

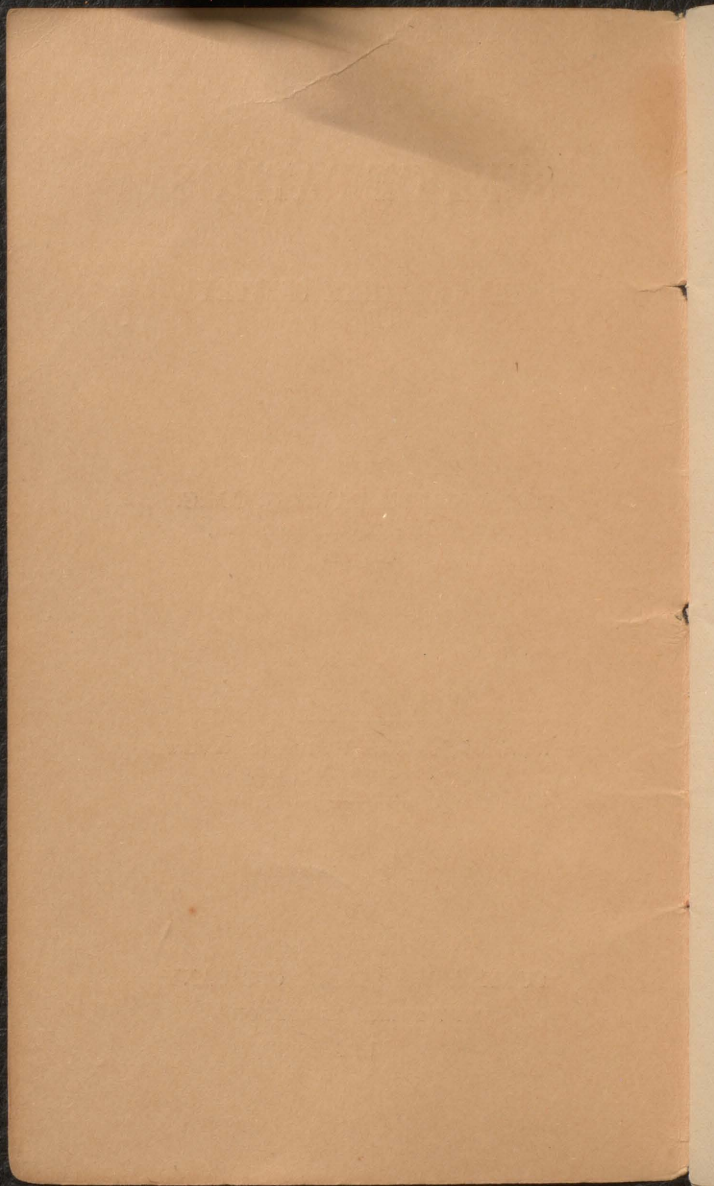
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THE
SEER OF PATMOS
AND
THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

BY
SIR J. WILLIAM DAWSON, C.M.G.,
F.R.S., LL.D., etc., Montreal,
Canada

*Reprinted from THE HOMILETIC REVIEW
for June and July, 1898*

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THE SEER OF PATMOS AND THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

I.

INTRODUCTORY VIEW OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

IN the introductory note which stands at the opening of the book of Revelation (chap. i. 1-3), we read: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." This remark in the introduction is evidently intended to be a stimulant to the study of the book, but the blessing is one that is often missed. It would indeed seem probable that the public reading and hearing of this prophecy is here contemplated; and God Himself thus pronounces a blessing upon both reader and hearer, provided that they "keep"—that is, keep in mind—the words of the prophecy. In view of this special blessing, it seems strange that the book has been so little used in public reading and exposition. Different reasons may be assigned for this; but perhaps most of all its sup-

posed difficulty and obscurity. Yet it is so much a book of pictures that even children may be interested in it; but they are likely to ask some hard questions, which the reader might not find it easy to answer.

It is surely a happy as well as an honorable thing to be introduced by the "sure word of prophecy" into the councils of God, and to know even in outline His great plans for the future of His people and of the world. It is also a happy thing to be forewarned of the times of trial that may be in store, before the final triumph of truth and righteousness. This blessing it is that is promised the readers and hearers of this prophecy. A special reason is also given, however, intended to interest the contemporaries of the writer of the book—"For the time is at hand." Some have supposed that this means that the whole prophecy extends only over a few years, and does not reach to the end of the present age; while others, despite of this intimation, have supposed that the beginning of the more important predictions is to be looked for very long after the time of the Apostle John. It seems more reasonable to believe that, however long the time covered by the prophecy, the beginning of its fulfilment was to be looked for at no distant date from the

time at which it was written. But we must now consider the time and circumstances of the writing of the book.

JOHN IN PATMOS.

Toward the close of the first century of our era,* the Roman Emperor Domitian, brother and successor of Titus, the captor of Jerusalem, began a widespread persecution of the Christians. The rapid spread of the new religion throughout the Empire may have led him to apprehend that it might be turned to political purposes, injurious to the integrity of the Empire itself. It might even lead to a repetition, on a far larger scale, of a fanatical rebellion like that of the Jews, which had been suppressed with so great difficulty. He may also have been irritated by the conversion of persons belonging to noble Roman families, among whom was his own relation, Domitilla, and her husband, Clemens; whose children it was supposed at one time that he intended to adopt, had not their parents become tainted with this "foreign superstition." Clemens had been executed and Domitilla banished; and it is not wonderful that other adherents of the new faith should come in for simi-

* For evidence of date, see Elliott's "Horæ Apocalypticæ," vol. i.; or Barnes's "Commentary on Revelation," Introduction, § II.

lar treatment. Perhaps the most leading figure in the Christian church of the time was that of the aged Apostle John, the last survivor of the original apostles, the respected and influential leader of the numerous and increasing Christian communities of Asia Minor. He might have been more effectually got rid of by the sword of the executioner; but possibly no legal pretext could be found, or disturbance might be feared. He was therefore arrested and transported, to be held in durance as a prisoner in the isle of Patmos during life or the pleasure of the Emperor. Being a very aged man and one held in great consideration by his many disciples, it is likely he was treated with some leniency, and not subjected to the labors which may have been imposed on other convicts. We learn, indeed, from his own statements and from the work which he accomplished, that some at least of his time was at his own disposal.

The little rocky island of Patmos, only about eight miles in length, belongs to the group in the *Ægean* Sea anciently called Sporades. I have not landed on it, but as seen from the sea it seems like a half-submerged volcanic cone, consisting of hard ledges of dark, igneous rock. The bay or harbor, with steep, hilly shores, on one side of the

isle, may be the crater of the old volcano filled with water—as is the case on a larger scale in Santorin and other islands in this sea. John introduces himself to us as being in the isle of Patmos, “for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ,” and as being thus a partaker with those to whom he writes, “in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.” It is not unlikely that the island was used as a place of safe-keeping for certain select suspects or criminals, guarded by a small detachment of soldiers.

Domitian had separated John from his brethren and disciples in Asia, but not from his Divine Master nor from the indwelling Spirit of God. Thus while the Apostle was unable to pursue his work as an evangelist and teacher in Asia, he became instrumental in producing the great prophetic book of the New Testament, which was destined to be a guide and solace to Christians all over the world down to the end of time. The circumstances remind one of the origin of a later and very different book, tho one that borrows many of its choicest figures from this. When the Bedford justices detained John Bunyan for so many years in Bedford jail, they no doubt prevented him from preaching to the peo-

ple of the town; but they were unconscious instruments toward enabling him to produce the great allegory which has carried his name, and the truths they feared, throughout the whole world. Thus Domitian and the Bedford magistrates, without knowing it, indirectly contributed to the production of the Apocalypse and the "Pilgrim's Progress." So it happens both in private lives and the history of the church, that the devil and his agents, if left to themselves, often take the surest means to defeat in the end their own plans.

IN THE SPIRIT ON THE LORD'S DAY,

The Apostle John was a man eminently endowed with spiritual gifts and graces, and habitually led by the Spirit of God; yet he was still in the flesh, and of like passions with ourselves, and it would not be wonderful that he should be distressed by his abrupt removal from his friends in Asia, and by his confinement in a place like Patmos, where there would also be many discomforts and possibly some rough and unpleasant associates. We would not even need to be surprised if insults or injuries on the part of his guards might sometimes revive the embers of that hot temper which in younger days caused him to suggest

that Jesus should take vengeance on the churlish men who refused them hospitality. However this may be, the Apostle could in exile and loneliness be raised by the Divine Spirit above all outward cares and annoyances. He expresses this by saying that he was "in the Spirit," or entirely absorbed in the contemplation of spiritual things. He might have said "filled with the Spirit"; but the form used was perhaps in contrast to the statement of the locality, "in Patmos." He was "in the isle that is called Patmos" by the sentence of Domitian, but "in the Spirit" by the grace of God; and so mentally removed, for the time at least, far from the place of his banishment. In Patmos he was a solitary prisoner; in the Spirit he was associated with the heavenly Zion, with an innumerable company of angels, and with the spirits of just men made perfect; and he was soon to be visited by the glorified Jesus. Thus the indwelling of the Spirit brings more than compensation for all earthly privations. On the particular occasion referred to, he had this privilege on the Lord's Day, that is, on the first day of the week, the usual time of Christian assemblies to commemorate the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The term Lord's Day (*Kuriaké hēmera*) here first occurs in the New Testament. Previously it is the "first day of the week," and questions have arisen as to the reason of its occurrence here. The early Christians were too much occupied with more serious matters to give much attention to names. They were content to be the Disciples, the Brethren, or even the Way, until the sharp-witted people of Antioch called them Christians; nor were they desirous to give unnecessary offense to the unconverted Jews, who would have been annoyed by the institution of a whole day in honor of Christ as a Christian Sabbath in opposition to the seventh-day Sabbath of the Jews. If a few Christians met on the first day of the week to sing hymns in honor of Jesus Christ and to commemorate His death and resurrection, it might attract little attention; but if they had set this whole day apart as sacred to Christ, that would have been a different matter.

The germ, however, of the Lord's Day, properly so called, is already contained in the discussion of the Divine rest or Sabbatism, in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews; which probably dates from about the time of Paul's martyrdom in the reign of Nero. In this chapter there is a

comparison of God's rest or Sabbatism at the close of creation, in which man failed to continue because of the Fall, and the rest into which the Redeemer entered at the close of His work on earth. The latter of these is held to be the true spiritual Sabbatism which remaineth for the people of God, and into which they are to enter at last. This would really give preeminence to the day of Resurrection over that which commemorates the close of creation. This idea may, under the guidance of the Divine Spirit, have been independently entertained by the Apostle John. In any case, the reasoning in the Epistle to the Hebrews must have been widely known in the Christian churches before the time of Domitian.

Another cause may also have tended to give currency to the term Lord's Day. After the capture of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, and the consequent interruption to the regular sequence of Jewish sabbatims and festivals at their headquarters, it would be very natural to carry into practise the suggestion in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and to convert the first day of the week into a Christian Sabbath under this appropriate title. It might thus be that, in writing to the churches of Asia, John

might use the expression Lord's Day as one already well understood by them.

Tradition has assigned to John a cave in Patmos as the scene of the revelation communicated * to him; but we may perhaps rather imagine a sea-cliff or headland looking over the sea toward the shores of Asia, where the friends he had left would probably be at this very time engaged in their Lord's-Day services. If the mind of the Apostle thus turned toward the scene of his later labors, he would rejoice and give thanks as he thought of the love and fervor of these Christian assemblies, and their joy in communion with one another and with their Divine Head. But he had also to think that in such a time of persecution their assemblies might be rudely broken up, and pains and penalties inflicted on their members. They were also subjected to temptations by false brethren and by innovators seeking to defile the purity of the Gospel. Such thoughts might well lead him to earnest prayer on behalf of these churches, and of such of their members and officers as were personally known to him. We may well believe that such prayer

* The revelation was *from* GOD to CHRIST; and John was merely a third party or accessory in the matter (see chap. i. 1).

would accord with the mind* of the Holy Spirit who animated the Apostle.†

So much for the present; but the thoughts of the Spirit extend over the past and future also, as parts of the Divine program. John's mind, following this guidance, may readily have gone back to the day, more than sixty years before, when he and his brother James had left their father Zebedee with his boat and nets on the shore of the Lake of Galilee, and had accepted the invitation of Jesus to become "fishers of men." His mind would follow on to that other day when he had seen the Master ascend into heaven from the side of the Mount of Olives near Bethany, and had heard the angels' promise that He would return even as He had departed—a promise not yet fulfilled, but a supreme object of Christian hope, tho the time was as uncertain to John in Patmos as at any previous period of his life.

Other predictions of Jesus had already been fulfilled. He had said that His kingdom was to grow from the likeness of a grain of mustard-seed to be a great tree; and this seemed already

* See Rom. viii. 27. The Spirit is not said to "join" in "our" prayers.

† The personal circumstances of John are introduced to illustrate the appropriateness of the revelation to him and the position of affairs at the time.

to have taken place in the great extension of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, and especially among the Gentiles, great numbers of whom already rejoiced under its shadow.

John had also walked in that triumphal procession which had escorted Jesus into Jerusalem with cries of hosannah; and at the turn of the road down the Mount of Olives, where the Temple and city of Jerusalem came into full view, he had seen the Lord pause and the tears arise in His eyes, as He mourned over the approaching desolation of the city, because it had rejected Him and failed to see the day of its merciful visitation. He had also been present when Jesus had predicted that not a stone of the Temple would be left upon another, and had intimated that this would take place before the generation of men then living had past away. In the more mournful procession to the crucifixion, John had also heard Him warn the women of Jerusalem of the miseries that were coming on themselves and their children.

All this had been fulfilled in John's own lifetime: Jerusalem and its Temple had been swept away and the Jewish nationality, for the time, utterly subverted by the avenging sword of Rome. But other prophecies given to apostles since the ascension of Jesus

referred to still future and greater events, before the Lord should return to establish His kingdom.

The Apostle Paul, at the close of his early missionary journeys in Europe, had been instructed to warn his Thessalonian converts against any fallacious hopes of the immediate return of Christ; because before that event there must occur a "falling away" or apostasy, and the revelation of a Man of Sin, posing as God in the Christian temple, and opposing and exalting himself above all that is called God or that is worshipt. This evil power would therefore seek to replace the true God in all His persons, powers, and attributes relatively to the salvation of men, and so to corrupt entirely the whole Christian system. Paul does not give the details; but if one asks how this could be done, it will perhaps be best understood by regarding the Godhead as consisting of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each with His own powers and functions, tho all working together in the plan of redemption. If the Man of Sin could cause himself to be recognized as head of the church—thus superseding Christ, its vital and true Head—the way would be open to all his other pretensions. John, who in his first epistle refers to the same evil power,

calls him Antichrist—that is, vice-Christ, deputy Christ, vicar of Christ; and these pretensions, he says, deny the Father as well as the Son; for in the work of man's salvation the Father and the Son are one. The Father is, however, more explicitly denied when the Man of Sin professes to pardon sin, a function especially of the Father, since in regard to it the Son Himself appears as advocate and intercessor, rather than as judge. More especially also does this evil power oppose the Son, when he assumes (or presumes) to offer sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin; and to work miracles, or "lying wonders," as Paul calls them, in support of his claims. Lastly, the Holy Spirit is the revealer of the Word of God for man's salvation; and the Man of Sin might usurp His place by representing himself as infallible in matters of doctrine. This might, however, be his last and crowning iniquity, and might bring down upon him some special mark of Divine displeasure, since it is said that blasphemy against the Holy Ghost will not be forgiven.

It was further intimated by Paul that this evil power could not fully manifest itself until an influence that then hindered should be taken out of the way; and this was understood to be the heathen Roman Empire, which

would not permit the rise of a nominally Christian power.

In the years intervening between Paul's letters to the Thessalonians and the exile of the aged John, the Roman imperial system had shown no signs of decadence; and was even then persecuting the Christians, and so leaving no space for the development of unholy ambition in the church. No doubt, as Tacitus and Juvenal had shown, there was even in the time of John political and social corruption so great that sagacious observers might predict a collapse of the whole under the weight of its own wickedness. The Empire had also extended so widely that it was beginning to show signs of weakness at its extremities. The Parthians on the east, and the Dacians and other rude peoples on the north, had already gained advantages over its outlying posts. But neither danger seemed imminent; and thus the hindering power, as revealed to Paul, was still in the way of the manifestation of the apostasy.

Nor was there any certain information as to the duration of the Man of Sin when he should come. If he were the same with the "little horn," predicted by Daniel as to arise from his fourth wild beast, representing the Roman Empire, his time was stated to be 1,260 days. If these were literal days,

his duration would be very short; but if prophetic days, a day for a year, then very long.* Nor in this case could he be an individual man, but must be a succession of men holding the same office or rule.† These and other questions relating to the future of Christianity and the second coming of Christ may well have caused the Apostle to pray earnestly to his heavenly Master for greater light. If he did so, his prayer, supported by the intercession of the Spirit, was speedily answered.

His reverie was interrupted by a great voice, which in loudness he compares to the sound of a trumpet, altho it was perfectly articulate. It commands him to write in a book what he should see, and to send it to

* See Ezek. iv. 5, 6, and Dan. ix. 25, 26. In this latter prophecy the period is given from the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem after the Captivity to the Messiah, and this was fulfilled exactly as a day for a year, which furnishes the strongest proof in favor of this year-day principle in prophecy.

† The use of a singular or personal term is again in accord with prophetic usage. Daniel says to Nebuchadnezzar, "*Thou* art this head of gold," meaning the Babylonian succession of kings; and again, it is said in explanation to Daniel, "These great beasts . . . are *four kings*," meaning four successive dynasties or lines of kings (see Dan. ii. 38, 39, and vii. 17).

the seven churches of Asia, in which he was chiefly interested. The voice came from behind him, and on turning to see whence it proceeded, John saw not the rocks of Patmos, but a temple scene resembling perhaps the Holy Place of the now-perisht Temple at Jerusalem. It was lighted by seven lamps, supported on golden lamp-holders; and in the midst of these was a glorious vision of the ascended Redeemer, in His heavenly aspect.

He was "clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. And his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto burnisht brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: . . . and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever more, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter" (Rev. i. 13-19, R. V.).

John could scarcely fail to recognize some points of resemblance between his Divine visitor and the transfigured Jesus he had seen long before on a mountain in Galilee; or between Him

and the glorious personage who appeared to the Prophet Daniel on the bank of the river Hiddekel, to inform him of the details of the troublous times awaiting His people on the break-up of the third or Macedonian form of the four great Gentile empires (Dan. x. 5, 6). But John is explicitly informed that it is the glorified Jesus he has seen, and who proposes to communicate to him things present and things to come, for the information and guidance of the churches.

THE EPISTLES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES,
AND THINGS THAT ARE.

ON these epistles, I offer only a few cursory remarks. The churches addressed were probably principal ones in Asia, and those with which John himself was most intimately connected, and such also as would serve as types of Christian churches in other times and places. The epistles themselves, from the connection and their place in the book, seem to belong primarily to "the things which are," and to have no continuous prophetic character. The seven lamps, representing these seven churches, are placed on independent stands, unlike the seven-branched candlestick in the Jewish Temple, to show that the real connection of Christian

churches is not national or earthly, but through the one Divine Head, the great High Priest, who walks in the midst of them. The symbolism of the several epistles is very rich and beautiful, and is connected with the features ascribed in previous verses to the glorified person of Jesus.

The word "angel," at the opening of the epistles, may mean simply messenger, and is by no means restricted to heavenly messengers, and certainly does not apply to any church officer. At this time the banishment of John was drawing to a close, as his liberty was restored on the death of Domitian, then imminent. On his return to Ephesus with these epistles communicated to him by Christ Himself, he would readily find Christian men willing to be messengers to carry them to the various churches designated; which was the usual means employed in previous letters to churches, written by Paul and other of the apostles. (See Paul's epistles for evidence; also 1 Peter 5:12).

"THE THINGS TO COME TO PASS HERE-
AFTER."

The Epistles to the Churches of his own time having been completed, John is next to receive revelations respecting the future, or "the things

which must come to pass hereafter" (Rev. iv. 1). He sees a door opened in heaven, and the same commanding voice which he had heard at first invites him to enter. Accordingly he is transferred in the spirit to what may be called the Court of the Almighty in heaven. Here he sees a throne on which is seated one whom he compares to "a jasper and a sardine stone"; evidently not the stone which we call jasper, but some brilliant and transparent crystalline gem—if not diamond, then perhaps topaz or beryl. Nothing is said of the form or lineaments of Him that sat on the throne. (Compare Ezek. i. 26.) Round about the throne, and surrounding those nearer to it, there stand innumerable angels who form an outer or limiting circle, extending apparently as far as the view could reach. These the seer speaks of as ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands—numbers of course beyond his reckoning. Immediately before the throne is a sea or pavement of glass, clear as crystal; and seated round about the throne are twenty-four glorified Elders, representing perhaps the Prophets or Apostles of the Old and New Testaments. Nearer still to the throne there are four Living Creatures or Cherubim, having animal and human features,

and wings, and full of eyes.* But the most remarkable personality here is a Lamb, who stands "in the midst of the throne," nearer than all the other beings around, and in immediate proximity to Him who sits on the throne. Strange tho it may at first appear, this Lamb in the midst of the throne is the Son of God, the Redeemer; and identical with the glorified high-priestly personage in the opening vision. The glorified human form represents Him as the Advocate and Intercessor; while the Lamb designates Christ as the atoning sacrifice, and here it represents Him also as the Agent in prophetic revelation.

John now sees a book or roll in the hand of Him who sits on the throne, which is understood to explain the Divine hand in human history, overruling and guiding it; chastening and reproving in the interest of His Church, and in preparation for the establishment of the kingdom of Christ. But this roll is sealed closely with seven seals, and no one can be found who has power to open the seals and disclose its contents. John is greatly distressed at

* From what is said of these Living Creatures, they seem to represent a wider view of life as included in the domain of God in this world, than that of humanity alone. See "Eden Lost and Won"; by the Author; chap. x. (The Restoration).

this apparent failure to realize his prophetic hopes; but at length the Lamb advances, takes the roll from the hand of God, and proceeds to open its seals. Thereupon the whole heavenly host bursts forth in a rapturous doxology, address to Him who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb; and especially to the latter, who has redeemed men by His own blood, and has thereby acquired the right to reveal to them the purposes of the Almighty. This has been well called the Great Inaugural Hymn of the Apocalypse; and it is certainly a magnificent introduction to the specially prophetic part of the book. It shows besides the conception of the Atonement from the standpoint of Heaven, and the efficacy of the blood of Christ in cleansing men from their sins, and giving them the consequent blessings which this includes. The white-robed multitude above are well aware that it is only through the merit of that blood that they have reached the temple of God. One of the Elders explains that "these are they who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; and *therefore* are they before the throne of God" (chap. vii. 14, 15). Next to the strong doctrinal statements of Paul, and of Christ Himself, this is perhaps the strongest testimony in the Bible to

these great facts; and warrants the statements of faith and hope on these points in some of our finest and most popular hymns.

II.

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

I may follow up these introductory remarks with a brief outline of the scope and meaning of the Book of Revelation considered as a historical prophecy. In doing so I would desire to avoid any dogmatism, and to offer the outline as a suggestion to be followed up by study on the part of the thoughtful reader, with the aid of the references given to works in which the points toucht upon are more fully explained.

The structure of the book from the point at which "things which must be hereafter" are mentioned (chap. iv. 1), is sufficiently plain on its face. The Seals give a series of views of the coming events down to the fall of the heathen Roman Empire; and the seventh Seal, instead of presenting a new scene, introduces the seven angels with the seven Trumpets (chap. viii. 1, 2). In the same way the seventh Trumpet introduces the seven angels with the seven Vials, which form the closing series of judgments prior to the Millen-

nium. This is the general sequence of the Book, which is, however, interrupted, in chapters xii. to xiv., by the parallel history of the Church, beginning with a retrospect as far back as the birth of the Savior. This may fairly be regarded as the writing on the other side of the roll, as it is stated in chap. v. 1 that the roll is "written within and on the back side."

We take the Seals to depict the successive stages in the Roman Empire in its relation to Christianity, down to the time of Constantine, when the political and religious heavens of the then world were rolled up as a scroll, and the triumph of the Lamb was openly acknowledged. The "hinderer" referred to by the Apostle Paul (in 2 Thess. ii. 7, 8) is thus removed out of the way; and the Christianized empire is left to be the scene of the development of the Apostasy. The reasons for the above interpretation are well and fully given in Elliott's "*Horæ Apocalypticæ*," Introduction, chap. v., and Part I., chaps. i.-vii.

I take the Trumpets to include the period of God's judgments or chastisements on the visible Church, now lapsing into apostasy. We now find it is spoken of as consisting of three parts, which correspond to the Western and Eastern Church and the former African

provinces of the old Roman Empire. The western portion subdivided later into the ten independent powers, which are still represented by the leading nations of Europe. In the west, the power of the Church was centered in Rome, Papal, which dominated over the civil powers by taking advantage of the divisions between them.

The woes symbolized by the Trumpets were largely of the nature of invasions by Asiatic peoples, who were often able, in the power of a purer tho mistaken faith, to stigmatize the worship of the Christians as idolatrous. In describing the conquering advances of the Turkmans and Tartars, the infidel historian Gibbon notes more than once with unveiled surprise the way in which the conquerors retired of their own accord or were turned back by some trivial circumstance. This to the historian is quite inexplicable; but in Revelation it is emphasized, that in the counsels of God these woes were restricted either to some one part of Christendom, or to a limited period of time. (See chap. viii. 9 and chap. ix. 5, 15.) For the detailed exposition of the Trumpet Woes, we may again refer to Elliott's work, Part II., chaps. i.-iv.; in which Gibbon's History is frequently quoted as forming a striking commentary on the period in question.

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These woes continue down to the time of the Reformation Angel, described in the tenth chapter,—a description so plain that its meaning is very generally recognized by commentators.

Following immediately upon the Reformation, a period of trouble ensues; which is represented historically by the wars and massacres in which Rome made a supreme endeavor to crush the Reformation, and succeeded in doing so in several countries. These struggles lasted for more than a century, but finally ended with treaties of peace (about 1699) with the countries which Rome had failed to reduce to submission.

The break in the sequence already referred to then occurs; in which the situation is reviewed from the beginning from the vantage-ground of the Reformation; and the true character of the Apostasy is then made manifest, and is described in detail. This occupies chapters xii. to xiv.; and the sequence is resumed in chapter xv., which details, under the symbolism of the Vials or sacrificial bowls, the later judgments on the Apostasy and its adherents, and on the nations supporting it. These "last woes" thus extend from the later Reformation times to the introduction of the Millennium.

In the Vial series, as detailed in

chapter xvi., a few of the prominent points may be usefully noted, in their bearing on the times in which we live. The first two Vials are generally understood to typify the outbreak of infidelity about the middle of the eighteenth century, and its culmination in the French Revolution. The import of this Revolution, as affecting the relation of Catholic countries to the Papal See, deserves to be more clearly recognized. Instead of remaining under its absolute jurisdiction, they then rose to an equality with it; and ever since have framed concordats with Rome, thus asserting their right to treat with it as equals. The date of that revolution is also significant, as it stands just 1,260 years distant from the date when the decree of Phocas conferred universal jurisdiction on the Roman bishop.* The same period intervenes between the establishment of the temporal power, and its fall amid the events of 1866 to 1870; which is typified by another of the Vials. The fulfilment of these prophetic periods serves further to identify the Papal system with the predicted Apostasy. This is well brought out by Guinness in "Light for the Last Days," chaps. iv., v., and xi., where the various critical

* The date is inscribed on a column still standing in Rome.

dates in the rise and decline of the Papacy are discust.

The river Euphrates and its drying up which is mentioned under the sixth Vial may possibly refer to that river as a defense to the original Babylon; and its drying up would thus form the counterpart to the way in which that city was actually taken by the Persian besiegers. It is more probable, however, that the expression carries a reference back to the time when the four destroying angels were let loose from the Euphrates (chap. ix. 14, 15). It was at this frontier that the threatening hordes of Turkman invaders were held back for a time, before descending as one of the desolating woes on Christendom; and the meaning here would accordingly be the gradual decline or decadence of the Turkish power. The drying up of this river is said to prepare the way of "the kings of the east"; and these may probably stand for the Russian power, as the modern representative of the Eastern Roman Empire, and as containing the eastern half of the Apostasy. What its precise function in relation to the other European powers be we are not explicitly told, but see chap. xix. 19; also x. 16.

In interpreting the meaning of the "three unclean spirits like frogs" which

come out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, under the sixth Vial, we may take the Dragon to represent Heathenism and Agnosticism; the Beast, the Papacy and Ritualism; and the False Prophet, apostate Protestantism. This last interpretation best accords with the reference to the "two witnesses" in chapter xi. 3, who are there said to be prophets. They thus represent the two lines of testimony for the truth in the Middle Ages, which was taken up in a wider field by the Protestant churches of the Reformation. The idea conveyed by a false prophet would thus naturally be a false professor or faithless witness, corresponding with decay in Protestantism.

As the fifth Vial poured out upon "the seat of the beast" (compare chap. xiii. 2 and xvii. 9 with xvi. 10) appears to correspond with the fall of the temporal power of the Papacy, we should now be in the days of the sixth Vial. In the predicted dominance of these noisy spirits during that period, we are thus forewarned of the special dangers of our own time. They use not only speech, but the widespread literature and periodicals of our day, to disseminate their views. Their mission is to gather the influential of this world against God and His Word, and to oppose the opening of a better era in

the Millennium. Our position amid the closing judgments of this dispensation may well excite our thoughtful consideration, and lead us also to a more careful study of this Book of God's revealed purposes.

THE MILLENNIUM.

The Millennium, in chapter xx. of the Apocalypse, has attracted a large amount of attention because of the happy prospect it discloses, and has become a center of controversy respecting what have been termed the pre-millennial and post-millennial return of the Lord Jesus. If with many godly and able men of our time we connect the Second Advent and the resurrection of the saints with the opening of the Millennium, we bring these stupendous events very near to us, as indicated by the position we have reached in the sequence of the prophecies. If, on the other hand, we regard the Second Advent as post-millennial, we postpone it by the duration of the Millennium and the loosing of Satan which succeeds it; and thus connect the Advent with the general resurrection and the judgment scene in chapter xxi., and with the new heavens and new earth, and the New Jerusalem, which are described

in the closing chapters of the Apocalypse.

It would seem clear, in either case, that we are now very near to the opening of the millennial period. According to the prophecies of Daniel and the statements of Christ Himself, this period is to follow upon the four successive Empires which occupy the "times of the Gentiles." During those times, the people of God, whether Jews or Christians, are scattered as individuals throughout the nations of the earth, and are ruled over by them, without any independent or national existence of their own. The people of God have stood in this relation to the nations of the world, and Jerusalem has been trodden down of the Gentiles, since the days of Daniel at the time of the Captivity; and the duration of this state of things was revealed to him. The period of "seven times" assigned to Gentile rule is now generally understood to mean 2,520 years; and this period has nearly run out, whether we count from the foundation of the first or Babylonian Empire, the fall of the Jewish monarchy, or the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem itself by Nebuchadnezzar. We find a remarkable coincidence in the dates reached on comparing them with the period allotted to the duration of the Beast as

detailed in the Apocalypse, whose destruction immediately precedes the Millennium. Whether we take the longer period of 2,520 years from the beginning of the Captivity, or the 1,260 years from the rise of the Apostasy, we find that the latest dates reacht on either count do not extend farther than the first third of the twentieth century. [See diagram on opposite page.]

To understand the Millennium, we must bear in mind that it forms a part of the explanatory prophecies of the last things which follow the last septenary of God's judgments on the Apostasy and its abettors, which are represented by the Vials. Altho these are said to be the last plagues, yet at the close of them, in the end of chapter xvi., the sad admission is made that men blasphemed God because of them, instead of repenting of their evil ways. Chapters xvii. and xviii. contain explanations concerning this, and the announcement of the downfall of the Apostasy under the designation of Babylon. Then follows in chapter xix. a hymn of praise in regard to this and to the approaching marriage-supper of the Lamb. Next we have a vision of a rider on a white horse who is Faithful and True, and is followed by the armies which are in heaven. He is called the Word of God, and is pro-

claimed King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This can be no other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and therefore it has been identified by many with the actual return or Second Coming of the Lord. On the other hand, it is to be noted that the Lord appears here as the Word of God, and in that aspect it may be thought that this is rather to be considered as His manifestation through Holy Scripture, the sharp sword that cometh forth out of His mouth. May this not therefore be regarded as a final triumph of the revealed Word of God over the machinations of the three unclean spirits referred to under the sixth Vial, who have hitherto been the assailants of Revelation, but may now in their turn be attackt and be driven from the field? Their final overthrow, together with the kings of the earth whom they have won to their side, and the Beast, and the false prophet, is described in unmistakable terms at the close of the chapter.

At the opening of chapter xx. there appears an angel having the key of the bottomless pit, or "the abyss," and a great chain in his hand. He lays hold on Satan, and binds him a thousand years, and casts him into the abyss, that he should deceive the nations no more. Thus Satan, the old instigator of all opposition to God, is shut out

from influencing mankind. The abyss in which he is imprisoned may, however, be a part of the earth; for in a previous passage, under the fifth Trumpet, the locusts, which typify the Saracen invaders, are said to issue from the pit of the abyss—the abyss thus representing the outlying parts of the world beyond the limits of Christendom.

From the terms in which the Millennium is described, we are led to expect a revival of the pure faith and practise of the Primitive Church. It is to be observed here that the Protestant Reformation did not effect this. It restored the doctrine of justification by faith, and gave back to the people the Bible and the right of private judgment, and also inaugurated many good works and missions; but it did not restore primitive purity and simplicity. We may suppose that now these are brought back to their best estate and become dominant, and that this will continue for a thousand years during the Millennium.

Those specially mentioned as participating in the millennial blessedness, and as seated upon thrones, are represented as two companies: first, the souls of those slain by beheading under the heathen emperors; and secondly, those that had not worshipt the Beast

TABLE OF PROPHETICAL PERIODS.

Position of this Year, 1898, in the Prophetical Series, as the *Beginning* of the closing period to which any of the dates predicted will extend :

Foundation of the }
Babylonian Empire. }

B. C. 623

Roman domination }
over Jerusalem — 666 }
years.

Seven times, or 2520 years,
for "Times of the Gentiles"
since the foundation of Baby-
lonian Empire. (*Earliest* date
to count from, at the beginning
of the Captivity.)

Saracen conquest }
of Jerusalem }

A. D. 637

Mohammedans (Sar-
acens and Turks)
tread down Jerusa-
lem—1260 years.

Establishment of the }
"Inquisition" for the }
suppression of the }
"Witnesses." }

A. D. 1233

The Beast or Little }
Horn. A persecuting }
power for 666 years ; }
—the "number of its }
name." }

1897-1899

TABLE OF PROCEEDINGS
Position of this Year 1888, in the Progress
during period to which any of the

Foundation of the
A. D. 1888

North American
A. D. 1888

A. D. 1888

1888

1888

1888

1888

during his period of ascendancy. These are said to live and reign with Christ a thousand years.

The whole description given of the millennial age occupies but six verses, which we may take to indicate that we are not able at present fully to understand its conditions and details. At its close, a falling away occurs, when Satan is loost, deceives the nations, and gathers them together in battle against the saints. This last attempt, apparently of short duration, results in the final overthrow of Satan himself, and is followed by the judgment scene, and the establishment of the New heavens and New earth.

Of these last we can not here speak at length, but would refer to the thoughts and explanations already given by the writer in "Eden Lost and Won"; chap. x. (The Restoration.)

The Book of the Apocalypse concludes with the description of the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven—the united and true church of Christ, as a spotless bride made ready for her Husband. The last thought left with us at the close of the book is the Coming of Christ, so frequently mentioned throughout the New Testament as the sustaining hope of His waiting church, and here set side by side with her final blessedness in

union with Him, as a challenge to her loyalty while still on earth, and an uplifting hope in any time of trial or persecution, which may here be predicted. "The time is at hand. . . . Behold, I come quickly," is thus the incentive throughout to the faith and patience of the saints by which they inherit the promises; and should be all the more so to us, amid the seductions of these last times, as we see the day approaching. We may well join in the fervent invitation with which the Book closes: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

The object of the above sketch will be gained should it induce any of its readers by the careful and prayerful study of the Apocalypse to attain to the blessing pronounced on those who read and keep the things written in this most wonderful revelation of the mind of Christ and of the plans of the Father in the work of Redemption, and in the establishment of His kingdom in the earth.

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