seen in the mouth of boastful arrogance, and the period of their brief career, viz., forty-two months in the one case (Rev. xiii. 5), and time, times and the dividing of time" (Dan. vii. 25), in the other. He will rail against God, that is the very thing that Bolsheviks are doing in Russia, caricaturing the most

sacred themes in connection with our Lord Jesus Christ. Them that "dwell in heaven," that is the saints already caught up and glorified, will draw forth his special venom; but he will not be able to touch them, they are beyond his reach, so that he will turn his diabolical rage in another direction.

"And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them" (verse 7).

Who are these saints? They are the godly Jewish remnant that has been frequently alluded to in these *Studies*. Large numbers of them will be put to death.

"And power (authority) was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations" (verse 7).

This shows how wide extended will be the sway of this power, centralised at Rome. But it will only be of brief duration.

"And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb slain" (verse 8).

We notice again the expression "all that dwell upon the earth," which occurs frequently in this book. The "earth dwellers" are not merely the inhabitants of the earth as such, but a special class morally distinguished from the "kindreds and tongues and nations." It aptly describes those who have had the advantage of Christian testimony but have refused it. Heaven had been offered to them, but they chose the earth. This is a very solemn consideration as we behold multitudes around us in all ranks of life who have no room in their hearts for Christ.

IF ANY MAN HAVE AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR.

To recapitulate, the little horn of Daniel vii. is the head with its deadly wound healed of Revelation xiii. In the arrogance of its Satanic power it pours forth blasphemies against everything that has to do with God and with heaven (verse 6), it will make war successfully with the Jewish saints alive upon the earth, it will wield for a time world-wide power (verse 7); apostate Christendom, at last relieved from all restraint of educational belief in Christ, will fling itself into the arms of this atheistical leader.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHO IS LIKE UNTO THE BEAST?

Revelation xiii. 4.

It is remarkable that God gave during the last century such clear light upon prophecy. Much that is now taking place in the world and in the professing Church, and which is filling the minds of serious people with surprise and dismay, was then most distinctly pointed out from the Word of God.

We find ourselves now in the midst of the alarmingly rapid development of those very things which formed the subject matter of much that these servants of the Lord were led of Him to minister from His Word. When first they wrote, Christians were but ill prepared to receive their testimony. It was the common belief that the world was getting better and that the Millennium would soon be set up. To be told that the Lord was coming to remove the Church in the twinkling of an eye met with little favour.

But to-day the state of the world is such that men are startled into inquiring what can be the end of these things.

So far as the world is concerned things will go from bad to worse. We say this not as a mere matter of opinion, but as the distinct forecast given to us by God Himself in the Scriptures of truth. Of course, if men refuse the light of God's inspired Word, darkness must be their portion. But whether or no, the spectre of Communism and anarchy is already filling the world with terror. Everything is in a state of unrest. Satan is breathing out sedition and strife amongst the nations of the earth.

In Daniel vii. 2 the four winds of heaven are seen striving upon the great sea. What a vivid picture rises to the mind of a seething, boiling mass of waters. Out of that the great Gentile powers arose. Revelation xiii. 1 presents the same figure, and foretells the uprising in its resuscitated form of the last imperial power.

Principles are at work to-day which are leading to world-wide catastrophe. Mass movements are seen in

Russia and China, and spreading to other lands, with which governments are unable to cope. The world cannot continue its existence under such conditions. All seem powerless to remedy it. The conflict between capital and labour, and the embitterment of feeling between the masses and the classes is paralysing industry and bringing many countries within measurable distance of civil war. Government is impotent.

WANTED A MAN !

This is a constant cry. Who knows but what this man is even now maturing his plans for the settlement of all this strife? The eyes of Europe are now upon Italy, and in Mussolini we see a man who has risen almost miraculously out of obscurity into irresistible power. His word is law ! His power in Italy is supreme ! To all outward appearance he seems a sort of proto-type of the superman people so often speak of. We are far from suggesting that Mussolini himself is the beast out of the sea, but we have little doubt that he is rapidly preparing the way for the man who will fulfil in every detail what is given in Rev. xiii. 1-8.

The beast will rise up out of the sea (Rev. xiii. 1). The " sea " may have a double significance. Some see in this expression a hint of locality, the Mediterranean sea. Italy is now claiming supreme acknowledgment in the Mediterranean. But as we have suggested the " sea " may be interpreted symbolically. Above the wild noise of human anarchy the lion's roar will soon make Europe tremble (verse 2). Satan will invest him with his authority, and will revive the mighty Roman Empire, causing once again an Emperor to take supreme command. The earth long dismayed and perplexed by the tyranny of anarchy will hail the advent of this great Emperor as a Deliverer. Men will be filled with admiration of his astuteness, and having given God up, will themselves be given up to the worship of Satan and his human tool.

WHO IS LIKE UNTO THE BEAST ?

This is the cry that will resound throughout Europe. Who is able to make war with him? will be the challenge laid down before the colossal powers of Russia, Germany, and the Far Eastern nations.

To some it may seem strange to write with such precision, but the prophetic Scriptures leave no room to doubt that the revived Roman Empire, composed of the ten kingdoms of Western Europe, will at the close find itself arrayed against the massed forces of Gog and Magog.

The Gog of Ezekiel (Ezek. xxxviii. 7) would seem to be the Assyrian of Isaiah, and the Asshur of Psalm lxxxiii. 8 and Numb. xxiv. 24. This latter passage foretold three thousand five hundred years ago the final conflict between the West and the East.

"And ships shall come from the coast of Chittim (i.e., the West), and shall afflict Asshur (i.e., the East), and shall afflict Eber (i.e., Israel), and he (i.e., Chittim) also shall perish for ever."

In these few lines the Spirit of God has compressed the stupendous events, so far as earthly matters are concerned, of the closing drama of the nations, viz., the conquest of the East by the West and the destruction of this latter in its turn.

From Scripture it is clear that the Roman Empire is to revive (Rev. xvii. 8, R.V.). In its closing phase it will consist of ten kings under one imperial head. By comparing Daniel vii. with Rev. xiii., we cannot but be impressed with the identity of the little horn of the former chapter with the beast of the latter. In each case arrogant and blasphemous words are spoken against God and against the heavenly saints, or, "saints of the high places." By this latter term we understand the saints caught up at the coming of the Lord. The beast cannot touch them though he hates them, any more than he can touch the Most High Himself. It is but impotent rage.

But there are those on earth, as we have seen, whom he can touch, against these he makes war, and is allowed of God to overcome them. These are Jewish saints, who at that time will be carrying out the ceremonial law of God. But "the little horn" will change all this and prevent the Jewish remnant from performing their religious observances. These Jewish "laws and times" are given into his hands for "a time, times and the dividing of time." This expression means the well-known period of three and a half years, or the last half of the seventieth week.

THE LITTLE HORN.

The "prince that shall come" (Dan. ix. 26) is the same as "the little horn" of Dan. vii. We must not confound this with the little horn of Daniel viii., who is a different personage altogether. The former will confirm a covenant with the Jews for one week or seven years, but in the midst of the week he breaks off this covenant, and causes their sacrifice and oblation to cease. This is evidently the same thing as the changing of the times and laws mentioned in Dan. vii. 25—the Jewish ceremonial times and laws.

It is remarkable to see the move that is now being made by Italy towards imperialism. The daily press is constantly speaking of this, little knowing, of course, the *rôle* that Italy is to play in the future of this world's politics. Prophetic students have long been aware of this, and are now watching with the deepest interest, mingled with awe, the developments of our times. May not the great movement now taking place in that land be preparatory to the accomplishment of this prophetic forecast?

When the ten kingdoms have been brought into being and are territorially recognised, another kingdom shall arise amongst them; so we learn from Daniel vii. 8. Small in its beginning this little horn will rapidly extend its power until three of the ten kingdoms are subdued. It thus becomes an eighth.

THE BEAST AND THE TEN KINGS.

It may seem difficult to disentangle and apportion the places that will be separately filled by all these powers of the last crisis, and we must remember that Scripture is not given to us as a geometrical puzzle but for moral and spiritual application. Nevertheless it seems clear that at the time of the end after the ten kings are definitely established—it may be by means of treaties and such an organisation as the League of Nations—that then an unknown man will arise amongst them who by means of extraordinary intellectual insight ("the eyes of a man"), coupled with violent pretensions to power ("whose look was more stout than his fellows") will seize the reins of earthly rule and mature his plans of world dominion regardless of man or God. Later on we shall see that he

will hurl himself against the Lord coming out of heaven followed by His armies (read Daniel vii., Rev. xiii., xvii., xix.).

All that dwell upon the earth will worship him; these are not merely the inhabitants of the earth, but a moral class, those that have made the earth their dwelling place by positive and deliberate choice—in other words, apostate Christendom. These are distinguished from the kingdoms, tongues and nations of the previous verse (see also xi. 9, 10, and xiv. 6). Their names may have been written in books of church membership, but they have not been written from the foundation of the world in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain. That this is the order of the words of verse 8 may be inferred by comparing chap. xvii. 8.

We then are given a principle applicable at all times, and especially at the time when these things will be taking place (verses 7, 10). The saints are not called to resist but to suffer, sustained by their faith in Jesus (chap. xiv. 12). These will be the saints of the Apocalyptic period, many of whom will be martyred and others who will flee to hiding places in the mountains and in the wilderness.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BEAST OUT OF THE EARTH.

Revelation xiii. 11-18.

In taking up the pen to expound this portion of our chapter, we do so with feelings of awe, and would seek the help of God's Holy Spirit, for the time of the accomplishment of these solemn prophecies is near.

The first beast of this chapter is clearly the Roman Empire which is destined to revive, which is even now reviving before the eyes of an astonished world. When all Europe is seething with anarchy, and the waves of "the sea" of social unrest are lashing themselves into fury, when the whole fabric of society is threatened with destruction, suddenly, out of this boiling sea of revolution and civil strife, a man will arise who will curb the passions of his fellows, control their unbridled wills, and combine them under his own Dragon-given power and authority. An empire of militarism it will be that will hold the rest of the world in check.

The unrest of the nations will subside to the wonder of the whole world, when, lo! out of this ordered state of the social system—an order, produced not by the fear of God, but by the working of Satan—another power will arise.

This second beast arises out of *the earth*.

The tumultuous sea has been stilled, and an ordered condition of things has followed. This is what many understand by the word "earth" in contrast to the "sea" in prophetic language. This, however, does not exhaust the meaning of the contrast. In Daniel vii. the four beasts are said to arise out of the sea (verse 3); this would seem to be their *providential* origin. But in verse 17 they arise out of the *earth*, and this suggests their moral origin. Further, the earth in Scripture is put in contrast to *heaven* (see 1 Cor. xv. 47). The true Christ of God came down from heaven, but the Antichrist will be essentially "of the earth, earthy."

The Jews will by that time be back in Palestine, they are even now returning in ever increasing numbers. It is in Palestine that this power will arise and will very soon put itself in connection with the Roman chief. All this was familiar to prophetic students long years ago. But now we are witnessing many things in process of fulfilment that were clearly foreseen in the pages of God's Word.

FALSE CHRISTS.

We know from our Lord's own lips that at the time of the end many shall arise claiming to be Christ (Matt. xxiv. 23; Mark xiii. 21; Luke xxi. 8). The Jewish remnant of that day are specially set on their guard against all such pretenders. But amongst these many false Christs, one in particular will rise to eminence, and will monopolize the field. Symbolically he is here represented as a lamb with two horns; he is externally an imitation of God's Lamb, but the inward power by which he speaks is that of Satan; he will be as full of Satan as the Lord Jesus was full of the Holy Ghost (Luke iv. 1).

Just as Jesus of Nazareth was anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power, and went about doing good, so this Antichrist—for we have no doubt that this second beast is the Antichrist—will exercise all the power of the first beast, which as we have seen is a power given by Satan.

“And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.

“And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed” (verses 11, 12).

We see this terrible character further on in the book (Rev. xix.), under the title of “the false prophet.” We have elsewhere sought to show the identity of this beast with the Antichrist (see *The Man of Sin; Who Will He Be?*), and would now only suggest to the student of Revelation that “the king” of Daniel xi. 36, the “Man of sin” of 2 Thess. ii. 4, the “Antichrist” of 1 John ii. 22; the second “beast” of Rev. xiii. 14, and the “False Prophet” of Rev. xix. 20, are all one and the same

person looked at from different points of view and in connection with distinct spheres of influence—

“And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men; “And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live” (verses 13, 14).

These miracles will be wrought by Satanic power, as 2 Thess. ii. 9 informs us. Christendom, that has already given up all real faith in the Christ of God, and in the Word of God, will then itself be by God given up to strong delusion, and to believe a lie. The long-suffering of God being exhausted, its day of doom will have arrived.

“That they all might be judged (R.V.) who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess. ii. 12).

How terrible it is to think that these times are so quickly approaching, and that the people now alive, may witness these awful things! The startling discoveries of science will all be turned to account by the Antichrist for his own ends. We have long since ceased to wonder at the telegraph, the telephone, and the wireless. We can talk from London to New York and Melbourne. Television now makes it possible for one in London to talk to his friend in New York, *and to see his face*. It is not difficult then to believe that the Antichrist will be able to—

“Give life (or, breath) unto 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” (verse 15).

From this it is clear that there will be saints on earth at that time who will remain faithful to God and His Christ. They will not be “Christians” in the sense that we attach to that word in this dispensation; that is to say, they will not form part of the “Church” which will already have been caught up at the coming of the Lord. But for all that they will be believers in Christ, converted Jews no doubt.

MARTYRS UNDER ANTICHRIST.

We have already seen from Rev. vi. 9-11 that there will be a company of martyrs after the church period is over during the time immediately following the rapture, and most probably during the first half of Daniel's seventieth week. This company of martyrs is noticed in Rev. xx. 4 as taking part in the first resurrection. But in that verse there is a second company of martyrs, viz., "those which had not worshipped the beast," etc., and these are slain during the last half of the week under the persecutions of the Antichrist and the Roman beast. It is important to notice carefully that Antichrist and the chief of the Roman Empire are two separate individuals, though, as our chapter proves, they are so closely linked that their actions are almost identical. The second company of martyrs (Rev. xx. 4) are those spoken of in Revelation xiii. 15.

"And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads:

"And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (verses 16, 17).

Boycotting and trade unionism, socialism, and syndicalism are rapidly preparing the way for the tyranny of Antichrist's rule. The democratic reforms of recent years have prepared a machinery that will soon be turned with irresistible tyranny upon the people themselves.

What awful times they will be, and yet how blessed to think that some will then be found keeping "the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ." Multitudes in the Middle Ages have gone to the stake rather than bow the knee before a "wafer God." The days of persecution are not over, for when Antichrist makes his appearance, whenever he holds sway in Palestine and Europe, but especially in Palestine, the blood of the martyrs will flow. We say "especially in Palestine," for it is there, we doubt not, that the image of the Beast will be placed.

Antichrist will set himself in the temple of God at Jerusalem to be worshipped as God (2 Thess. ii. 4), but besides that he will honour "a god whom his fathers

knew not" (Dan. xi. 38). This has been before us in our *Studies on the Book of Daniel*.

"Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man: and his number is six hundred three score and six" (verse 18).

Many have attempted to explain this symbolical number, but we believe the effort is futile. In "Daniel xi. and xii. which describes the same period of time, we find frequent mention of a band of faithful people who at the time of the end will "understand." To them it will be perfectly plain. God will, in some way known to Himself, make clear to them the number of that fearful name.

Christians now find their joy in everything connected with the Name of Jesus. Through His peerless name they are forgiven, they are saved, and accepted; to His name they gather, and in His name their prayers ascend to heaven, and are answered. In that day the name of the Beast will be a terror to humanity.

Alas! alas! ye Christless men and women of these highly favoured lands. To you the truth is now presented in all its sin-pardoning, soul-saving, and peace-giving power. All the blessings of the gospel, the unsearchable riches of Christ are now offered for present enjoyment as well as everlasting bliss; they are offered on the simplest of terms—"repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

Why not bow the knee to Jesus now and own Him Lord? then all those infinite blessings will be yours for time and eternity. If not—then, Antichrist, his Satanic miracles, his deceivableness of unrighteousness, his tyrannical persecutions—and, worse than all, strong delusion from God, a well-merited judgment, and eternal perdition.

Which shall it be? Decide it now, but do so at once, for in the twinkling of an eye

THE DOOR WILL BE SHUT.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE LAMB ON MOUNT ZION.

Revelation xiv. 1-5.

We now approach a profoundly interesting part of our study. One, too, as to which much diversity of opinion exists, and that amongst earnest prophetic students. We desire to write in all humility and with christian charity, and crave a sober and prayerful consideration on the part of any who may differ from our interpretation.

In chapters xii. and xiii. we have had a description of the powers and instruments of evil on the earth during the brief period of the Beast's activities—the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet, or Antichrist.

What a relief to find in chapter xiv. a history of the ways of God on the earth during that same period, and continuing right on to the end of His acts of judgment.

The view point of these verses is not "heaven" as in chapter xii. 1, nor is it that disturbed state of the nations as symbolized by the "sea" in chapter xiii. 1, nor is it the seat of the Beast, the seven-hilled city of Rome, as in chapter xvii. Here we are called to view the Lamb upon Mount Zion, and those specially connected with Him there.

"And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with Him an hundred and forty and four thousand, having His name, and His Father's name written in their foreheads" (verse 1, R.V.).

We believe that this is to be taken literally. It is Mount Zion at Jerusalem. No doubt in Hebrews xii. 22, a symbolic meaning is intended, for there Zion is put in contrast with Sinai—grace *versus* law—and that contrast is explained in the passage itself as the heavenly Jerusalem.

But it does not follow that wherever the Mount Zion is spoken of it must be understood to mean heaven. Mount Zion is on the earth—"the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion" (Psalm xlviii. 2). There is no spot on the earth so dear to the heart of God as Mount Zion—"the Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob" (Psalm lxxxvii. 2). The time is yet to come when "the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob" (Isaiah

lix. 20). It is this time, we believe, that is in view in Rev. xiv. 1. Only there it is viewed in anticipation for we do not yet see God's king set upon the throne in Sion (Ps. ii. 6), as He most certainly will be. He is now set at the right hand of God in heaven, but presently He will take His place of earthly royalty at Jerusalem and with Him will be associated a band of faithful followers who had not shrunk from confessing His name during the awful persecutions of the Beast.

These "first fruits" are not a special and select part of the Church, for, if the key of chapter i. 19 be the true one, the whole church as well as all saints before Pentecost, and those martyred after the rapture will have been translated to heaven. These are a Jewish remnant spared for special association with Christ during the Millennium.

The Church's portion is quite distinct; her calling is a heavenly one, whereas that of Israel is an earthly one. The glory of Christ is connected with both heaven and earth.

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

"Of whom every family (R.V.) in heaven and earth is named" (Eph. iii. 14, 15).

All things will be headed up in Christ, both those in heaven and those on earth (Eph. i. 10). Christ will be the Centre of the whole universe of God, but different circles of relationship will be gathered round Him, some on earth, others in heaven.

We must not confound the 144,000 of this chapter with those of chapter vii. In chapter vii. the sealing seems of a more general character—"the servants of our God." But in chapter xiv. they are not only "servants" but "sufferers"; they are closely associated with the suffering Lamb; the period of their suffering will be "the great tribulation," the time of the Beast's persecutions during the last half week.

We suggest that the 144,000 of Rev. xiv. are drawn specially from the land of Palestine. They are not "slain" but "saved" (see Matt. xxiv. 22). It would appear that they are the very ones described in our Lord's prophetic utterances on the Mount of Olives. The 144,000 of Rev. vii. might well be those more widely scattered—"removed into all the kingdoms of the earth" (Deut.

xxviii. 25). At any rate it is clear that whereas there will be "martyred" remnants during the last week of Daniel ix., there will also be spared or "saved" remnants kept alive throughout that terrible time.

When Christ was here on earth He suffered at the hands of Israel for owning God as His Father. This the Jews would not tolerate, for it was, as they said, "making Himself equal with God" (John v. 18, x. 33).

Christendom is to-day denying the deity of Christ but during the awful three years and a half that is coming the Jewish remnant will make an open confession of this very thing, they will have His and His Father's name upon their very foreheads. They will suffer for this, their witness, and will be in special association "with Him" on Mount Sion. He had suffered unto death; they are brought up, as it were, to its very gates, but are not slain; they thus are not included in the glorified company of martyrs in heaven, but they are very closely linked with them, and are so morally near to them that they, and they only, can learn the song that is sung before the throne. This is intensely interesting.

"And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps" (verse 2, R.V.).

Heaven celebrates these events in majestic tones; from thence proceed voices of glorious power and joyful praise.

"And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth" (verse 3).

The harpers are in heaven, the sealed company are on Mount Sion; but the 144,000 are the only ones on earth who can learn that heavenly song. It is not exactly the new song of Revelation v. 9—they sung *as it were* a new song. In Rev. v. 9, the living creatures join with the elders in singing the new song; but the harpers' song is not sung BY the living creatures and elders, but BEFORE them.

WHO THEN ARE THESE HARPERS.

Clearly they are not the saints of the Church period, for they sing *before* these latter. There is a difference also

in the song sung. In Rev. v. 9 there is a reason given for the song; which implies greater intimacy of worship, whereas here we have simply a public witness given to majestic might and joyful praise.

The beasts and elders are closely linked with the throne (Rev. iv. 4, v. 6), they are a heavenly company. The harpers are also in heaven, but not in such close relationship with the throne, they sing "*before* the throne, and *before* the four beasts, and the elders."

It would appear, then, that we have in the harpers and the 144,000 the heavenly and the earthly portion of those faithful saints during the period that follows the rapture of 1 Thess. iv. We have already referred to these under the seals and trumpets. The harpers are the *martyrèd* remnant of Israel, the 144,000 (both of Rev. vii. and xiv.) the *spared* remnant. They are the "elect," for whose sakes those awful days of tribulation will be shortened (Matt. xxiv. 15-24).

Morally so close to heaven that they can learn the song sung there by their brethren who had chosen death rather than bow the knee to the image of the Beast set up by Antichrist (chap. xiii. 15), they are redeemed or "purchased" from the earth, but still on the earth. They are the first-fruits of that fulness of blessing in which both Gentiles and Israel will share in the millennial earth.

"These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These are redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb" (verse 4).

The Millennium is not yet established, but it is fully in view. Evil has been developing with terrible rapidity. Satan has been sealing his followers in their foreheads, openly setting them apart for himself and to carry out his dark designs. But God has purposes which He has even now made known to us:—

"Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself:

"That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one (or, head up) all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (Eph. i. 9, 10).

That dispensation of the fulness of times is nearing; it is the Millennium. Christ will be the bond of union

between the earthly and the heavenly glories of that period. The rapture saints and the apocalyptic martyrs will be the heavenly portion, the palm-bearing multitude of Gentiles and the sealed of Israel (Rev. vii. and xiv.) will be the earthly portion—all linked together in Christ.

Just as Satan has sealed the followers of the Beast, so God has sealed the followers of the Lamb. They followed Him in suffering, they will follow Him in earthly royalty.

IDOLATRY AND CORRUPTION.

Verse 4 speaks of moral defilement. During the period in which these saints are witnessing for God, idolatry and corruption will be all around. There will be idolatry at Jerusalem under Antichrist, who will set up the image of the Beast to be worshipped, setting himself for this purpose in the temple of God (2 Thess. ii), then rebuilt. Besides this, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth (Rev. xvii.), will be in full power, controlling the Beast, and causing the blood of the martyrs of Jesus to flow, as she has ever done when possessing the power to do so. These followers of the Lamb will keep themselves from all idolatrous corruption of those days—"for they are virgins."

Not only this, but in their mouth was found no lie. The apostasy will at that time be in full development. Christendom will be given over by God to believe a lie. This will be God's judgment upon men, for their rejection of the truth (2 Thess. ii.), for it is a great mistake to imagine that things are going to improve in Christendom. But "in their mouth was found no lie." Great foundation doctrines which are to-day being abandoned by preachers and teachers in almost every section of the professing church, will presently find ardent and fearless advocates amongst Jewish witnesses.

The chief factor in unbelief to-day in large numbers of churches and theological colleges is the denial of the deity of Christ. These saints will confess it openly, they will have it stamped upon their foreheads.

But not only is their doctrine sound, their conduct will be blameless—they are "without fault." It is important to notice the omission of the clause "before the throne of God," for the point here is practical conduct before men, and not ground of acceptance with God.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL.

Revelation xiv.—*continued.*

We have seen in the opening verses of our chapter the results of the grace of God acting towards that part of Israel that will be found in Palestine during the final crisis of the times of the Gentiles. Antichrist and the Beast energized by Satan will be in deadly and united activity violently oppressing those who confess their faith in God and His Son.

There will be a special and peculiar work of His grace. Whilst many will be martyred a definite number will be delivered, who are called "first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb."

Christians *now* have "the first-fruits of the Spirit" (Rom. viii. 23). Our lot is cast in the days of the groans and travail of creation; but the bondage of corruption is to give place to "the liberty of the glory of the children of God."

In other words, when we reach the glory at the coming of the Lord, and enter upon the inheritance already purchased for us, then, for us, the groans of creation will cease. The Spirit of God Who now seals the believer is the earnest of that purchased possession (Eph. i. 14), and thus carrying on our thoughts to those glorious scenes becomes the "first-fruits" of them to our souls. *We* are not the first-fruits, but we *have* the first-fruits. But during the last "half week" these redeemed (or, purchased) companions of the once suffering Lamb are themselves the first-fruits of the harvest of millennial blessing.

But God's grace during those dark days is not confined in its activity to the Jews, it spreads abroad to every quarter of the earth.

THE THREE ANGELS.

The whole chapter now under review (Rev. xiv.) is divided into seven sections:—

1. The First-fruits—verses 1 to 5.
2. The Everlasting Gospel—verses 6, 7.
3. The Fall of Babylon—verse 8.
4. The Doom of the Worshippers of the Beast—verses 9 to 11.
5. The Blessed Dead—verses 12, 13.
6. The Harvest of the Earth—verses 15, 16.
7. The Vintage of the Earth—verses 18 to 20.

Section 2, 3 and 4 are grouped together as we gather from the mention of three angels that have to do with the events taking place at that time—the “third angel” of verse 9, supposes those of verses 6 and 8 to be the first and second. What the providential agents will be we cannot say, but the Spirit of God would lead us to note the difference between this angelic operation and the direct and visible execution of judgment by the Son of man Himself under section 6 and 7.

THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL.

“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

“Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (verses 6, 7).

This everlasting gospel is not the same as the gospel that has been preached since Pentecost. The gospel of the grace of God by which the Church is called out from the world announces that “now is the day of SALVATION”; it assures the believer that eternal life is his present portion, and that he shall not come into judgment (John v. 24). But the everlasting gospel announces that the hour of JUDGMENT is come.

So long as the present dispensation continues it is the day of *salvation*, but at the time of which our chapter speaks the testimony will not be salvation for heaven, but escape from *judgment* on earth. It is God’s appeal to the nations far and wide who are sunk in idolatry to

fear the one only God Who created all things, and to give glory to Him.

It is called the everlasting gospel for it is the old glad tidings sounding down from Eden, that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. It was proclaimed by prophets of old:—

"O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord. all the earth. Sing unto the Lord, bless His name; show forth His salvation from day to day.

"Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all people.

"For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised: He is to be feared above all gods.

"For all the gods of the nations are idols; but the Lord made the heavens . . .

"Say among the nations that the Lord reigneth. . . . He shall judge the people righteously . . . for He cometh, for He cometh to judge the earth: He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His truth" (Ps. xcvi.).

The everlasting gospel, we are told, will be preached to "them that dwell upon the earth," as well as to "every nation," *etc.*, a distinction which has already been pointed out, and which occurs repeatedly in this book. The whole world will have sunk into idolatry, even professed Christian lands, as well as Jews and heathen. From chap. xiii. we have learned that Antichrist causes the dwellers upon earth to worship the Beast, hence we can understand the universal call to acknowledge the true God as the one and only object of worship, unheeded though it will be by apostate Christendom, but largely accepted by the heathen nations.

The "gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. xxiv. 14), is no doubt very closely linked with this "everlasting gospel," and its results in blessing and judgment are seen in Matt. xxv. 31-46.

THE FALL OF BABYLON.

The second of the group of three angels here announces the fall of Babylon. The particulars of this judgment are described in chapters xvii. and xviii. It is no doubt introduced here that we may know the place this judgment occupies in the order of God's dealings during the brief interval that follows the close of this present dispensation.

"And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (verse 8).

Babylon in this book, as is well known, stands for ecclesiastical Rome, the Mother of Harlots, and abominations of the earth. She has always been idolatrous, and in the end, an end now nigh at hand, will be the source of corruption, intoxicating men with her golden cup of moral and spiritual fornication. Torment and sorrow (chap. xviii. 7) will be her well-merited portion in the hour of God's judgment.

THE CUP OF GOD'S INDIGNATION.

"And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the Beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,

"The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

"And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name" (verses 9-11).

The Beast continues for a short while after the fall of Babylon; this we see plainly from chapter xvii. 16, where we are told that the Beast destroys the Great Whore, which is Babylon. Indeed the worst state of the Beast in blasphemous rebellion against God will be after the destruction of Babylon.

How awful will the condition of men be at that time; they will have to choose between the violent rage of the atheistical Beast, and the wrath of God's indignation. The worshippers of the Beast are doomed to the same eternal torment as the Beast himself (compare Rev. xiv. 10, xix. 20, xx. 10).

True faith in those days will be proved by refusing to worship the Beast. Europe and Palestine will be the theatre of this fearful ordeal.

BLESSED ARE THE DEAD.

We now come to the fifth section of our chapter.

"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them" (verses 12, 13).

Unquestionably all who die in the Lord are blessed, at whatever period it may be. But we must put ourselves in thought into the circumstances of our chapter for a right understanding of this passage.

GOD OR THE DEVIL.

It will be the time of fearful crisis of the 42 months of the Beast's blasphemous rage against God and all who own Him. The Devil's effort will be to exterminate all recognition of God. Atheism will not at that time be a voluntary apostasy as it is to-day, but a compulsory tyranny. Nothing will deliver but the wearing of the badge imposed by the ruling authority of the government under the influence of the Beast whose seat of government will be at Rome, but whose sphere of influence will extend to Palestine, and especially to Jerusalem where the Anti-christ will reign as the accepted king of apostate Israel.

Men are getting accustomed now to badges. Unions are already paralysing private enterprise and exercise of individual conscience. This will grow to a terrible extent as we learn from Rev. xiii. 15-17. It will be the time spoken of by our Lord "as He sat upon the Mount of Olives."

"When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place . . .

"Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains . . .

"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

"And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved" (Matt. xxiv. 15-22).

All who refuse to worship the Beast and his image will be slain. It would seem that every true and faithful saint within the immediate jurisdiction of Antichrist will be slain; not only so, but they are slain just at the very time when the millennial kingdom of Christ is to be set up. How terrible, some might say, to be deprived just at the last moment of all this which others will be left to enjoy! But no, so far from being losers, they will be specially blessed.

The company here alluded to are the last who will be martyred for their faithful adherence to the Lord Jesus.

We find them mentioned in Revelation xx. 4, as forming part of the first resurrection. While other saints (such as the 144,000) will partake of the earthly blessing of the kingdom, these will share in the heavenly glory along with all the rapture saints. They are here seen about to rest from their labours during that terrible period, and about to enter into their bright reward without further delay.

The wicked dead at the CLOSE of the millennium will be JUDGED according to their works and CONDEMNED, these at the BEGINNING of that period will be REWARDED according to their works and GLORIFIED.

The voice that speaks from heaven (verse 13) we believe is the voice of the Lord Jesus Himself, and the Spirit adds His, "Yea."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE HARVEST AND THE VINTAGE.

Revelation xiv. 14-20.

The two last sections of our chapter describe scenes of earthly judgment—the harvest of the *earth*, and the vine of the *earth*.

We must not forget that the completed Church had been already removed from the earth, “caught up” to meet the Lord in the air. This had taken place before the last week of Daniel’s seventy weeks commenced to run. This last week will terminate by the appearing of Christ as Son of man in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

“And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle” (verse 14).

Wherever we read of the coming of Christ in the character of “the Son of man” it is always His coming in judgment, as may be seen from the study of such passages as Daniel vii. 9-14; Matthew xiii. 36-43, xxiv. 27-30; Luke xvii. 26-37.

“And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in Thy sickle and reap: for the time is come for Thee to reap: for the harvest of the earth is ripe” (verse 15).

These are solemn words when we reflect upon their awful reality and the imminence of their fulfilment. In this gospel dispensation we are accustomed to speak of a harvest of souls, meaning thereby their salvation. But the harvest here spoken of is the end of the age (see Matt. xiii. 39); the kingdom of the Son of man is just about to be set up, and all things that offend must be gathered out of it.

At the rapture (1 Thess. iv.) the saints will be gathered to meet the Lord in the air—the saints, that is, of all ages up to that point of time—and the wicked will be left behind for judgment. But at Christ’s appearing the

wicked who are alive will be taken away in judgment, and the righteous will be left to enter the millennial kingdom.

THE WHEAT AND TARES.

The tares so diligently sown by Satan, the great enemy of God and man, are springing up on all hands and spreading with startling rapidity. Large sections of professing Christians are being separated off from all outward association with sound and spiritually minded Christians; they are being drawn together by their common adherence to some form of heretical teaching. Is this not somewhat like the binding together of the tares for burning? The tares are not ordinary unregenerate or unconverted people, they are the positive work of Satan sown amongst the wheat. *No tare ever becomes wheat.*

"The harvest of the earth is ripe," these are solemn words. They imply that "the field," which is "the world" (Matt. xiii. 38) is ripening for judgment. This ripening will proceed with terrible rapidity after the removal of the Holy Spirit at the rapture.

"As therefore the tares are gathered and burnt in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this age (or, dispensation).

"The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity" (Matt. xiii. 40, 41).

This, we believe, is the harvest described in Rev. xiv. It is a *discriminating* harvest—a separating between tares and wheat. The tares are first dealt with; after that, the kingdom of the Son of man is set up here on earth. The wheat will be gathered into the barn, and the righteous will shine forth in the kingdom of their Father (see Matt. xiii. 30, 43). The millennial earth will be peopled by a multitude from all the nations that no man can number (Rev. vii. 9), and besides this "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. xi. 26). "The Lord of Hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem" (Isaiah xxiv. 23). This will be a glorious time of earthly peace and happiness.

"Many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

"And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah ii. 3, 4).

The harvest of the earth as we have said will be a judgment *separative* in character.

"As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

"For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

"And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away: so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

"Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left," etc. (Matt. xxiv. 36-41).

In this passage those who are taken, are taken for judgment, and those who are left, are left for blessing on the earth. It is a mistake to apply these words to the rapture when the saints will be taken to heaven, and the world left behind for judgment.

THE GREAT WINE-PRESS OF THE WRATH OF GOD.

It is most instructive to consider the types in the O.T. in connection with the last two sections of our chapter (Rev. xiv.). We can here but briefly allude to Leviticus xxiii. This chapter describes the full ceremonial year of God's dealings with His earthly people Israel, leading up to the feast of tabernacles which typifies the rest that remains for them when gathered to their own land in a coming day. "All that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths," we are told, and they will rejoice before the Lord their God in remembrance of His great deliverance wrought on their behalf. This feast, we are told, will take place "when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land," that is, after the harvest.

But in Deuteronomy xvi. 13 we are told that the feast of tabernacles was to be observed "after that thou hast gathered in thy corn *and thy wine.*" In other words, the earthly rest of millennial glory will take place after

the harvest and vintage judgments described in Revelation xiv.

"And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe" (verse 18).

The vine of the earth! What a solemn expression is this. Israel had been Jehovah's vine (Psalm lxxx. and Isaiah v.) but had yielded nothing but "sour grapes," though watched over and tended with the utmost care. Christ Himself then became the true vine, and His disciples were the branches. Abiding in Him, His people may bear fruit that glorifies His Father. But *the vine of the earth* speaks of judgment, and nothing but judgment. There is no separation of good from evil as in the harvest. The vintage is unmingled judgment of living people.

"And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God" (verse 19).

How little do people tremble to-day at the wrath of God. The pulpits of Christendom have quieted their minds as to all such unpleasant themes. But "the wrath to come" is a reality of which the Bible speaks in no uncertain terms, and the earth through sin and unbelief is ripening for the outpouring of this judgment.

This is a judgment that will be executed by Christ in person upon the ungodly and apostate people round about Jerusalem. Religious apostates from all parts of Christendom may be there too, though the gathering of the people seems to be of a military nature. Palestine and the surrounding districts of Syria and Arabia are to become the battlefield of the world (Psalms lxxix. and lxxxiii.).

"And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs" (verse 20).

This seems to be a similar judgment to that in Edom or, Arabia (Isaiah lxiii. 1-7) though nearer to the city of Jerusalem. The carnage will be terrible, even though

the language be taken in a figurative sense. All nations will be gathered round about Jerusalem to battle (Zech. xiv. ; Joel iii.). Suddenly the Lord Himself will appear and tread them down in His fury.

It will be seen that there are many different acts of judgment described in the Scripture. Through inattention to the Word, many Christians seem to think only of the judgment of the dead, but there is much more description in Scripture of the judgment of the living, and all judgment has been committed to the Son, that all men should honour Him (John v.). Christ is judge both of the quick and the dead. The judgment of the quick, that is the living, will take place at His appearing—that of the dead, not till a thousand years later, at the Great White Throne (Rev. xx.).

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES.

Revelation xv.

To a superficial reader there might seem to be a little confusion in the Book of Revelation, certain subjects, such as the fall of Babylon, being introduced at several points as though there were a lack of order in the narrative of events.

We can almost hear the higher critics triumphantly affirm their favourite theory of a plurality of writers, But there is no need to resort to such a speculative device either in the Old or New Testaments. As we have before pointed out, the Book of Revelation is made up of different sections which overlap one another, God having seen fit to enlarge where necessary, and to go back upon the general outline in order to amplify certain important and special details.

For instance, chapter xi. 18 carries us in a general way right down to the end of God's judicial dealings with the earth—His wrath come upon the living nations, His judgment of the dead, and the time of reward to His servants during the millennium.

Then in chapters xii., xiii., and xiv. we get a separate section, going back to give fuller details, especially connected with the Jewish people, and linked on the one hand with His grace to them through the victorious Christ, the Man-child caught up to God's throne, and on the other with Satan, the inveterate enemy of Christ and His people, whether earthly or heavenly.

But another section now lies before us, commencing with chapter xv.

“And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is finished (R.V.) the wrath of God” (verse 1).

We must not suppose that the seven vials follow in historical order after the close of chapter xiv. This

latter chapter seems to give us an orderly account of the different events:—

- (1) The sealing of the godly remnant of the Jews.
- (2) The everlasting gospel to the nations.
- (3) The fall of Babylon.
- (4) The judgment of the Beast-worshippers.
- (5) The special blessedness of the Lord's dead ones during that period, then
- (6) The harvest judgment, and finally
- (7) The vintage judgment.

It will be observed that in this most interesting outline the fall of Babylon comes third, with several other events quickly following. Whereas in the section now under discussion it comes last of the seven vials. It seems, therefore, natural to conclude that the vials may be emptied on a world increasing in its blasphemous rebellion against God *during the time* that a special activity of His grace is at work both amongst the Jews and the nations of the earth. It will be the period of the Great Tribulation, but in the midst of judgment God remembers mercy!

THE SEA OF GLASS.

"And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God" (verse 2).

The figure of the sea of glass is taken from the temple and not the tabernacle. In the molten sea (2 Chron. iv. 6) the priests who did the service of God in the temple had to wash. But here the sea is of glass, indicating that the need of purification is now over, and that a fixed and settled state of holiness has been reached. All that grieves has passed away, both in the shape of moral defilement and fiery persecution.

We must not think that those here seen standing on the sea of glass are the saints in glory in any general sense, for the saints of this dispensation are not included. They are a special class of martyrs already alluded to, who suffer under the Beast during that time of fiery tribulation which will take place during Daniel's last half week (see Rev. xiii. 15-17). They are here seen in glory, where

sin can never enter, where no need of purifying is ever known. They will not forget the fire through which they had to pass, and in which they glorified God. They are conscious of the victory won at a time of stress and strain, when the blasphemous instrument of the dragon was compelling world homage. They had overcome, as others had done (Rev. xii. 11), through the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony; and now their groans and sighs and tears were ended, and with the well strung "harps of God" they fill the heavenly courts with joy and praise.

"And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways Thou King of nations" (R.V. note—and cf. Jeremiah x. 7).

There is a great difference between the song the elders sang in Revelation v. and this that is sung by the overcomers on the sea of glass. These last had been martyred after the removal of the saints at the coming of the Lord for His own. Though personally faithful to a degree but little known in these days of lukewarmness, yet dispensationally they were on a lower level. There is a distinctly Jewish character in their song—the song of Moses.

But which song of Moses, we might enquire? One was sung at the beginning of their national history (Exod. xv.), celebrating redemption, and before their sad history of failure had been traced. The other (Deut. xxxii.) was at the close of the wilderness journey of stiff-necked and perverse rebellion. It was easy to sing when the Lord Himself was before the soul as the Omnipotent Redeemer of His people (Exod. xv.), but how difficult when in prophetic vision that same people is seen utterly corrupting themselves, doing evil in the sight of the Lord, and provoking Him to anger with the work of their hands.

"For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days. . . .

"And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song," *etc.* (Deut. xxxi. 29).

In the Apocalypse their "latter days" are in full view. And it was in the knowledge of all that should befall them then that Moses could sing his song!

Let Deuteronomy xxxii. be carefully read in the light of Revelation xv. Greatness is ascribed to God (Deut. xxxii. 3; Rev. xv. 3) all Whose ways are perfect, just, and true, even though His hand weighs heavily on His own people because of their sin. Then follows a long description of the froward conduct of His earthly people, and God's governmental chastisement—mischiefs heaped upon them, arrows spent upon them, burning heat and bitter destruction devouring them, and all this in their "latter days."

Is not this what they will be experiencing to the full during the awful days of the Beast and Antichrist? For though *personally* these saints are faithful and overcome, yet *nationally* the Jewish people will be suffering for their sins.

But the day of their enemies' calamity is at hand, and the things—things of judgment—that shall come upon them make haste (Deut. xxxii. 35). This verse describes what will befall the nations that at the end will be found fighting against God and His people. For the Lord at that time of their extremity will interpose on their behalf, when He sees that their power is gone. Then He will avenge the blood of His saints, and render vengeance to His adversaries (Deut. xxxii. 43). This verse has in view the final blessing of the living nations, along with His people, the Jews.

JEWISH OVERCOMERS.

This it is that seems to draw forth the praise of this glorified company of Jewish overcomers.

"Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy judgments are made manifest" (verse 4).

This we suggest connects Rev. xv. more with Deut. xxxii. than with Exod. xv. Not so much His redemption, but His judgments are in view. Yet not judgment unmingled with mercy, for the song looks on to the final blessing of the nations after judgment has done its work.

In this connection it is deeply interesting to note the word which the Holy Spirit has used to describe the character of the Lord—"Thou only art holy." It is not the usual one, ἅγιος which means holy in the sense of

separation from all that is evil. Here it is, *ῥατος*, and implies mercy as well as holiness. It is the same word as is used in Acts xiii. 34 (see *margin* of that passage). Though judgment is in view, and holiness in the sense of separation from all that is evil becomes God for ever, yet the result of judgment here is also in view, for "all nations shall come and worship before Thee."

Nevertheless, the judgment about to be described is awful, and no ark of the covenant is seen in the temple as in xi. 19. This latter verse introduces the section (chapters xii., xiii. and xiv.) which has to do with Israel in particular, and the ark is brought in as the pledge of God's faithfulness to His people, spite of all their failure. But here (chap. xv.) God's enemies, and that apostate enemies, are in view, and for them nothing but judgment is in store.

SMOKE FROM THE GLORY OF GOD.

The seven angels come forth from the temple where none could stand for intercession until the plagues were fulfilled, clothed in pure and white linen, and girded with golden girdles. Who these representatives of God's glorious power may be we cannot say. We are told that the saints shall judge the world (1 Cor. vi. 2), and the fine linen is "the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. xix. 8, R.V.), so that it seems to us that the saints will be instruments in the execution of judgment, though they are here seen in angelic form, because not yet manifested with Christ.

The vials are "full of the wrath of God." These are terrible words! Our blessed Lord drank the cup of God's wrath on Calvary for all His beloved people. He drained it so that not one drop might come to them. But for His enemies who here despised His grace, who have trodden under foot the Son of God, vengeance will be recompensed—Hebrews x.

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE VIALS OF THE WRATH OF GOD.

Revelation xvi.

Judgment is God's strange work, and we cannot but be struck with the slow and measured way in which it is resorted to. It is no hasty and impulsive action, such as is common amongst men. God has borne patiently with the ever increasing sin and corruption of the world, but now the moment has come for the complete and final execution of judgment upon the living; the judgment of the wicked dead will not take place till one thousand years afterwards.

"And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth" (verse 1).

A great voice sounds from the heavenly temple. The time at last had arrived, however long delayed, when God must vindicate His name and character. No intercession could now avail, for no intercessor could stand in that temple filled with God's glory. God had lingered in long-suffering mercy over the earth, sending message after message of mercy, but all in vain. Now He must pour forth the vials of His wrath; but it is the wrath OF GOD, not yet the wrath OF THE LAMB. Men to-day will not listen to anyone who speaks of the wrath of God against sin. They say it must be all love, love, love. Even Christians fear to sound the alarm of coming judgment, and soften down the terrors of eternal perdition.

THE FIRST VIAL.

But the same gospel that makes known God's salvation to all who believe, likewise warns of "the wrath of God from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. i. 18). In Revelation xvi. that wrath is about to be executed in its completeness.

"And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image" (verse 2).

There is a certain similarity between the vials and the trumpets with regard to the spheres of their operation, only in the case of the vials there is no restriction of their extent to the third part. If, as some are inclined to think, the expression "the third part" alludes specially to the Roman Empire in its Western portion, a wider sphere is here in view—the earth. That is, the whole prophetic earth would seem to be involved.

Territorially in the past the Roman Empire extended eastward over Syria and Asia Minor, also southward along the African coast and Egypt as well as Arabia. Any biblical atlas will shew this. But in its revived form, such as we find in the Apocalypse, it will be limited to Western Europe. Other prophetic actors in the closing part of the dispensation will occupy Syria and Egypt. But the sphere of influence of the Roman Empire, that is, the Beast, will extend beyond the strict limits of its own dominion. This must be borne in mind when we consider the expression "the earth" under the first vial.

As we have suggested above, "the earth" seems to indicate the whole prophetic sphere of action. This as we know has Palestine as its centre. The Beast will come into very close contact with Palestine at the time of the end.

Those who have ranged themselves under the Beast, and have worshipped his image will be stamped with a loathsome external sign of the corruptions within. It will be the government of God, according to the principle that whatsoever a man sows that he shall also reap. To have close dealing with God in prayer and the purifying power of His Word preserves from moral degradation, but the worship of the Beast and his image will have no such deterring influence, and men will plunge into excesses which will stamp their very bodies with disgusting sores. Russia, which to-day has banished God and legalised vice, is a loathsome object lesson with its teeming generation of degraded children sodden with disease. This is a sample of the judgment hinted at under the pouring out of the first vial.

"And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea" (verse 3).

Evidently the "sea" must here be taken symbolically, for how otherwise connect therewith the idea of "the blood of a *dead* man"? The sea represents the masses of peoples and nations with no settled form of government, but in constant commotion like the troubled sea. The "earth," as we have suggested, stands for such countries as are found in Western civilization where constitutional government exists. Therefore the second vial affects a wider circle than the first.

The plagues in Egypt were no doubt literal, and so far there is no difficulty in believing that God could repeat these things literally if He choose. But inasmuch as the Apocalypse is a book where figures abound, we may well ask what this second vial implies symbolically? Is it not the abandonment of profession, and complete spiritual death in apostasy? At any rate we know that such an apostasy is clearly foretold in the Scripture (2 Thess. ii.), and in Jude 12 we read of those who are "twice dead," that is, dead in sin spiritually, and dead by apostasy from God.

THE THIRD VIAL.

"And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood" (verse 4).

Here the judgment falls upon all the springs and streams of human pleasure and refreshment. It may be that all such sources of joy as should naturally be found in family relationships, and in social and national prosperity become baneful in their influence. Men to-day are giving up God by choice. Are they making themselves happier thereby? During the time of the pouring forth of the vials God Himself will give them up.

"And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because Thou hast judged thus."

"For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy" (verses 5, 6).

As we have before seen, these apocalyptic times will be times of persecution of God's witnesses and saints. God was just in rewarding the martyrs (Rev. xv. 2-5); He will be righteous also in meting out wrath upon their persecutors. As they had shed blood, even so should

they drink blood. This gives a terrible idea of what is before these anti-christian idolators; it is not here said that their blood is shed merely, but they drink it. It is God's retributive dealing with living men.

"And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgments" (verse 7).

This is not yet the judgment of Babylon, the great ecclesiastical persecutor of the saints of God; that will come in due course; these seem rather the political supporters of the Beast. The blood of their victims had been crying from the altar on which, so to speak, their lives had been offered, even as Abel's had been long before. If not a sparrow falls to the ground without God's notice, surely not a drop of the blood of His saints can be shed without His taking account thereof; the "angel of the waters" may stand for this tender care of God over His persecuted people. They are represented before God, as we may compare the "little ones" whose angels behold the face of their Father in heaven (Matt. xviii.); the angel and the altar both approve and justify God in His judgment of the heartless persecutors.

THE FOURTH VIAL.

"And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.

"And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which had power over these plagues; and they repented not to give Him glory" (verses 8, 9).

The sun, typically, stands for the supreme civil authority. The powers that be are ordained of God for the well-being of men, but oftentimes have been used for oppression and tyranny. Russia is a terrifying sample in these days of this very thing. Government will throughout all Europe become intensely and inquisitorially intolerant. Men are complaining of this even to-day; it is destined to become infinitely more so, as a judgment from God. It will be a power that no passive resistance will be able to cope with. Men will be goaded into blaspheming the name of God, but will not repent to give Him glory.

Men to-day are displacing God altogether from their lives, they are robbing Him of every honour and claim which is His due; they deny His very existence. But

at that day, while recognising the fact of His existence, they will utterly refuse His claims, and will with impotent rage blaspheme His Name.

THE FIFTH VIAL.

It is not yet the judgment upon the Beast himself; this will not take place until later at the glorious appearing of Christ as the Son of man (Rev. xix.); here it is his throne and kingdom which are thrown into confusion.

“And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain.

“And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds” (verses 10, 11).

The seat of the Beast—where is that? There can be but one answer—it will be Rome. The very land where we now see order restored, and Bolshevism repressed under the rule of Mussolini will yet become full of frightful darkness and foreboding fear. Mussolini is not the Beast but he rules to-day in the kingdom of the Beast, and may be the immediate precursor of the Beast. This we shall discuss later on.

When the Beast revives, his power and the glamour of his haughty pretensions will be short lived, and those who were ready with flattery and adulations to bow at his feet, will find his kingdom one of darkness instead of light, of confusion instead of prosperity, of pain instead of worldly pleasure. Why? Because it will be an atheistical government like Russia to-day—a land where no mention of God will be allowed except in blasphemy. They will gnaw their tongues in hopeless and helpless rage, and while forced to own that there is a God in heaven, will blaspheme Him as the source of all their trouble. Men to-day by their careless infidelity are sowing the wind, in that day they will reap the whirlwind of wretchedness and misery, but yet will not repent of their deeds.

CHAPTER. XXXIX.

THE GREAT RIVER EUPHRATES.

Revelation xvi. 12-21.

We are now approaching a deeply interesting portion of the drama of the last days. Hitherto in these vials, and the same may be said of the trumpets (Rev. viii., ix.), the Western enemies of God and His people have been specially in view. But a large part of the prophetic Word is occupied with the future of the Eastern nations (see Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah), and this it is that comes prominently before us in the sixth vial, as it did in the sixth trumpet.

THE SIXTH VIAL.

“And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of ('from'—R.V.) the east might be prepared” (verse 12).

The Euphrates holds an important place geographically in the Scriptures. It was one of the four heads into which was divided the river that flowed through Eden (Genesis ii. 14). So this affords all the indication that God thought necessary to give of the situation of what men call “the cradle of humanity.” Some there are who would place the garden anywhere but where Scripture clearly has stated it to have been. And yet we may understand the wisdom of God in not fixing for us the exact position of the garden, for prone to idolatry as man is, what pilgrimages of curiosity and superstition might not have been instituted for pecuniary purposes, even under the name of religion!

But the Euphrates had an importance with reference to the seed of Abraham (Genesis xv. 18). It was the boundary eastward of the promised land, showing how much vaster was the territory allotted to Israel than many suppose. Euphrates is often mentioned in Scripture, and frequently as “the great river.” Apart from the two places where it is found in the Apocalypse lessons of great spiritual importance may be learnt therefrom, but this must be left for the present.

The importance of the Euphrates in our chapter is this, that it is the boundary line between the East and the West. We are told that the Roman Empire never extended beyond the Euphrates, and verse 12 of our chapter shews that the great river is a barrier that stands in the way of the kings from the East. There is every indication to-day that these kings are beginning to look Westward. This has often been pointed out in the *Advent Witness*. This very day, as we write, the newspaper placards have in bold letters—

ASIA THREATENS EUROPE.

The Eastern nations are now awaking from the slumber of ages; the march towards Europe and Palestine of the kings of the East will soon begin; God in His providential dealings with the earth is preparing their way. Our passage tells us how this preparation will take place. The water of the great river Euphrates will be dried up.

Possibly this may figuratively be accomplished by the building of railways, projects which now fill the air for Persia, India, and China. But there is no necessity to take it figuratively. This very week the daily press has recorded that a river has disappeared—"dried up" is the very expression used—during the earthquakes that have been taking place in Mexico. Rationalists of course may see any amount of difficulty here as elsewhere in the Word of God. But like their Sadducean protagonists they "err, not knowing the Scripture, nor the power of God" (Matt. xxii. 27). To the simple believer neither a literal resurrection from the dead, nor a literal drying up of Euphrates presents any difficulty. Did not God roll back the waters of the Red Sea to cause His people to go dry shod out of Egypt? But the Egyptians essaying to do it were drowned. Whether a similar catastrophe may not overwhelm a multitude of these Eastern hordes we cannot say.

"And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

"For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty."

Without dogmatizing as to exact details in connection with the events of the final crisis immediately preceding Christ's Millennial reign of peace it would seem that the attack of Gog upon the land of Palestine (Ezekiel xxxviii., xxxix.) and this battle of the great day of God Almighty are closely related. Startling events are about to take place. Military leaders in all countries, East and West, are aware of it. In spite of Locarno, Geneva, Lausanne, and all such pacific attempts there never was a time when mightier preparations were made amongst the nations for their mutual extermination. What with poison gases and bombing raids upon defenceless cities truly we may say "the spirits of devils, working miracles" are abroad in all lands.

Though we may see all these things preparing, yet the removal of the Church must precede their full development. Some may hesitate in accepting this, but we believe that the rapture described in 1 Thess. iv. may at any moment take place. A Jewish testimony will then immediately commence. Interesting as the study might be we shall not attempt to fit in the different prophetic events recorded in the Scriptures. We take them in their broad outline. Palestine, or rather "the land of Israel," a very much wider and more extended area, will then become the prominent scene of earthly happenings.

"Behold it is come, and it is done, saith the Lord God; this is the day whereof I have spoken" (Ezek. xxxix. 8).

We reserve to another occasion a detailed exposition of these remarkable chapters in Ezekiel. The whole world is to be set ablaze by the power of Satan. At Pentecost the Spirit of God was working mightily for man's salvation through the preached Word, accompanied by signs and miracles of the Holy Ghost. That Spirit is still working, in spite of being grieved and quenched. But under the sixth vial, as we have seen, the devil will be at work stirring up strife and war fever such as has never been known before.

If men to-day spouting at street corners and in all places of public resort, inflaming men's passions one against the other, can sway the masses in seething sedition, what will it be when directly inspired by Satan? Not only the kings of the East, but the kings of the whole world will

be involved, thus emphasising the universal character of the upheaval.

"Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" (verse 15).

A solemn note of warning is this—a parenthesis in the vials, as has already been noted in the seals and trumpets. Saints there will be on the earth—Jewish saints, and also from amongst the Gentile nations (Rev. vii.)—saints whose one and only hope lies in the setting up of the Kingdom. Persecuted and oppressed beyond all power of words to describe, they will be looking for Christ's coming, not into the air to catch them away to heaven, but to the earth to judge their enemies, and to establish them in earthly blessing. For the saints of this dispensation Christ will come as the Bridegroom to introduce them to their celestial abode; for the world at that day He will come as a thief.

Not for a moment do we wish to minimize the importance of prayerful watchfulness on the part of God's people in this dispensation. Abundant exhortations do we find in the Word to this end. But *exegetically* both here and in Luke xxi. 34-36 the saints referred to are those who will be on the earth after the Church period is ended, and who will be passing through the tribulation crisis that will terminate by the appearing in the clouds of heaven of the Son of man. Conversions will be taking place at that time of terrible trial. Special light will also be given to faithful men at that time who will be able to instruct others with the consolation of God's holy Word (see Daniel xi. 33, etc.).

ARMAGEDDON.

"And he ('they'—R.V.) gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" (verse 16).

Textual critics, a very different race from "higher" critics, are not agreed whether "he" or "they" is the proper reading in this verse. If one may venture an opinion along exegetical lines may we suggest that "he" is the more likely? While it is true that the unclean Satanic spirits inflame the political leaders of that time and gather them together, yet all is really under God's

control and the time will then have come for the completion of God's purposes concerning Israel and the nations. If Armageddon and Ezekiel xxxviii. are identical, verse 16 of that chapter bears a striking analogy to verse 16 of Revelation xvi.—“it shall be *in the latter days*, and I WILL BRING THEE against My land.”

Everything helps to direct the thoughts to Palestine—the very expression “in the HEBREW tongue” suggests this. And where will Armageddon be fought? The word means “the hill of Megiddo,” and Megiddo is a well-known district in Palestine. It has been called “the classic battleground of Scripture” (G. A. Smith). It is a part of the mountain range of Mount Carmel. It has ever held an important part in the wars of Canaan in the past and is destined to do so in the future.

It is a most significant fact that Haifa, the neighbouring seaport is putting on a feverish activity, and a great harbour is being built, and railway communications are in process of rapid construction connecting the Mediterranean with Mesopotamia and the great oil fields. The eyes of all nations are now being directed to that very district where “the battle of that great day of God Almighty” will be fought.

THE SEVENTH VIAL.

The golden vials “full of the wrath of God” have one after another been poured forth upon the earth, and now we come to the last one—

“And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done” (verse 17).

This seems a judgment more penetrating than any that had preceded. At one time we took it symbolically, as a judgment that would fall, permeating everything that is essential to man's social well-being and which none could escape. But there may also be a literal fulfilment. The air is an element that is coming more and more into prominence.

Fallen man has been turning his faculties, God-given faculties, along lines of invention well-calculated to bring humanity to the verge of extinction. The recent air manœuvres over London have left the uncomfortable

feeling that had it been real war a vast population would have been destroyed by poison gas emanating from bombs dropped from the air.

A MIGHTY EARTHQUAKE.

"And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great" (verse 18).

These judgments complete the series prior to the advent of the Son of man in flaming fire, so that a voice out of heaven from the throne of God can cry—IT IS DONE.

All this is accompanied by the most awe-inspiring portents from heaven, and a widespread upheaving of all that seemed secure on earth.

"And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath" (verse 19).

These days are rapidly approaching, and when they come nothing that has ever been known in the shape of earthly disaster will in the smallest degree compare to them for horror. In the universal collapse of all civil political and religious order, three things seem specially prominent:—

1. "The great city," or Rome itself, the centre of the revived Roman Empire.
2. "The cities of the nations," that is, the centres of political activity outside the Roman Empire, for instance in the Far East.
3. "Great Babylon," Satan's imitation of the Bride of the Lamb, that vast system of religious worldliness, and intolerant and cruel persecution of God's people. For her the fierceness of God's wrath is reserved. Furthermore, the influence of these things spreads to the remotest parts, "every island" being affected, and the "mountains," too, which symbolize all that is great and powerful in the world.

"And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was very great" (verse 21).

The thoughts of men are being prepared for such things, they are even preparing them themselves. The bombs of destruction now being carried by fighting air planes reach, we are told, to a ton in weight. In the government of God men will be allowed to let loose these weapons of destruction upon one another, weapons which they themselves have called into being.

There will be a downpour of wrath from heaven upon men, which will only harden men's hearts, and lead them to blaspheme the God Whose very existence they profess to deny.

It is a solemn thing to see men in these days lightly and thoughtlessly throwing the Bible away, preferring Satan's delusions to the sober truth of God. In the days which are to follow the removal of the Church to heaven God will Himself send them strong delusion that they shall believe a lie (2 Thess. ii.).

CHAPTER XL.

MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT.

Revelation xvii.

We now approach a portion of the Book of Revelation as to which some difference of interpretation has taken place, and if our exposition is not in full harmony with that of others we humbly appeal for a patient perusal.

Babylon was first mentioned in this book in chapter xiv. 8, and no doubt in that chapter we are given the orderly sequence of the different events therein described.

Whatever Babylon may symbolize, it is unquestionably something particularly obnoxious to God. It is an evil system which obtains extraordinary power over all nations, intoxicating them with the wine of her idolatrous seductions. Under the seventh vial we see that she herself is made to drink of the cup of God's wrath.

But Babylon the Great has played so great a part in the history of the world, and is destined to become still more prominent in the future, that the Spirit of God now devotes two whole chapters to a fuller description of her, enlarging upon those traits of her moral character which rendered her so hateful in the eyes of God.

"And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:

"With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication" (verses 1, 2).

A STRIKING CONTRAST.

We cannot but be struck with the almost identical language of Revelation xxi. 9, nor can there be any doubt that the Spirit of God intends to put in striking contrast the "great whore" of Rev. xvii. 1, and the "bride, the Lamb's wife" of Rev. xxi. 9. If the latter be the Church, the former is no less clearly the false Church, the imitation of the true.

The true Church, as we see in the Corinthian assembly which was its local representative, is espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Cor. xi. 2), but Babylon is here represented in her moral character as a woman of evil life.

The points of contrast are most pronounced. The Church, or at any rate those who compose it, are viewed as seated "in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. ii. 6): the "great whore" sits by many waters, which in verse 15 of our chapter are explained to be "peoples, multitudes, and nations, and tongues"; this shows how widespread is her influence.

"Heavenly places" is a term descriptive of the true church. Its members may be poor so far as material possessions are concerned, but her blessings are spiritual and eternal. Her living union is with Christ in the heavenlies. There, too, is the sphere of her conflict while here on earth, wrestling against rulers of darkness, and wicked spirits. Babylon the great knows nothing of such association with a glorified Christ, nor such deadly conflict with Satanic powers of darkness.

THE BRIDE.

Some of our readers may have difficulty in understanding what really is meant by "the Bride." It has been suggested that it is a Jewish company, and not the Church at all. That there is such an illustration in the Old Testament is clear from the Song of Solomon. And Jehovah is also spoken of as the husband of Israel (Isaiah liv. 5; Jer. xxxi. 32). But the husband of a married woman is a different figure from a bridegroom of a bride, and the marriage of the Lamb has not yet taken place.

Others again have taken the Bride to represent a dispensational mixture of patriarchal, Jewish, and Christian saints who will be in a special place of blessing as the result of special fidelity on their part. But all this seems to be creating difficulties of interpretation where none really exist. Babylon and the Bride are in evident contrast. No one should have any difficulty in understanding what Babylon typifies. It is a religious ecclesiastical system which claims to be the only true Church. The Spirit of God, by using identical words, as we have seen in Rev. xvii. 1 and Rev. xxi. 9, lays stress on the contrasts between the pretension and the positive reality. The Bride is the figure of the true church which Christ has loved with an everlasting love, for which He gave Himself, from which He Himself removes every spot and

wrinkle by the water of His Word, and which He will present to Himself in heavenly glory.

SYMBOLIC BABYLON.

In passing we may observe that we see no connection between the Babylon of Revelation, confessedly a mystery (verse 5), and the Chaldean city of the Old Testament. This latter was built in the *plain* of Shinar, whereas the woman of our chapter sits on the seven *mountains* (verse 9). Is not this sufficient to suggest, if not to prove, that Rome is meant, the city of the seven hills? Another has said, "We are not at liberty to eliminate such a feature; it is written to be believed not ignored nor explained away" (Kelly).

We have already seen that Jerusalem is called Sodom (xi. 8) because of her moral resemblance to that wicked city of the plain. In like manner Babylon, so famed for her many idols (Jer. l. 38), is taken figuratively to represent that system of idolatry which claims to be the true Church. We merely point out the figurative use of the names of cities in this book, Sodom for Jerusalem, and Babylon for Rome. We do not now enter upon a discussion of the vexed question of the rebuilding of Babylon literally, being ourselves quite satisfied, from the frequent statements of Isaiah and Jeremiah, that the literal city of Babylon will never be inhabited again.

"So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness; and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns" (verse 3).

That Babylon in this chapter is a religious system, few who read these pages will have any doubt. It is a religious system admirably adapted to worldly and earth-loving people. The "kings of the earth," those in high social position, are attracted to her embrace, and "the inhabitants of the earth," truth-rejecting Christendom, are intoxicated with her worldly and ostentatious display.

BABYLON AND THE BEAST.

More than this, she sits upon the Beast. The Beast, we have before seen, is the revived Roman Empire that under Mussolini's astounding influence is to-day in rapid process of formation. Unlike the true Church, which is subject

to Christ, Babylon rules the world. In the day which is drawing near after the removal of the Church, the Beast or political power of Western Europe will be characterised by utter infidelity. This unbelief in God and His Word is making enormous strides in our times. Side by side with this political Rome, ecclesiastical Rome is on the increase, in spite of all that zealous Protestants attempt or declare. In the time that is here contemplated, the extraordinary spectacle is presented of an atheistical government under the complete control of an ecclesiastical system.

"And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication" (verse 4).

What an amazing and accurate description is this of Papal Rome prophetically given centuries before it existed. How admirably it depicts that vast system of religious corruption, superstition and idolatry which has continued right down the centuries. All that wealth, luxury, and splendour can do to attract the natural man is seen in her borders; riches are ceaselessly flowing into her coffers, and strange, indeed, is it to think that the wealthiest man in all the world, who lives amidst pomp and magnificence, and before whom crowned heads do obeisance, claims to be the successor of poor Peter, who declared, "Silver and gold have I none!"

A MYSTERY OF INIQUITY.

"And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (verse 5).

Well, indeed, is she spoken of as a mystery, but it is a mystery of iniquity, and not the mystery of the true Church's union with Christ. A claim to holiness she makes, and that in defiance of her history of moral corruption on the part of her Prelates and Clergy. In God's sight it is abomination, a system of superstitious idolatry, not only of the consecrated wafer, but of bones, and nail parings, and locks of hair and old clothes which she calls "holy relics."

"And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus; and when I saw her I wondered with great wonder" (verse 6).

By man this dark page of Rome's history is oftentimes forgotten. By some it is extenuated as though it belonged to bygone barbaric times, but that now such intolerance is at an end. Others again try to minimise the cruelties perpetrated under the Inquisition, asserting that Protestants have done the like! But this is flying in the face of history. Rome's own boast is that she is always the same ("*semper eadem*"), but only give her power and she would seek to exterminate those she calls heretics, but whom God calls "saints and martyrs of Jesus."

Here at the close of her history, and just before the hour of her judgment, the Spirit of God charges home upon her the guilt of her blood-stained annals. This is a mark that demands the careful consideration of those who are to-day clamouring for reunion with Rome. Babylon the Great is called the "Mother of harlots." She has her daughters. The influence of the Church of Rome is extending to-day beyond her own borders. The line of demarcation between Protestantism and Romanism is becoming blurred. In writing as we do, let us not be misunderstood. We are writing about ecclesiastical systems and not individual men and women. Truly converted people are to be found in the Church of Rome; large numbers of unconverted people are to be found as members of so-called Protestant bodies.

THE CRISES OF THE DAY.

There are three great movements on foot to-day—

1. True Christians in all the various branches of the professing church are finding ways and means of drawing together for worship, service, fellowship and edification apart from the denominational barriers that have for long kept them apart. Such gatherings as Keswick and the A.T.P.M. are largely conducive to this. God's people are gathering together on earth in anticipation of being "caught up together in the clouds."

As Dr. Meyer in later years so forcibly and beautifully expressed it, "the hurdles are being broken down at the foot of the mountain and the Lord's flock is feeding on the pastures higher up"—there shall be one FLOCK (not, "fold"), one "Shepherd" (John x. 16).

2. Protestantism is splitting in two. The churches are apostatising from the faith. Famous teachers in all

branches are leaders in the "down-grade" movement, and a race of admiring pupils are being drafted into the pulpits. We need not labour this painful feature of these "last days." It is patent to all.

3. A refuge from the blight of modernism is being sought by large numbers who dare not face eternity without something to believe in. How terrible to approach the end of life's voyage and to hear the breakers roar upon the shore of eternity, in a frail barque of rotten timbers—without rudder, without chart, without compass. Can no ground of certainty be found? If the Bible be unreliable—if Christ be no better than any other man, worse, for He claimed to be God, and yet . . . we will not defile our pages with what men dare to say of Him—if there be no propitiatory and substitutionary atonement, no actual resurrection of Him Who died in my stead, the Just for the unjust—then who can show me any good? who can give me anything on which to rest my soul for eternity?

Rome calmly replies—WE CAN. Is it any wonder that she is on the increase?

That there are true believers in the Church of Rome we do not for one moment question, even as there are true believers in every so-called Protestant church, in spite of abounding apostasy.

What is then going to happen? In the twinkling of an eye all true christians will be removed from earth to heaven, a lifeless profession will be spued out of Christ's mouth, and the whole ecclesiastical fabric left upon earth after the removal of the Church will merge into Babylon the Great.

BABYLON IN OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS.

It may be well to add that the Babylon of the Apocalypse must not be confounded with the Babylon of Isaiah and Jeremiah. The former, as we have seen, is a religious system now represented by the Church of Rome. The Babylon of Isaiah is a political system which began with Nebuchadnezzar, and which runs through the whole period called "the times of the Gentiles," represented successively under the four great Gentile powers—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome.

The Beast of the Apocalypse will be the final form of that great power which began with Nebuchadnezzar. Remembering this, we can understand many prophecies in Isaiah and Jeremiah which allude to Babylon, and which clearly remain yet to be fulfilled. These do not oblige us to conclude that the literal city of Babylon must be rebuilt.

Isaiah xiv. is a case in point. Verses 1 and 2 clearly prove that the prophecy awaits its fulfilment. Not even does the present return of the Jews to Palestine meet the requirements of this passage, still less their return in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. Then, as Nehemiah mournfully confesses—

“Behold, we are servants this day, and for the land that Thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruits thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it” (Neh. ix. 36).

When Isaiah xiv. is fulfilled Jehovah Himself will have restored His people in rich mercy and set them in their own land. The people who will be instrumental in their restoration, not only to Palestine but to the land which Jehovah calls His own land, will themselves be possessed by restored Israel as servants and handmaids. Instead of being despised and hated as they have been for long, they shall rule over their oppressors. All this clearly is yet future, but it is then that Babylon, such as we have it in Isaiah, is finally dealt with. This is why we point out the distinction between the Babylon of the Apocalypse and that of Isaiah.

Another has written:—

“The overthrow of Babylon (Isaiah xiv.) involves the emancipation of Israel. It has thus much greater importance than the history of any ordinary power; and the past Babylon is simply a type of the fall of the greater power, its final heir, which is to the last the enslaver of the Jews, the would-be protector but master of the holy city” (Kelly, on *Isaiah*).

It is “the prince that shall come,” in other words, the prince of the revived Roman Empire, who will confirm a covenant with the Jews for “one week” (*i.e.*, seven years) and break it off “in the midst of the week” (Daniel ix. 27).

CHAPTER XLI.

THE MYSTERY OF THE WOMAN.

Revelation xvii. 7-18.

The description of the woman given in our chapter so accurately portrays the ecclesiastical system that prevailed at the time of the Reformation, that it seems more like a history than a prophecy.

"And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns" (verse 7).

In answer to the prophet's amazement, the angelic messenger explains the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her.

It is the beast with seven heads and ten horns that has already been before us—undoubtedly the Roman Empire. But the mention of the ten horns proves that it is that phase of the Roman Empire which will be seen at the close.

"The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and shall be present" (R.V.).

This is a most remarkable verse, dividing as it does the history of the Beast into three stages. There was a time during which Rome existed as an imperial power—it "was"—but for centuries it ceased so to be—it "is not"—and until quite recently it gave no appearance of revival. Prophetic students had clearly foreseen that it would arise in fulfilment of what had been revealed in the Word of Truth. Ever since in years gone by it was the present writer's good fortune to come in contact with the writings and oral ministry of some of the early "Brethren" it has been his happy privilege to proclaim the truth of the Gospel linked as it ever should be with a clear testimony as to the coming of the Lord.

Such works as *Plain Papers on Prophetic Subjects* (Trotter), and *Notes on Daniel* (Kelly), were a revelation to him, and the three stages of the Beast in Rev. xvii. 8 were then clearly seen.

THE BEAST FROM THE PIT.

The Roman Empire is destined to rise again. What John was inspired of God to reveal, we are now seeing coming to pass under the leadership of Mussolini.

But the Scriptures that foretell the final rise of the Roman Empire likewise reveal what will be its moral characteristics. It will ascend out of the bottomless pit (xi. 7; xvii. 8). It will be energised by Satan, for the dragon, we are told, will give it "his power, and seat, and great authority" (xiii. 2). Woe to the earth dwellers then! They will fall completely under the power of the Devil, whose existence they now deny. And Satan is to-day obtaining startling power over men. Spiritism which is spreading with such extraordinary rapidity is preparing the way for the apostasy from God which will mark the time of Antichrist's seductions after the removal of the Holy Spirit—"the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (2 Thess. ii. 9).

Men to-day are rejecting, or perhaps we might more accurately say, they are *despising* the offered mercy of God because they do not love the truth (2 Thess. ii. 10). They "might be saved," but *they will not*. None will be lost because they *could not* be saved, only because they *would not*.

"And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth" (verse 9).

In verse 3 we are told the woman sits upon a scarlet coloured beast "having seven heads"; in verse 9 these seven heads are explained to be seven mountains. This clearly shows the geographical position of the Beast. The Roman Empire will have its centre and seat at Rome, the city of the seven hills. So what this chapter clearly teaches is the revival of the Roman Empire—a political system—and the control of that Empire at the close by an ecclesiastical system whose moral features are too clearly delineated to leave any reasonable doubt what is in the mind of the Spirit.

But there is an additional explanation of the seven heads of the Beast.

“ And there are seven kings; five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space ” (verse 10).

This evidently alludes to the different and successive forms of government with which every reader of Roman history is familiar. Five of these had fallen, such as Triumvirs, Decemvirs, Consuls, etc.; the sixth, or imperial existed when John wrote; a seventh was to arise—“ not yet come ”—and we are distinctly told that when come, this seventh would continue but a short space.

THE SEVENTH HEAD.

Along with others we used often to suggest that Napoleon Bonaparte might have been this seventh. The brief description here given seemed to have had its fulfilment in his extraordinary rise to power, and his equally sudden fall. But the present remarkable developments in Italy make it much more likely that Mussolini may be this seventh, for after all, Napoleon's seat of government so long as it lasted was Paris, whereas Mussolini's is Rome. Time will shew. But it is noteworthy that in a recent article in the *Evening Standard* from the pen of Dean Inge, this prolific writer in giving his opinion upon the affairs of Italy, and commenting upon the meteoric appearance of Mussolini upon the stage of history, gives it as his opinion that Mussolini's influence is destined to be short-lived. Without reflecting upon the Dean in any wise, we do not suppose he had in mind this passage in Revelation xvii. But it is remarkable for all that.

Whether this be so or not, it is important to observe that the seventh head is not exactly the Beast himself.

“ The beast that was, and is not, even he is an eighth (R.V.), and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition ” (verse 11).

So that what we are now witnessing in Italy may be, and most likely is, the immediate preparation for the actual Beast of prophecy.

“ And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast ” (verse 12).

In this verse we have ample evidence not only that the Roman Empire will be revived, but that its last phase will be different altogether from what has been seen in the past. Never yet has such a thing been known as an empire with its seat at Rome, and consisting of ten independent kings associated with that central power. The expression "the beast" may sometimes be understood as the empire, and at other times the head of the empire.

All our readers are well aware of the remarkable awakening of Italy that is now taking place. From the human point of view the Great European war has been the chief cause of this, though the Balkan war with Turkey in 1912 gave the first impetus to the events which when fully developed will divide up Europe into its ten kingdoms. It was during that time that the king of Italy claimed to be called *the Emperor of Rome*. Little notice was taken of that by politicians, but prophetic students saw and pointed out the remarkable coincidence. *Now* all eyes can see it.

THE TEN KINGS.

"These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast" (verse 13).

When God gave the Revelation to Jesus Christ, and He in turn signified it by His angel to His servant John (Rev. i. 1), the ten kings spoken of in our chapter had no existence as such. The Beast was there in its sixth head, but the ten kings had not received their power as kings. This ten-fold division is the final phase of the Roman Empire. The changes we are now seeing so rapidly developing may, and in all probability will, bring into existence the ten kingdoms—just ten, neither more nor less—but the wonderful features of the last hour of European politics are these, that the Roman Empire will be unmistakably revived: that territorially it will cover the extent of the ten kingdoms into which Europe, south of the Danube and west of the Rhine, will be divided: that these ten kings will have their own separate spheres of authority and power, but that for a short period, just at the close, they will give their power to the Beast, who will thus be an Emperor over the whole. Geneva to-day is a sort of weak and inefficient sample of this.

There are all sorts of rumours now afloat of changes in the governing heads in Italy. Hints are afloat as to Mussolini's successor. Even allusions to abdication of the king have made their way into the daily press.

The whole habitable world is just now in a state of feverish unrest. The sickening memories of the Great War are fading away. A new generation has sprung up to whom it means no more than a mere name like "Waterloo." War, in spite of Peace Pacts, is uppermost in everybody's mind. Many have been cooing like doves in their cots, "Peace, peace," and are now rudely being awakened to find that "there is no peace." Russia with its teeming millions, helpless under the cruel leadership of the Soviet power—the Russian military machine, now being organized by Germany, as the latest carefully guarded secret has revealed—war preparations in the Far East under Russian influence—civil commotions in European countries—all these things make thoughtful men tremble as they contemplate the possibilities that darken the political horizon.

THE KINGS OF THE EARTH.

In this chapter (Rev. xvii.) and in the next we must confine our attention to the western nations. The "kings of the earth" (xvii. 2, 18; xviii. 9) do not simply mean kings reigning on the earth. The "earth" must be understood in its prophetic sense in contrast to the "sea"; in other words, those nations which are in an ordered and civilised condition, rather than restless and changing.

Other kings besides these will enter into the conflicts of the last days, the "kings of the east" (xvi. 12), and the "kings of the whole habitable world" (xvi. 14). The drying up of the Euphrates need not be taken literally, but as in a symbolic way breaking down the eastern boundary of the old Roman Empire to enable the free and unhindered intercourse between the East and the West. The "kings of the east," no doubt, refer to such nations as China, Japan, India, etc. But no part of the earth—north, south, east, or west—will be left out in that awful Armageddon, "the battle of the great day of God Almighty."

But here in Revelation xvii. as we have said, it is the western nations, the ten kings, that are in question.

Shortly before the Great War we wrote what may be repeated with even greater emphasis:—"A threatening confederacy of northern and eastern nations can even now be seen in embryo, but will soon loom largely on the political horizon. The Balkan surprise has rudely shaken the settled beliefs of politicians, and as we write, the daily press begins to speak of the unexpected coquetting between Russia and Germany. This need not surprise the prophetic student. But all that it involves with the countless multitudes of China, Japan, India, etc., the great north-eastern confederacy of nations, soon to be formed into one united army, the Assyrian of Isaiah, the Gog and Magog of Ezekiel, the King of the North of Daniel—all this we fully believe, may, as suddenly as the Balkan conflagration, burst forth before the eyes of an astonished world. This may as suddenly call into being the confederacy of the West, or the ten kings united under the Beast, as a preservation of their very existence."

WAR IN THE AIR.

Once formed, and under the direct inspiration of Satan, the Beast and the ten kings will make war with the Lamb. This anticipates Revelation xix. 11.

"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 are called, and chosen, and faithful" (verse 14).

He who was rejected on earth, the suffering Lamb, will then come with power and great glory. Despised and rejected on earth He had been. He had been sentenced and crucified by the very empire, which now under Satan's leadership will hurl itself against Him when He comes the second time. But all supremacy and royal authority will then be His. The dying malefactor's vision of faith will then be fulfilled,—“Lord remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom”—and that first trophy of redemption will find himself coming with the King of kings, holding no mean place amongst the called, chosen, and faithful followers of the Lamb.

"And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations and tongues" (verse 15).

The woman's geographical position was the seven mountains of the city of Rome, but her spiritual and ecclesiastical influence will spread throughout the whole of that part of Europe dominated by the Beast. This is what Scripture announces will be the case after the removal of the Church at the coming of the Lord. Ecclesiastical Rome will be the all-controlling power in the revived Roman Empire.

Protestantism will never break the power of Rome. Protestantism will quickly be sucked into the vortex of the apostasy, as is now rapidly taking place under the influence of an ever-increasing army of its so-called Ministers. Those who cannot be satisfied with an infidel form of religion, professedly Christian yet deprived of every Christian doctrine, will go to swell the ranks of Babylon the Great, with the exception of those who through grace are found in Christ and will be "caught up" before the final catastrophe. But Babylon's hour of doom will surely come, not at the hand of Protestantism, but from the infidel and blasphemous power of the Beast and its ten horns.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE GREAT WHORE.

"And the ten horns which thou sawest AND (R.V.) the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire" (verse 16).

For a time the political power will tolerate the impudent assumptions and persecuting tactics of Babylon. Her wealth, her luxury and worldly magnificence will dazzle the kings of the earth, and intoxicate the high circles of Society. But at length her pretensions and her tyranny will become intolerable, and in hatred of the whole hierarchy of religion, they will strip her of her magnificence, and swallow up her wealth. This is what we believe the Spirit of God would have us understand by eating her flesh. She is not yet seen as completely destroyed, but deprived of her power.

"For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled" (verse 17).

In the words of another:—"How good to know amid all that day of terror that God is supreme, above all

the devices of His enemies! 'He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder of it He restraineth!' And this is the time which will most fully demonstrate this. Then the way is prepared for blessing, wide in proportion to the judgment which has introduced it"—Grant.

Never before had these kings been in complete accord. Dual and triple alliances there had been to keep the balance of power between one another, all the more needful when Europe had become an armed camp. But then they will all have one mind, and will all agree in their antagonism to the Lamb, and to carry out His purposes with regard to the idolatrous persecutor of His people.

In the order of the events verse 16 will precede verse 14 as may be easily seen from chapter xix.

CHAPTER XLII.

COME OUT OF HER MY PEOPLE.

Revelation xviii.

Perhaps no chapter in the Book of Revelation has presented greater difficulties of interpretation, while at the same time possessing clearer marks of identification than that which now lies before us.

It should be evident to all that the Babylon the Great here spoken of is the same as that of Revelation xvii. and earlier chapters in the Book.

Just as the Beast in Rev. xvii. represents the Roman Empire as a political system in its final form, so Babylon the Great of the same chapter represents the ecclesiastical system of Christendom in its final form. As we have seen, Babylon the Great is the Mother of Harlots—she has her daughters. The Reunion of Churches of which we hear so much to-day will presently reach maturity, for after the removal of the truly born again members of all denominations at the coming of the Lord a great ecclesiastical system will rear its head aloft, having its chief centre in the city of the seven mountains, but spreading its imperial influence throughout all Europe. This may seem impossible to some, but it is the clear forecast of these prophetic chapters.

Babylon in the Old Testament is the source and centre of idolatry, and the land of captivity of the people of God. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit takes up the same term and applies it to describe the final form of apostate ecclesiasticism.

A EUPHRATEAN BABYLON.

There are many earnest prophetic students who believe that the city of Babylon is yet to be rebuilt on the banks of the Euphrates. Whether this be so or not it is impossible to identify the Babylon of Revelation with a Chaldean city on the Euphrates hurriedly built between the Rapture and the Appearing of the Lord on the Mount of Olives. One reason given for a rebuilt Babylon in the land of Shinar is that the Babylon of Revelation xviii.

will be a great commercial centre, possibly maritime, for we read of ships and sailors trading by sea (verse 17). But these terms are not inconsistent with the city of Rome. At the present time under Mussolini's rapid development of Rome, broad avenues with magnificent buildings are being constructed leading from the existing city down to the sea.

It is clear that the Babylon of Rev. xviii. draws a picture of a great commercial system trading in every form of luxurious and costly merchandise (verses 11-14), but even this has its religious aspect, for it enslaves the "bodies (R.V.) and souls of men" (verse 13).

On the one hand we have such passages as Jeremiah l. 13, 39; li. 26, 29, 37, which support the view that the city of Babylon will never be rebuilt.

On the other hand, Isaiah xiii. and xiv. which speak of a judgment on Babylon which is evidently in the future when Israel is restored to their own land in blessing, at rest from sorrow, fear and bondage (Isa. xiv. 1-3).

Putting all these passages together it would appear that the present desolate and uninhabited condition of the literal Babylon will continue to the end (so far Jeremiah), but that the expression Babylon in Isaiah denotes that political system which began with Nebuchadnezzar and which runs through the whole period called "the Times of the Gentiles" under the four great Gentile powers—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The Beast of the Apocalypse will be the final form of that power which began with Nebuchadnezzar.

THE APOCALYPTIC BABYLON.

Returning now to our chapter, it must be clearly understood that Babylon is the symbolic name of an ecclesiastical system which bears unmistakable resemblance to the Papacy, and which will be found at the close seated on the Beast.

No tyranny in the past has been greater than that of a clerical priestcraft, backed up and supported by an all-powerful ecclesiasticism. Superstitious fear has brought kings and peoples cringing at the footstool of a power that claims to have the keys of heaven, to shut or open at its pleasure.

But the time will come as we have seen when atheism will rise in revolt. The Beast and the ten kings will hate the whore, and make her desolate, and naked, and burn her with fire, who once burned the martyrs of Jesus (Rev. xvii.). The destroyers of Babylon are not evangelical protestants but atheistical world rulers.

Now from Rev. xviii. 8 we learn that this judgment on Babylon, though executed by men, is really the judgment of God. It was not enough to shew the antagonism of the human instruments of vengeance, but the terrific sentence of divine displeasure.

It has been pointed out before in these pages that the oft-repeated expression "another angel" (viii. 3; x. 1) seems to refer to our Lord Jesus Christ. The time had not yet quite come for His personal manifestation—that occurs in Rev. xix. 11—but the time of reckoning with that great religious system drunken with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus is now in full view, and the whole earth is seen lightened with His glory, and is made to ring with His mighty voice, announcing the fact of Babylon's fall (verse 2) and the moral reasons thereof (verse 3).

COME OUT OF HER MY PEOPLE.

Another voice from heaven now is heard to sound throughout the religious circles of Europe.

"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 have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities" (verses 4, 5).

The rapture will already have taken place; the church will already have been removed; another band of witnesses will at that time be upon the earth—Jewish witnesses, as we have before seen. It is to these, we believe, this call to come out of Babylon is addressed. If any amongst these Jewish witnesses, or their Gentile converts have become entangled in her meshes, the call comes loud and clear—COME OUT.

While this seems the precise and prophetic interpretation of this verse, there is unquestionably a moral interpretation applicable at all times throughout this present dispensation. Wherever the marks of Babylon are discernible, it is the bounden duty of every believer to sever his connection therewith.

Another has written—

“Though we may look for a future development of Babylon, as opposing God's final testimony of the Kingdom to all nations before the end comes, yet I think that, even at the present moment, there need be no difficulty in judging where the features of Babylon are found most fully. It is a religious system that governs a number of kings, not an establishment that is at the mercy of the secular government. This is inconsistent with Scripture, but it is not the wickedness spoken of here.

“Babylon is an incomparably darker, deeper, and more widespread system of religious corruption—arrogating to itself the name of the church of God exclusively, setting itself above kings, intriguing with them, but at the same time maintaining its supremacy above them all; stupefying the masses with the poison of her exciting falsehoods: arrayed in all the meretricious splendour of the world: the fountain-head of the worst idolatry under the sun: and finally manifesting a spirit of bloodthirsty persecution against the true saints and witnesses of Jesus, under the usurped pretence of His will and authority.

“There is one that does claim this place—one that takes it as given by God—one whose seat and centre are found in the very heart of what was once the Roman Empire—a religious system that affects universal dominion, and that, in order to accomplish it, either wins by every enticing art, or extinguishes all opposition in the blood of heretics so-called, her victims. ‘By thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth’ (verses 23, 24). For any unprejudiced person who reads this description of Babylon calmly, and asks himself, What is that professing Christian body so abounding in idols, so authoritative over the kings of the earth, so indulgent to the wicked, and so cruel to the righteous? it is impossible not to see the answer” (Kelly).

THE SMOKE OF HER BURNING.

It would be impossible to read Rev. xvii. 4 along with Rev. xviii. 16 without realizing that these two chapters speak of the same evil system. Many are of opinion that after the removal of the saints at the rapture a time of

peace and prosperity will come to the world. In all likelihood this will be so, for men will be saying, "Peace and safety." But this will quickly be followed by times of terrible distress. There will be great catastrophies, and that here described will be one of the greatest. "In one day" (verse 8), even "in one hour" (verse 17) the city of Rome will be a scene of desolation and disaster.

In all probability the burning here spoken of will be literal. Every traveller in Italy knows full well how volcanic is the country around Naples and Rome. In many parts the ground under one's feet is too hot to stand on. Smoke and steam burst forth from subterranean caverns. Vesuvius and Etna are now showing unwonted activity—a solemn indication of what may soon give actuality to the vivid description of our chapter. Politics (the ten horns) and religion (Babylon the Great) will be in deadly conflict when God Himself will suddenly intervene.

The "kings of the earth" (that is, those rulers beyond the limits of the "ten kings"), and the merchants of the earth will bewail and lament at Babylon's fall. The shipmasters and sailors secure on their ships, as they may think, standing out to sea will cry aloud as they behold the smoke of her burning, "Alas! alas! that great city."

The sound of music and joy will cease; business and industry will be at a standstill in this the seat of Europe's political and religious splendour.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB.

Revelation xix., 1-10.

We have seen in chapters xvii. and xviii. the judgment of Babylon as a system. The judgment of *individuals* is a different thing altogether.

Babylon is a vast system in antagonism against God. It is the world as a system, and "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passeth away" (1 John ii. 15-17).

Babylon is typical of the world as a moral system. It is a system opposed to Christ and all His. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John xv. 18, 19).

In the chapters we have been considering Babylon has a threefold character.

1. *Religious and ecclesiastical*—the Great Whore, entering into unholy and illicit connection with the world, committing spiritual fornication with the kings of the earth. She sits a Queen, Mistress over the world, false to her true character as "called out" of the world. No wonder she has stamped upon her forehead MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. In contrast to the true Bride of Christ it is the World-Church.
2. *A political system*—the Woman sitting upon the scarlet coloured beast, arrayed in purple and scarlet, decked with precious stones of every kind, her dignitaries displaying all the pomp, magnificence, and grandeur of the earth. What a contrast to the hunted, persecuted and oft-times martyred people of God linked by faith with a rejected Christ, quickened with Him, raised up together with Him, and seated in heavenly places in Him!

3. *A commercial system* of wide-spread influence whereby the hard earned savings of the multitude are transferred to the colossal fortunes of the few. Huge combines squeezing out small traders, under-selling till financial ruin sweeps them away, broken in mind, body and estate, so that their supplanters may be "placed alone in the midst of the earth." (Isaiah v. 8). "Thy merchants were the great men of the earth" (Rev. xviii. 23).

Babylon in all its threefold earthly glory is doomed to fall under the righteous judgment of God. Her plagues will come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine. The whole fabric of finance will burst like a mighty bubble, filling the world with dismay, "weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate" (Rev. xviii. 19).

But if earth weeps and mourns, heaven will rejoice at the collapse of that vast system of religious idolatry and bloody persecution, of political intrigue, and commercial deception.

"Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets, for God hath avenged you on her" (xviii. 20).

This to some may seem a hard saying, but God is not unrighteous to forget the blood shed by man upon the earth, and Babylon, insensible to her own guilt, utterly indifferent to the holiness and righteousness of the God with Whom all have to do, to say nothing of the torture and misery she has heaped upon her helpless victims—Babylon, unrepentant, inherits the accumulated guilt of all the blood that has been shed upon the earth.

"And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth (xviii. 24).

Slain, not only in the name of religion, but also international wars, of aggression and trade.

MUCH PEOPLE IN HEAVEN.

On earth there has been weeping and wailing. The last days of the great crisis week of seven years are seen to be rapidly running out. The different bands of martyrs that have been noticed in our previous study of this wonderful book have gone to join the heavenly host.

"And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God" (xix. 1).

The time seems now to have arrived for the long delayed answer to the prayer—"Thy Kingdom come . . . for Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory." The heavenly host are here heard using almost the identical words—"glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God" (xix. 1), only not now as a far distant prospect, but as an immediate actuality.

And who are these "much people in heaven? Are they not the whole company of the redeemed in glory? Do they not include (1) all the saints caught up at the rapture, viz., O.T. saints and the completed Church, (2) martyrs under the fifth seal (Rev. vi.), (3) martyrs under the beast (Rev. xiii. 15)? They are here seen as an undivided company, voicing as one the triumphant Hallelujah's of heaven over the long-delayed but righteous judgment of the great idolatrous persecutor of God's servants (xix. 2).

The Kingdom of God could not be established upon earth until the two opposing forces were put down—Babylon and the Beast. The first of these is now disposed of "and again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever" (xix. 3). The judgment of the Beast and the kings of the earth is soon to follow.

A VOICE OUT OF THE THRONE.

It is solemn to think that nowhere in Scripture is found such a chorus of thanksgiving as here over the downfall of Babylon. Not once only nor twice, but four times does Alleluia! sound through heaven's eternal arches. Angelic hosts (xix. 6) take up the strain, and the voice of Him whose voice was as the sound of many waters (i. 15. xix. 6)—the mind of heaven is one as amidst the mighty thunderings of omnipotent power they proclaim—**The Lord God omnipotent reigneth.**

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB.

Long centuries before the voice of the Spirit had proclaimed the espousals of the Church as of a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Cor. xi. 2). The Church at Corinth was a

local representative of the whole Church everywhere, for this we believe is the teaching of 1 Cor. xii. 27. "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." Of course the body of Christ in its entirety included all saints everywhere, but each local assembly represented the whole. What is true of the Body aspect, is likewise true of the Bride aspect of the Church. Now here, in Revelation xix. the marriage is about to be consummated.

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready" (xix. 7).

The harlot church united to the kings of the earth, and the chaste virgin united to the Lord of heaven could not exist side by side. The Great Whore must go to her doom before the chaste Bride appears side by side with the once rejected but now glorified Lamb in heaven.

Up to this point the saints in heaven are seen, as we have said, as one undivided group. They can each and all take up the song of Revelation i. 5, 6—"loved—cleansed—and crowned," but now Babylon having been judged, the Bride is seen separated off from the rest to occupy a place of special nearness to the Lamb. The twenty-four elders embrace all the redeemed "caught up" when the Lord comes into the air. In this passage (xix. 4) they are mentioned for the last time for the different families in heaven are now being separately defined ("EVERY family, etc.," Eph. iii. 15—R.V.).

If the Bride holds a special place, there will be no jealousy in heaven, where all is sovereign grace. Here it is said she hath "made herself ready." The blood of the Lamb made her ready as to her title, as indeed will be the case with each individual saint in that day. Here it is a matter of manifestation with Christ in glory. The light makes everything manifest, not to the eyes of others, but to His with Whom each one has to do. The result of that manifestation at the *Bema* of Christ will be that the Bride as a whole will be seen "arrayed in fine linen, clean and white." No finger will be able to point out a single stain, all will have been manifested before God and the result will be seen by all—fine linen "granted" even though unmerited. How different the "scarlet and purple" of the meretricious harlot and the

clean white linen of practical righteousness of the Bride—"the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (xix. 8, R.V.).

THE BLESSED GUESTS.

From this point the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures cease from view, and the figure changes to the Bride and the guests called to the marriage supper. That is, the Church displayed as the Bride, the Lamb's wife, and the remainder of the saints included under the twenty-four elders, namely, the O.T. saints seen as a separate company, blessed indeed, though not in the same position, called to the marriage supper as guests, but not in the same relationship to the Lamb—

The Lamb is all the glory
In Immanuel's land.

Some may think these distinctions unnecessary, but let us remember that, "these are the true sayings of God" (xix. 9).

The effect upon John of these stupendous revelations was to produce a feeling of reverential adoration, and he falls at the feet of the angelic messenger. But he is immediately prevented from creature worship, and angels, however exalted, are but creatures. God alone is to be adored—

"I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren, that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (xix. 10).

There are some Christians who profess to take no interest, and to find no profit from the study of prophecy. This verse is God's condemnation of such an attitude. The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus. This sentence is reciprocal. What the Spirit has revealed in the prophetic Word is the testimony about the Lord Jesus that He would have sounded abroad, and so much the more as the day of its fulfilment draws nigh.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS.

Revelation xix. 11-21.

It is of immense importance that everyone who desires to be a successful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ in these last days should pay very earnest attention to the prophetic portion of the Word of God.

We have often heard Christians, even, speak disparagingly of this kind of testimony; but they are profoundly mistaken in this. We have sometimes heard evangelists saying, "Oh, I don't want to bother about such subjects as the Jewish remnant, what has that to do with me? I want to win souls, I want to attract the young, I don't want to puzzle them upon such speculative matters."

Such an attitude is often due to the indolence of the preachers themselves. They have not the taste for patient, persevering study of the Word of God. But we are persuaded that as the time of the end draws nigh effectual witness for Christ will be largely linked with the prophetic testimony that the Spirit yields in such a book as we are now studying—"the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy," or, "the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus."

HEAVEN OPENED.

The supreme moment is now at hand. Nearly 2,000 years ago the Christ of God was crucified by wicked hands, but God raised Him from the dead and received Him into heaven. There, ever since, He has been seated at the right hand of God. "Sit Thou at My right hand until I make Thy foes Thy foot-stool" was God's answer to the world's appalling act of sin. During all this while a message of pardon and salvation has been proclaimed, but soon, according to the Saviour's own warning, the world is to "see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. xxiv. 30). That solemn moment is here seen to have arrived.

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold! a white horse; and He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and make war" (Rev. xix. 11).

To-day God saves in righteousness all who put their trust in His dear Son. To-day God justifies freely by His grace the vilest and the guiltiest through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom. iii. 24). But presently His session at the right hand of God will cease and He will come forth as a mighty conqueror riding the symbolic white horse of victory. All power will be in His hand and He Who was the faithful witness (Rev. i. 5) in the days of His rejection will be publicly acknowledged by high heaven as the Faithful and the True "in righteousness He doth judge and make war."

A RIGHTEOUS WAR.

The wars of this world have been mostly wars of human passion and avarice. Not so will it be when that day comes—when "the Lord cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity," when "the earth also shall disclose her blood and shall no more cover her slain" (Isaiah xxvi. 21).

"His eyes are as a flame of fire," penetrating, scrutinising. The world will then know that all things are manifest in His sight. Crowns of universal dominion are on His brow; and "A NAME WRITTEN that no man knew, but He Himself." What mere creature could fathom the infinite depths of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. "NO MAN KNOWETH THE SON BUT THE FATHER" (Matt. xi. 27). To Him every knee shall bow either in willing worship or reluctant compulsion.

"And He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and His name is called THE WORD OF GOD" (verse 13).

The vesture dipped in blood has nothing to do with the gospel message. It is not salvation offered through the blood of Christ. This is the blood of vengeance in the execution of judgment. It is vividly described in Isaiah lxiii. 1 to 6, and specially refers to the deliverance of God's earthly people from the combined armies of the earth—"the day of vengeance is in Mine heart, and the year of My redeemed is come."

God will have a people on the earth at that time. This has been frequently before us in these studies.

"When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him. And the Redeemer shall come to Zion" (Isaiah lix. 19, 20).

But He will not come alone for—

“The armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean” (verse 14).

THE ARMIES IN HEAVEN.

The armies which were in heaven—*before* the heavens were opened, *before* the Rider came forth upon the white horse to execute this warrior judgment, these armies had been in the heaven from whence they are here seen coming forth to “swell the triumph of His train.”

The coming of the Lord *for* His saints had already taken place. They had been filling heaven with their worship and praise, and the marriage of the Lamb had already been celebrated. They are here seen coming WITH Him Who had previously come FOR them.

These armies are not angels though angel hosts, myriads of them, will of course be there as well (2 Thess. i. 7). These are the redeemed whose garments have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. xxii. 14)—“blessed are they that wash their robes” (R.V.)—“made white in the blood of the Lamb,” as is said of another company (Rev. vii. 9-17). While it is true that the blood of the Lamb can alone give us fitness of title for heaven, yet the “fine linen, white and clean” of our chapter seems to be explained as the “righteous acts” of the saints. Though all the glorified saints will be in the army of heaven on the ground of the blood of the Lamb, their position and rank in that army will be the fruit of their practical conduct while on earth.

“And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations: and He shall rule (shepherd) them with a rod of iron: and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God” (verse 15).

We have read in verse 13 that His Name is called The Word of God. He called worlds into existence by the word of His *power* (Hebrews i. 3). “He spake and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast” (Psalm xxxiii. 9). He speaks in *grace* to-day and dead sinners receive life, pardon, and peace. But that same voice will presently speak in *judgment*. No carnal weapon will be in His hands—“He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked” (Isaiah xi. 4).

In this day of grace men are found foolish enough to close their ears to His voice, but in that day everyone must listen for He will come forth in all the majesty of universal authority with a name written clear and irresistible.

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Judgment is God's strange work and it is only man's sin and rebellion that forces Him into that attitude. But when at length this day of grace will end God's judgment will fall on different parties and in different ways.

THE COMING ARMAGEDDON.

The closing verses of our chapter must be read in connection with Ezekiel xxxviii. and xxxix. They describe the final military crisis amongst the nations of the whole earth just before the millennial reign of Christ which is presented to us in the next chapter.

It is towards this climax of human sin and devil-led folly and wickedness that things are tending to-day.

"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" (verse 19).

This has already been before us when considering chapter xvi. It is the Armageddon of the future. It is Satan's last effort against Christ before he himself is cast into the bottomless pit. The first prophecy of Scripture is now about to be carried out to the very letter. The Seed of the woman is about to bruise the Serpent's head (Genesis iii. 15). One final effort he makes by stirring up the whole military machine of the nations, to hurl defiance at "Him that sat on the horse, and against His army."

The issue of such insane folly was inevitable. The two leaders of this lawless apostasy and blasphemous iniquity are caught red-handed, and without the necessity of further trial are cast alive, without dying, into the lake of fire, their final doom. It is the military leader of the Western nations, the Beast; and the religious leader of the Jewish and Christian apostasies, the Antichrist reigning at Jerusalem.

"These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone" (verse 20).

Thus while in heaven all will be peace, on earth will be rebellion and tumult. The Church and all the heavenly saints will be filling heaven with worship, but on earth all will be turmoil and violence. The centre of the storm will be in Palestine. There the nations under the Beast and the king of the North, as well as the kings of all the earth will be assembled to cut off God's earthly people from being a nation and to wipe out the name of Israel from all remembrance (see Psalm lxxxiii.). Weapons of war will be in their hands (Ezek. xxxix. 9), but the armies of heaven will need no such instruments. They follow an all-conquering Leader Who will consign to their eternal doom the guilty leaders of this rebellion, the remnant, less guilty in God's sight and deceived by the Satanic miracles of the false prophet will fall slain by the sword of Him that sat on the horse, which sword proceedeth out of His mouth. Their final judgment will not take place for another one thousand years, as we shall see in the next chapter.

It is indeed a solemn thing to think that we are nearing the time of the fulfilment of these prophecies.

Christendom religiously is hastening to the predicted apostasy, the nations of the whole earth East and West, are sharpening their swords, Palestine is once again becoming the centre of world interest, as it will soon become the battleground of the earth—*the coming of the Lord is drawing nigh.*

CHAPTER XLV.

THE SUPPER OF THE GREAT GOD.

Revelation xx.

The warrior judgment described at the end of the previous chapter (Rev. xix. 17-21) is evidently the same as we find in Ezekiel xxxix. or at any rate immediately precedes it.

THE TWO SUPPERS.

In Revelation xix. there are two suppers described, but how different they are. Blessed, indeed, are those who are called to partake of the first (verse 9), but awful will be the portion of those who find themselves involved in the terrors of the second (verse 17).

The marriage supper of the Lamb will take place in heavenly glory, the supper of the great God will be amidst scenes of earthly carnage and blood.

A careful reading of Ezekiel xxxix. makes it clear that Palestine will be the theatre of the great conflict of the future. There is to be a great military gathering upon the mountains of Israel under the leadership of Russia—Rosh, Meshech and Tubal. In spite of all the infidelity of these modern times, the day whereof God has spoken (Ezek. xxxix. 8) is surely drawing nigh, when God will make known His holy Name in the midst of His people Israel, and the whole world will then know that He is the Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel (verse 7).

THE TEN KINGS AND THE BEAST.

Without attempting to fill in with too great precision every detail of the picture God has been pleased to give us of the closing events of this age, it seems clear that the ten kings and the Beast will be united only for a short while—they “receive power as kings one hour with the beast” (Rev. xvii. 12).

They are found at the close of Daniel's 70th week in hostility to the Jews, having broken the seven years' covenant that the coming Roman prince shall have confirmed with them (Dan. ix. 27). But not only are they antagonistic to the Jews, they are in open and blasphemous rebellion against God and the earthly Jewish saints of the

same period (Rev. xiii. 5-7). They hurl themselves defiantly against the Lamb and those called, chosen and faithful saints, who as the armies of heaven descend in glory, from the heavens, when He comes as KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev. xvii. and xix.).

Now we know that when the Lord comes forth to battle, His feet will stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives (Zech. xiv.). It is there that all the nations will be gathered to battle. There will first of all be the nations under the leadership of the Beast; these appear to be first dealt with at Jerusalem itself. The nations under Gog will then sweep in to the land to find the Lord Himself already there. They come "as a cloud to cover the land" (Ezek. xxxviii. 16). They fall upon "the mountains of Israel" (Ezek. xxxix. 2, 4, 17). The Beast seems to concentrate upon Jerusalem. Gog appears to deliver a wider attack, but when he does so he finds the Lord already there (Micah v. 5). It will be as when Sennacherib invaded Palestine in B.C. 710, Jehovah will say once again, "I will defend this city, to save it, for Mine own sake, and for My servant David's sake" (2 Kings xix. 34), for in truth David's greater Son is now to take the throne—"bchold, they were all dead corpses."

Russia may now be making her blasphemous boast that she will drag God down from His throne but He will yet set His glory amongst the nations.

"And all the nations shall see My judgment that I have executed, and My hand that I have laid upon them.

"So the house of Israel shall know that I am Jehovah their God from that day and forward" (Ezekiel xxxix. 17-22).

THE KEY OF THE BOTTOMLESS PIT.

The judgment of the Beast and False Prophet is followed by that of Satan himself, the malignant foe of God and man (Rev. xx. 1-3).

"And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand."

Lest there should be any doubt as to the identification of this cunning and sinister enemy of the human race allusion is made to his early attack upon God and man in the Garden of Eden—he is called "that old serpent."

"And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years."

These four titles are also found in Rev. xii. 9. The hour of his judgment is here seen about to commence, and he knew it. That first prophecy of Scripture had never been forgotten by Satan—IT SHALL BRUISE THY HEAD—the Seed of the woman is yet to triumph.

The bottomless pit is a place of captivity. It is the abode of fallen, evil spirits. In Rev. ix. 1 we have seen that God will give the key to an evil dignitary, a fallen star, who will open that pestilential furnace and cause its poisonous fumes to spread. Evil men, and seducers are even now waxing worse and worse; they will presently culminate in the Antichrist or man of sin who will be revealed after the removal of the Church when the Holy Spirit will be taken away (2 Thess. ii.). This fallen star may be that very Antichrist. However that may be, fumes from the pit are already belching forth in Russia and spreading through Communistic and Atheistical Societies throughout Europe. The anti-God campaign has taken a firmer hold in our land than most are aware of.

IN Revelation xx. 3 we are told that after the destruction of the Beast and False Prophet, Satan who had energised these two wicked leaders of apostate Christendom will be cast into that pit of perdition, bound with the chain and locked with the key, so that for 1,000 years he will cease to deceive the nations.

The Beast and False Prophet caught red-handed in their violent but impotent rage against God and His Christ will be cast alive into the lake of fire (Rev. xix. 20). Another has said:—"Enoch and Elijah had been taken to heaven without dying; they had been active for God in testimony against evil. Here are two beings active for evil in testimony against God, thrust alive into hell fire without the preliminary of death. . . . The Devil, getting hold of both, puts the sword into the hand of the Beast, and spiritual manifestations into the hand of the False Prophet. The latter plays into the hand of the former. Both play into the hands of the Devil, man being the victim of their sins. The rest of the combatants are slain by a word from him that sits on the horse." (Hartridge). These will remain in their condition of physical death, but conscious existence, until the thousand years are ended, then to stand for judgment before the Great White Throne.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE FIRST RESURRECTION AND THE
SECOND DEATH.

Revelation xx. 4-15.

Satan bound.—What a change will take place on the earth! Things are to-day getting worse, and the outlook is blacker than ever. To all outward appearance the answer to the cry has gone up to God, sometimes as a merely formal routine, at other times from the heart of multitudes, Thy Kingdom come!—seems further off than ever.

Indeed we have been considering the awful tribulation period that seems now every day to be drawing nearer. Satan, the Devil, that old Serpent, the great Dragon seems very active in Russia even now. But he is not yet “cast out” of heaven (Rev. xii. 9). He soon will be, though. This has already been under review in these *Studies*—see Revelation xii. In spite of Treaties and Peace Parleys he will stir up strife amongst all nations, using the Beast and False Prophet very largely as his instruments for bringing about the real Armageddon of the future (Rev. xvi. 13-16). Armageddon is not so much international strife, but the armies of heaven meeting the armies of earth. It is called “the battle of the great day of God Almighty” to which “the kings of the whole world” will be gathered.

Yes, Satan will be bound. This will make a tremendous difference during the dispensation that will follow the time of tribulation. That dispensation is commonly called the Millennium because it will last for 1,000 years. This expression occurs six times in our chapter, and must be taken as a literal period of 1,000 years.

THE BOTTOMLESS PIT.

The bottomless pit is a place of imprisonment. It is called the “abyss.” It is not the place of final doom. God is about to test man in a new way. The great deceiver of the nations is to be shut up. The parliaments of our time have little idea how all their projects for

the peace of the world and the betterment of humanity are being frustrated. They forget that the rightful Heir has been rejected, yea, crucified, and that Satan has for the moment apparently triumphed. He deceiveth the whole world (Rev. xii. 9); he blinds "the minds of them that believe not" (2 Cor. iv. 4); he is an adversary that is always on the alert to devour any careless soul (1 Pet. v. 8); from the very commencement of human history throughout every dispensation the influence of Satan has constantly been at work both in the world and amongst the people of God. The Wicked One plucks out of the hearts of the hearers the good seed that God's servants scatter, and sows the evil tares of false doctrine. He will energize the Antichrist and bring about the complete apostasy of Christendom. The seeds of all this wickedness are now being sown amongst all sections of the professing church (2 Thess. ii.). But during the Millennium Satan will be bound, his activities for evil will be suppressed.

THRONES OF DIVINE JUDGMENT.

Not only will Satan be bound throughout the whole period of the Millennium but Christ will reign. Then will be fulfilled the bright prophecies of earthly blessing.

"Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment" (Isa. xxxii. 1).

"Give the king Thy judgment O God, and Thy righteousness unto the king's son.

"He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgment. . . .

"He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth," etc. (Psalm lxxii.).

Yes, Christ will reign; but that will be in a new dispensation. It will not be until He comes as the Ancient of Days (see Daniel vii.). After the dispensation of grace is closed, after the apostasy is complete, after the Antichrist and the Beast have been cast into the lake of fire, after the first resurrection has been completed, it is then that He will reign as King of kings, and Lord of lords. But this involves His coming again, and that in its twofold aspect, namely, His coming into the air FOR His saints (1 Thess. iv.), and His coming to the earth WITH His saints (Zech. xiv.).

Who are the saints that will come with Him? Who are the saints that will reign with Him? Who are the saints that will share in the first resurrection? These questions are answered in verse 4. They are there seen in three groups. They are the heavenly saints. They are the saints mentioned in Daniel vii. 18, 22, 25, and 27, where they are called "the saints of the Most High, (or, of the high places, *margin*). Of these saints it is said "they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

"And I saw thrones and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them" (verse 4).

The first clause of this verse refers to those who were seen seated on thrones in Rev. iv. and v.—the 24 elders. They represent, as we have already pointed out, the whole company of saints both of Old Testament and New Testament who will be raised at the coming of the Lord into the air. In other words they are "the dead in Christ" of 1 Thess. iv. 16, and "they that are Christ's at His coming" of 1 Cor. xv. 23; and along with these all the living saints "caught up" to meet the Lord in the air, when His shout is heard.

TWO GROUPS OF MARTYRS.

But there is another group here mentioned—

"And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God."

These are the martyrs under the fifth seal (Rev. vi. 9-11)—slain for the Word of God.

The religious leaders in Christendom to-day are abandoning all real belief in the Scriptures. They mock at those who declare their conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. This unbelief is spreading amidst all classes, and bringing about the apostasy which will presently bring down God's judgment upon the professing Church, which will be rejected by Him, as the vessel of His testimony—spued out of His mouth (Rev. iii. 16). But these martyrs slain after the removal of the Church will yield an unflinching testimony, and seal it with their blood. They will be Jewish martyrs.

The exact moment of their resurrection is not stated. Some have thought they will remain for a short while in their disembodied state, waiting till another group of

martyrs is added. These are mentioned in Rev. xiii. 15. We would not dogmatize on this point. But may it not be that as each yields up his life they pass into the heavenly scene, for "every one of them" is arrayed in a white robe which scarcely seems to fit a disembodied condition.

At any rate it is said of the three groups mentioned in verse 4 that they live and reign with Christ a thousand years. This is the first resurrection, the resurrection of the saints. The rest of the dead, the wicked dead, remain in their disembodied state until the thousand years are finished. Six times is this period of 1,000 years mentioned in this passage, which doubtless is to be understood in its literal sense. We are nearing now the termination of man's history on the earth, which in spite of the wild guesses of evolution we hold to be about 6,000 years. May not the Millennium of these verses be the seventh thousand, thus completing the full week of God's dealings with man on the earth—"there remaineth therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Heb. iv. 9, R.V.), and "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. iii. 8). The vast stretch of eternity lies beyond, namely, the day of God for which we look, the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Throughout the Gospel period of nearly 2,000 years since Pentecost, grace has been reigning through righteousness. During the Millennium a King shall reign in righteousness. But in the eternal state righteousness will dwell.

The first resurrection, then, is first by contrast with those who die in their sins, and who will be raised to be judged for their sins when the thousand years will be finished (verse 5). A blessed and holy company they will be—their only title, the blood of the Lamb. The first resurrection will be complete at the dawn of the Millennial day. Not a single saint of God will be left in the tomb when Christ takes to Himself His great power and His reign begins. No saint will die during the Millennium. It is important to remember that there is no such thing as a "general" resurrection. The resurrection is selective. The first resurrection is a resurrection after the pattern of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was the "first fruits" (1 Cor. xv. 20); they that are Christ's—all of them— will follow "at His coming." It is in this sense that it is selective; not selective of some saints as being more worthy than other saints, but "they that are Christ's" in contrast to "the rest of the dead" who die in their sins. It was this selective resurrection of all saints that Paul had abandoned all self righteousness of his own in order to obtain, and at the cost of suffering the loss of all things that he might be found in Christ, arrayed not in the rags of his own righteousness, but in the spotless robe of the righteousness of God by faith.

The first resurrection is not only a resurrection OF the dead, but "OUT FROM AMONGST the dead," and those that are accounted worthy to obtain that resurrection evidence by that very fact that they are "the children of God" (Luke xx. 34-36).

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE MILLENNIUM AND AFTER.

Revelation xx. 7-15.

It is clear that there is to be a time of earthly blessing after the appearing in glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. What is commonly called the warrior judgment will have taken place just previous to this period, which from the length of its duration is called the Millennium, an expression which means "a thousand years" found six times in the opening part of our chapter.

As we have seen, the glorified saints will then be reigning with Christ, and Satan will be confined in the bottomless pit. Magnificent descriptions of this period are contained in the O.T. Prophets and in the Psalms, giving glowing pictures of earthly grace and prosperity for all the nations of the earth.

Another has written:—

"Of the millennial earth, not even the slightest sketch is given us here. The book of Revelation is the closing book of prophecy, with the rest of which we are supposed to be familiar. . . . The reign of the heavenly saints has just been shown us: for details as to the earth, we must go to the Old Testament" (Grant).

THE MILLENNIUM.

However far removed we may be from a state of earthly peace, there are few who have given up the expectation of such a time. Even utterly worldly men are often found using the word "millennium," an evidence of the hold that the Scriptures have upon the minds of men who may even pretend to disbelieve its divine source. We are accustomed to hear men speak of bringing in the Kingdom of God. It seems a long time coming by human effort, well meant as surely it often is. But it will come as we are told when "the time to favour Zion, yea, the set time, is come." And, "when the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory" (Psalm cii.).

SATAN LOOSED.

"And when the thousand years are finished, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison" (verse 7).

The Millennium is not the final goal. Men on the earth will have been put to a fresh test throughout the 1,000 years' reign of Christ and the glorified saints. Again quoting:—

"The glory of God is manifested so that the earth is filled with the knowledge of it as the waters cover the sea. Righteousness rules, and evil is afraid to lift its head. The curse is taken from the ground, which responds with wondrous fruitfulness. Amid all this, the spiritual condition is by no means in correspondence with the outward blessing. Even the manifested connection of righteousness and prosperity cannot avail to make man love righteousness, nor the goodness of God, though evidenced on every side, to bring man to repentance. At the 'four corners of the earth,' retreating as far as possible from the central glory, there are still those who represent Israel's old antagonists, and thus are called by their names—'Gog and Magog.' Nor are they remnants, but masses of population, brought together by sympathetic hatred of God and His people . . . a last and terrible answer to the question, 'Lord, what is man?'

"The Gog, of the land of Magog, whose invasion of Israel is prophetically described in the book of Ezekiel (xxxviii., xxxix.), is the prototype of these last invaders. There need be no confusion, however, between them; for the invasion of Ezekiel is pre-millennial, not post-millennial, as that in Revelation is" (Grant).

THE INHABITANTS OF THE EARTH.

Some may ask, Who will enter the Millennium?

1. In the first place, Israel as a saved nation—"All Israel shall be saved" (Romans xi. 26). When the Redeemer comes to Zion (Isaiah lix. 20) He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob, thus for the first time on earth shall be seen a whole nation saved.

"Thy people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land—(i.e., the land given by unconditional promise to Abraham) for ever—the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified" (Isaiah lx. 21).

2. Besides this, all those that shall be born of Israel during the millennium shall be known amongst the nations as "the seed which the Lord hath blessed" (Isaiah lxi. 9).

However mysterious this may seem to us, God made choice of Israel "above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deut. vii. 6)—not because of their might (Deut. vii. 1), nor because of their number (Deut. vii. 7), nor because of their goodness (Deut. ix. 5), but simply "because the Lord loved you" (Deut. vii. 8).

3. In Matthew xxv. 31-46, we are given a wonderful picture of what will take place when the Lord Jesus as Son of man shall come in His glory. All the living nations shall be gathered before Him. Multitudes amongst them will have been saved as the result of the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. xxiv. 14) by the Jewish remnant, who are called by the King—"these my brethren" (Matt. xxv. 40). These born-again Gentiles will enter the Millennium, as it is said, "Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matt. xxv. 34).

4. But there will be some amongst the Gentile nations that will apparently yield a feigned allegiance to Christ. As soon as they hear of the tremendous happenings connected with the return of Christ to Jerusalem they will realize that opposition will be vain—

"As soon as they hear of Me, they shall obey Me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto Me," or as the margin reads, "shall yield feigned obedience" (Psalm xviii. 44).

The same expression occurs in Psalm lxvi. 3—

"Say unto God, How terrible art Thou in Thy works! through the greatness of Thy power shall Thine enemies submit themselves unto Thee," or, "yield feigned obedience" (*margin*).

The works here described are not His works in creation nor redemption, but in judgment, when He rules by His power, subduing the rebellious amongst the nations that would exalt themselves against Him.

THE LAST GREAT BATTLE.

It will be just as necessary for salvation of any during the Millennium to be born again by personal faith in Christ as it is now. Of those who enter that period of earthly bliss in an unsaved condition we are not told if any will be saved or not. But with Satan bound and

Christ and the glorified saints reigning at Jerusalem it would seem hard to think that no heart could be touched. But whether this be so or not when Satan is loosed his baneful influence will soon spread to the remotest corners of the earth. Can it be that sin-burdened conscience and a hostile heart had driven these pretended followers as far as possible from the centre of this earthly kingdom of the Son of man? One thing at least is certain, sinful man will need conversion during that period of bliss as much as now.

Satan that deceiveth the whole world, loosed from his prison, will never again have access to heaven from whence he was cast down (Rev. xii. 9). But he was a murderer from the beginning (John viii. 44), and a murderer he will be to the end. For the believer his power is now broken. Through the death, the sacrificial death, of our adorable Lord and Saviour his power has been destroyed, and myriads of men, women and children have been delivered from fear and bondage (Heb. ii. 14-15).

THE BELOVED CITY.

When cast out of heaven, as he will be just prior to the great Tribulation (Rev. xii.), he knows his time will be short—it will be shorter now as he goes out to deceive the nations and gather them to this last battle in human history. Jerusalem the beloved city, the city over which Christ wept in the days of His humiliation, the city outside whose walls Satan at Calvary had received his death-blow—"that through death He might destroy (annul) him that had the power of death—that is, the devil" (Heb. ii. 14)—that city that will be the centre of earthly blessing (Isaiah ii.) now becomes the object of attack.

THE CAMP OF THE SAINTS.

If the final test is given of men in the four corners of the earth, it must be made manifest that no traitors will be found in the beloved city nor in the camp of the saints. It has been suggested that the camp of the saints is the whole company of the heavenly saints who are as the Lord's host in defence of the earthly Jerusalem.

Whether that be so or not, the attack is futile, for the fire of God's wrath descends upon the invaders and devours them, leaving not even their corpses, as had been the case when "the Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold" (Isaiah xxxvii. 36). No trace of them will be left on earth. The age-long rebel of God and deceiver of men was cast into the lake of fire.

THE GREAT DECEIVER.

From the beginning of man's history Satan exerted all his efforts to destroy him. "The Serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety" (2 Cor. xi. 3). By reason of his rebellion against the Most High he is doomed to the eternal judgment of hell—a hell prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. xxv. 41). Hell has not been prepared for men, but Satan the great deceiver has for 6,000 years exercised his deadly power over the human race—he "deceiveth the whole world" (Rev. xii. 9).

At the close of chapter xix. we have seen the awful doom of two real men, the Beast and the False Prophet. Taken red-handed and banded together against Christ as He appears in His majesty and glory they are cast alive into the lake of fire, where it is stated absolutely they will still be a thousand years later (Rev. xx. 10). There the great deceiver will also be, and there "for ever and ever." Whatever some may say as to the fire, whether material or symbolic, God would impress upon the mind the awful fact of the reality of a place of punishment, and a condition of torment to last throughout eternity. There is no room here for either annihilation or universalism.

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE.

This is the judgment of the dead. In Matt. xxv. we have described the judgment of the living nations who will be gathered before the glorified Son of man before the Millennial reign begins. But this judgment of the Great White Throne will take place after the thousand years are finished. No true believer will stand amongst that resurrected company. The dead in Christ had all been raised in glory before the thousand years began. These others are "the rest of the dead" that do not rise until the thousand years are finished (Rev. xx. 5).

THE BOOKS WERE OPENED.

The scene here described will take place in eternity. Time conditions will be over. The earth and heaven, such as we now know them, will have fled away. This is the resurrection of judgment, the resurrection of those who have lived and died in their sins (John v. '29). The resurrection of life had taken place a thousand years before. It will be a judgment of strictest equity—"according to their works." The books contain the record of their lives. This will be the evidence of their guilt.

Some may ask, But will not all, believers and unbelievers, be judged according to their works? Nay, verily; the believer in Christ will not come into a judgment of that kind (John v. 24). Three things are here stated as to every true believer.

1. Hath everlasting life.
2. Shall not come into judgment.
3. Passed from death unto life.

How different for the unbeliever. Long forgotten sins will appal his memory—"the books were opened." There, as we have said, is the positive record of a guilty past. It will be an individual judgment—"every man according to his works."

THE BOOK OF LIFE.

But there is another book—the Book of Life. Does that book contain the name of any unbeliever? How can it? It is only those who hear and believe whose names are found in the Book of Life.

WRITTEN IN THE BOOKS.

The Devil, the great deceiver of mankind, has succeeded—alas, too well!—in blotting out of man's mind all thought of a coming day of judgment, but God has appointed that day and ordained the Judge. There will be a resurrection of judgment as well as one of life. The resurrection of life had taken place a thousand years before at the coming of the Lord. Not one of those then to be raised will be judged "according to their works." They could each one point to the ordained Judge and say, "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

'Tis done, the great transaction's done!
I am my Lord's and He is mine.

The certainty of coming judgment is looked upon by many as an exploded theory. "Death ends all" is the Devil's slogan; but death itself will cease to be. At the first resurrection "death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. xv. 54), that will introduce the Millennium (see Isaiah xxv. 8), but at its close death will be destroyed (1 Cor. xv. 26). "Death (the body) and hades (the soul) were cast into the lake of fire." This refers to the wicked dead, proved guilty according to their works. This is the second death.

Whilst there will be some who will never die even once, for they will be amongst "we which are alive and remain" (1 Thess. iv. 17), there will be others who will die twice, physically and judicially.

This closes the seven thousand year history of human sin, the eternal state is to follow—a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE ETERNAL STATE.

Revelation xxi. 1-9.

From chapter xix. to xxi. 8 is one consecutive account of the tremendous events that follow upon the downfall of "that great city, Babylon, that mighty city."

Babylon of Revelation xvii. seems to portray that great religious system that commits spiritual fornication with the kings and inhabitants of the earth.

Babylon of Revelation xviii. depicts the same system from a commercial point of view.

They will both have their centre of importance and influence in Rome—ecclesiastical and geographical—but their ramifications will spread far and wide throughout the earth.

The events that have been described in chapters xix. and xx. may be briefly summarised as follows—

1. Babylon judged—Rev. xvii. and xviii.
2. The Marriage of the Lamb—xix. 1-9.
3. Christ's glorious appearing—xix. 11-16.
4. Overthrow and final doom of the Beast and False Prophet—xix. 17-20.
5. The kings of the earth and their armies slain—xix. 21.
6. Satan bound—xx. 1-3.
7. Reign of Christ and the glorified saints for 1,000 years—xx. 4-6.
8. Satan loosed from his prison; Gog and Magog revolt—xx. 7, 8.
9. Rebellion crushed—xx. 9.
10. Satan eternally disposed of—xx. 10.
11. The Great White Throne judgment of the wicked dead—xx. 11-15.

The close of the Millennium carries us down to the end of the 7,000 years of man's earthly history. We take no account of the wild guesses of modern science. The speculative theories of evolution have become largely discounted even in the eyes of their former votaries. The stubborn facts of archæology as they are constantly being disembowelled from the earth are evidencing the accuracy of Biblical history.

Nearly 6,000 years have already run their course. They may be roughly divided into three parts. First 2,000 years carries us from the re-making of the earth as man's *habitat* to Abraham. This we might call the Gentile history, and is largely individual.

Second 2,000 years carries us from Abraham to Christ. This is Jewish history and is national.

Third 2,000 years from Calvary possibly to the Rapture. This is Church history—a new creation where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but one body called out from both Jew and Gentile.

The signs of the times and the close study of Scripture lead many to believe that the coming of the Lord is at hand. One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, thus six of these days are just about to end. Will the next day of a thousand years be the Millennium—the day of the Lord? It will come in as a thief in the night, and at its close the earth and heavens which are now will pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat (2 Peter iii.). In view of the awful terror of that day an urgent appeal should go forth. Mercy is offered to all—salvation by grace through faith, the free gift of God, and not by works of man's righteousness. Yes, mercy is offered to each and all, only deliberate rejectors will be lost.

To return, the six symbolic days of man's history have been thus described:—

“Six days formed man's day, namely, two days to show man without law, two days to show man under law, and two days to show man under grace—two witnesses of each great fact, and, in each, two prominent personal witnesses: Enoch and Noah, Moses and Elijah, Christ and the Holy Ghost. In each, one was taken up into heaven and the other testified on earth. But the seventh day, the day of the Lord, introduced as with the stealthy and sudden approach of a thief, and ending by the dissolution of all things, will be for the display of *all God's ways and purposes and counsels* IN THE MAN—HIS MAN—THE SECOND MAN—THE LORD JESUS—JEHOVAH'S FELLOW” (Hartridge).

A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH.

The first eight verses of Rev. xxi. run on as we have said, consecutively from chapter xx. They are a description of eternity. The eternal state is different from everything that has preceded.

The earth and the heavens that are now are said to be dissolved, pass away, melt with fervent heat, fled away (2 Pet. iii.; Rev. xx. 11). What then are we to understand by a new heaven and a new earth? The heavens here spoken of are the *earth*-heavens, and not "the heaven of heavens" where God dwells. Dissolution does not involve extinction. Some have asked, Does a new earth mean a new creation, or is it re-modelling? We are told that God rested on the seventh day from all His works. Those were works of creation, and they were "finished from the foundation of the world" (Hebrews iv. 3). On the other hand we read, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work" (John v. 17-21). But these were works of grace.

The dissolution of the earth and heavens at the close of the Millennium is a catastrophe likened in 2 Peter iii. to the overflowing of the earth with water at the flood—"the world that then was being overflowed with water perished," but this did not mean annihilation, for as the water of the flood receded "in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dried" (Genesis viii. 14). It was the same earth but renewed, and God swore "that the waters of Noah should no more go over it" (Isaiah liv. 9).

Yet the language of Rev. xxi. 1 seems to go beyond a re-modelling of the present earth—"the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." We leave to our readers the further study of this most interesting question.

NO MORE SEA.

It is clear that more must be understood by the new heaven and the new earth than anything that had preceded in Millennial condition. In Isaiah lx. we are told that the sea and shipping will have a great deal to do with Palestine and the Jewish people—

"the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee. . . .

"Surely the isles shall wait for Me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and gold with them" (Isaiah lx. 5, 9).

That will be during the Millennium. But in the eternal state there will be no sea—no separation of nations, no boundaries of countries. For there will be no nations distinct the one from the other—not even Jews and Gentiles in their separate national condition, but simply “man” as such.

It will be unlike everything that has been seen or known throughout the history of the world. On the new earth there will not be two classes, the saved and the unsaved, as there are now. In the new earth, as well as heaven, divine righteousness will dwell. Throughout the Millennium the earth will be governed in righteousness, but in the eternal state will be experienced the full force of the words, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John i. 29).

All the population of the new earth will have been born and born again in the old earth. The first eight verses of our chapter describe what will be the unchanging condition of things throughout eternity as far as is possible for us to conceive. All distinctions such as Jew and Gentile will have ceased—

“the tabernacle of God is with men and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God” (verse 3).

The mediatorial kingdom of the Son will have ceased, and God will be “all in all” (1 Cor. xv. 28). But though national distinctions will have ceased, and though there will not be then, as is the case now, the people of God as distinct from the other inhabitants of the earth, yet there will be throughout eternity, a distinction between what is earthly and what is heavenly.

“I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (verse 2).

Interesting and important questions at once arise with reference to the city and the Bride. These we may consider later on. But here it is worthy of careful attention that a thousand years before this descent out of heaven, the marriage of the Lamb had taken place as described in Revelation xix. A further and detailed description of the Bride, the Lamb’s wife, is given in our chapter from verse 9 onward.

The holy city, the new Jerusalem, the Bride remain in all their beauty and glory, untarnished by 1,000 years. The Bride is something dear to the heart of the Lamb, the Lamb that had suffered at Calvary. The passing of 1,000 years does not diminish her beauty in His sight, nor alter one whit the love that led Him to die and suffer for her.

It does not seem that the holy city, new Jerusalem, actually comes down to earth. She shines with the glory of God (Rev. xxi. 11), and the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it (verse 24). That will be throughout the Millennium. In verses 2 to 8 is given a beautiful description of the link between the heavenly tabernacle of God and mankind upon the earth—no more weeping eyes, no more dying agony, no more sorrow, no more pain; these former things, the fruit of sin, will have passed away for ever.

“He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.”

Impossible as it is for us with our limited powers to appreciate the full import of the brief description of the eternal state here given, yet it is written for us to read, and read again. And the words are true and faithful. Every word might well detain us. As it was when God first brought all things into existence in the past—“He spake, and it was done” (Psalm xxxiii. 9)—so in this final creation the words go forth—“He said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.”

In that new creation all soul-thirst will be satisfied with the streams that flow freely from the fountain of the water of life. And though there will be a countless multitude in that new earth, yet each one has his or her individual experience, each one will drink of the water of life for himself, and each one will have reached the rest that remains for the people of God by a path of individual conflict and victory, for the path of the saints of God has never been an easy one.

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things: and I will be his God, and he shall be My son” (verse 7).

What is true of the redeemed as a whole (verse 3) will be the experience of each individual (verse 7) in that day. Awful indeed will be the portion of those who deliberately reject God's salvation freely offered to all.

Another has written, "Just here, with no less earnestness, and in eternity, past all the change of time, the doom of the wicked is pronounced: but the fearful—too cowardly to take part with Christ in a world opposed to Him,—and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Grant).

The time to make the fateful choice is NOW, on this side of death.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE BRIDE, THE LAMB'S WIFE.

Revelation xxi. 9-27.

It is of great importance that we should understand that the first eight verses of this chapter are a description of the eternal state, and that at verse 9 the Holy Spirit goes back to give a detailed picture of the new Jerusalem and the Bride, the Lamb's Wife in her millennial connection.

There has been much diversity of opinion amongst earnest Bible students with reference to the Bride. Is it something Jewish or Christian? And if either, is it something selective from each? Or, is it a select combination out of both?

Evidently the Bride must be understood in a figurative manner, for in Rev. xxi. 2, John sees the holy city, new Jerusalem, prepared "as a bride." Further, this figure is found in the Old Testament as well as in the New. This has led some to affirm that there will be an earthly as well as a heavenly Bride, just as there will be an earthly Jerusalem as well as the heavenly. The earthly Jerusalem, during the Millennium, will be the metropolis of saved Israel, the beloved city (xx. 9), in the land of Palestine. This clearly will be Jewish.

ARE THERE TWO BRIDES.

Another has written:—

"In the Old Testament these figures of marriage are used. Israel was Jehovah's married wife (Isaiah liv. 1; Jeremiah xxxi. 32), now divorced indeed for her unfaithfulness, but yet to return (Hosea ii.), and be received and reinstated. Her Maker will be then once more her husband and more than the old blessing be restored. In the forty-fifth psalm, Israel's king, Messiah, is the Bridegroom; the Song of Solomon is the mystic song of His espousals. Jerusalem thus heard His name—"this is the name whereby He shall be called, Jehovah, our righteousness" (Jer. xxxiii. 16, *c/f.* xxiii. 6). The land, too, shall be married (Isa. lxii. 4).

"In the New Testament the same figure is still used in the same way. The Baptist speaks of his joy as 'the friend of the Bridegroom' in hearing the Bridegroom's voice (John iii. 29), and in the parable of the virgins (Matt. xxv.), where Christians are those who go forth to meet the Bridegroom, they are by that very fact not regarded as the Bride, which is still Israel (according to the general character of the prophecy).

"All this, therefore, is in that earthly sphere in which Israel's blessings lie; our own are 'in *heavenly* places' (Eph. i. 3), and here it is we find, not the Bride of Messiah simply, but distinctively 'the Bride of the Lamb.' The 'Lamb' as a title always keeps before us His death, and that by violence,—'a Lamb as it had been *slain*' (Rev. v. 6),—and it is thus that He has title to that redemptive empire in which we find Him throughout this book. But 'the Bride of the Lamb' is thus one espoused to Him in His rejection and shares (though it be in slight measure) in His reproach and sorrow" (Grant).

The Old Testament Bride (Psalm xlv.) is associated with Christ as triumphant Messiah with girded sword, riding in majestic glory, His enemies falling before Him. But the Bride of Revelation is one associated with a rejected and suffering Lamb. The one is earthly, the other heavenly—the very thing that makes the distinction between Israel and the Church.

THE HARLOT AND THE BRIDE.

On the face of it, it is impossible not to connect Revelation xvii. 1 with Revelation xxi. 9—but this connection is by contrast. In each case one of the vial angels talks with John. In each case, the angel says, "Come hither; I will show unto thee, etc." But how different the vision, how great the contrast! The very similarity of the angelic invitation emphasizes the contrast. A moral wilderness is the viewpoint of Rev. xvii., a high and heavenly mountain that of Rev. xxi. The great Whore in contrast with the spotless Bride of the Lamb. Earthly glory in contrast with the glory of God.

The picture of Revelation xvii. is too clear to need identification—an ecclesiastical system characterised by spiritual fornication with the world, by religious idolatry, and stained with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. If

Rev. xvii. depicts the harlot church, does it not follow that Rev. xxi. describes the true church which Christ loved, and for which He gave Himself?

And what is the Church? Who that reads the epistle to the Ephesians can have the smallest difficulty in answering that question? But the Church has an eternal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ—

“Unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end, Amen” (Eph. iii. 21).

With all deference to others we must state our own firm conviction that the Bride in Revelation xxi. is a term used to describe the relationship of the Church to Christ—not a part of the Church, but the Church in its entirety, including every saved soul from Pentecost to the rapture. Christ loved the Church, we read in Ephesians v. 25—not a part of the Church, and He will present her to Himself “a glorious Church,” that is, the Church in her entirety.

In the passage now under consideration (Rev. xxi. 9—xxii. 5) a picture is drawn before our wondering eyes of the Church in her millennial connection with the earth.

Many figures are used in the New Testament describing the Church—a body (1 Cor. xii. 13; Ephes. i. 23, etc.)—a building, a temple, an holy habitation (Eph. ii. 21, 22); each of these has a most important line of teaching attached to it. Here in Rev. xxi. a different symbol is used, that of a city, but, unlike all human cities which oft-times are scenes of violence, immorality and sin, this is “the HOLY city Jerusalem.” It is *divine* in origin, it comes down from God. It is *heavenly* in character, it comes out of heaven from God. It is *holy* in nature, a moral contrast to man’s great city, Babylon, whether that be a literal or symbolic Babylon.

THE CITY AND THE CHURCH.

It is an interesting question, whether the city and the Bride are co-extensive. That they are very closely connected is clear.

Abraham “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. xi. 10). Vast as Ur of the Chaldees was, and deeply laid as were its foundations, even as present-day excavations are bringing

to light, yet Abraham left all for the path of faith, seeking a better country and a more enduring city, better than a Palestinian Jerusalem, "an heavenly . . ." for God hath prepared for him and the Old Testament saints a city whose builder and maker is God.

Remembering that Pentecost was the birthday of the Church, it is clear that the saints in dispensations that preceded were not incorporated in that. They died in faith (Heb. xi. 13), awaiting the "better resurrection" (xi. 35). The day of realisation of the earthly promises, so far as they were concerned, has been postponed. God having provided some better thing for us of this dispensation, they await their glorified condition until His work of present grace is completed. That work, we believe, is the calling out of the Church, now going on. It will be completed at the rapture. Then all who died in faith in the ages past, along with those who sleep in Jesus during the present dispensation, as well as those alive when He comes, shall be glorified together. This, we believe, is the meaning of Heb. xi. 40. The expression "made perfect" is to be understood in the same sense all through the epistle (see ii. 10; v. 9; vii. 28). In these verses, to be "made perfect" implies to be "glorified."

Whilst *dispensationally* the Church has been provided with better things than they, yet their practical fidelity often puts us to shame.

SINAI AND ZION.

A deeply interesting passage of Scripture comes to our help as showing that the heavenly Jerusalem and the Church are not identically the same, though very closely allied. We refer to Hebrews xii. 22-26.

We (Christians) are not come to the Mount that burned with fire, etc. In other words, we have not come to the law as our ground of relationship with God. Nay, verily, from that we are delivered (Rom. vii. 6).

"Free from the law! O happy condition!"

Jesus hath bled, and **there** is remission!

Cursed by the law, and bruised by the Fall,

Grace hath redeemed us once for all."

No! we are not come to Sinai, but to Mount Zion, the city of sovereign and royal grace. But this introduces a wonderful circle of heavenly blessings which it is our

privilege to behold now by faith, as we shortly shall enter into full possession. And what are they?

1. *Mount Zion.*

These mountains are here used not in a mere geographical sense, but as two distinct principles of relationship with God—Sinai for law, Zion for grace. But this suggests—

2. *The city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.*

In other words, the very city described more fully in Rev. xxi. Associated with that there will be not only sinners saved by grace through faith, but an angelic host.

3. *An innumerable company of angels, the "general assembly."* The divisions of the verses in our Bibles are somewhat misleading. A glance at the Greek shows that the expression "general assembly" refers to the angelic host (ver. 22) and not to "the Church of the first-born ones" (ver. 23).

4. *The Church of the first born* which are written in heaven.

It is not our purpose now to enlarge upon this most interesting passage, but simply to point out the distinction between the "city" (ver. 22) and the "church" (ver. 23). In this inventory of our Christian inheritance here described, they are mentioned as two distinct though closely associated objects.

Turning again to Revelation xxi—it seems that we are intended to understand that the city will be the home of everything heavenly—angels are included, the church is included, "the spirits of just men made perfect," or the saints that died before the Pentecostal change of dispensation—these will all appear in their glorified bodies, "made perfect."

COME, LORD JESUS!

The Bride, the Lamb's wife, will in that transcendent scene of glory hold a position of special nearness to her glorified Lord.

"Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it;

"That he might present it to Himself a glorious church," etc. (Eph. v. 25, 26).

The love of Christ for the Church is beyond a question, but the Church itself is in such a state of ruin that bridal affection for Christ is little understood. Individuals may say, "Come"—but the Bride is a collective term.

As things grow worse and denominational churches fall into apostasy, might not all true Christians hear a separating call, and rally together at the cry, "Come, Lord Jesus" ?

The early Brethren made a genuine attempt at it. This has failed, as everything in which man takes a part has ever done.

It may seem a miracle impossible of accomplishment, but God with whom all things are possible may yet cause every true Christian to cry, Come!

At the very end of the dispensation—the Spirit and the Bride say, COME!

Surely, I come quickly. Amen.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
be with you all. Amen.