

LECTURE III.

PART I.

STRUCTURE AND PLAN OF THE APOCALYPSE.

HAVING considered the influences moulding the conception of the Apocalypse, the next point claiming our attention is its structure and plan; and, as before, the object to be kept steadily in view is not mere literary inquiry or the gratification of curiosity, but the interpretation of the book. Upon this interpretation the subject now before us will be found to have an immediate and important bearing.

There is indeed a fear on the part of many that the idea of plan is inconsistent with simplicity of purpose. Principles of arrangement, the existence of which earnest inquirers in examining the structure of our canonical books have been unable to deny, have not unfrequently seemed to these inquirers themselves too artificial to be correct. Even while accepting their own conclusions they have shrunk from them. They have been afraid of yielding to their convictions lest, by doing so, they should destroy the naturalness of the Word of God; should introduce into the utterances of the sacred penmen too much of what in a modern writer

would be conscious design; or should even disparage the work of the Spirit by ascribing to Him those contrivances through which merely human authors endeavour to lend force and attractiveness to their works. The fear is groundless. In the first place the question, like every other, must be determined by the facts, and not by prepossessions of our own. In the second place, admitting the facts, it is impossible to deny that the Spirit of God, in bestowing His inspiration upon men, has in innumerable instances made use of the very instrumentality thus thought to be too human for His purpose. Metaphor, parable, allegory, the tropical sense of words, even the use of paronomasia or pun, strophe and antistrophe in the Psalms, the poetic clothing of the most solemn prophecies, the arrangement even of didactic passages in Epistles upon what are incontestably the principles of Hebrew parallelism—such and similar phenomena are sufficient to show that in these, as we might call them, human devices, there is nothing inconsistent with simplicity, or with the desire to produce a moral and religious result. If, in proportion to the degree in which we were constrained to acknowledge their presence in Scripture, we felt at the same time compelled to admit that the Divine element in it was giving way to the human, the effect would be that we should lose the former in exact proportion to the amount of sublimity or pathos, of power or tenderness, by which it was really indicating its presence. Lastly, it ought to be remembered that such artistic arrangements are improperly designated when spoken of as device or

artifice. However strange to us, they were the very mould and fashion of Jewish thought. Precisely in proportion to the degree in which the prophet or poet of Israel was impassioned, did his language shape itself into their most perfect forms. The form had a meaning to him. It was part of his inspiration to adopt it. Not because he hoped to gain an adventitious influence over men did he so speak, but because he had no alternative. He was making his nearest approach to what he recognised as the Divine ideal. He was using the only mould adequate to the expressions of the Divine conceptions with which his breast was filled. Consciousness, or rather self-consciousness, there was none. The artificial form was so natural to him, was so much a part of his whole habit of mind, that, when most true to his message and himself, he fell most naturally into it. So far, therefore, is artificial arrangement in a book of Scripture from being an argument against the truth of the contents, that it may be the reverse. It may be a valuable token of the inspiration of the writer. It may be a pledge to us of the exalted state of mind in which he wrote. It may be strictly a part of the Divine method. If we sink ourselves into the style of Hebrew thought, and no one will deny that in studying a Hebrew book we ought to do so, it may be full of valuable instruction, and may commend the lessons of the book to us with double force. All that we have to beware of is the substitution of our own fancies for the objective phenomena. When we allow ourselves to be guided simply by the latter ; when our effort is only to pene-

trate into all parts of the Divine idea ; when we resign ourselves to Him who teaches, not only in Scripture but in nature, by form as well as substance ; when we see that the form is substance, inseparably connected with it, and adapted to it as its appropriate vehicle, we have no need to be afraid of form. Not only is the effort to discover it full of interest, but the form when discovered may be full of power.

Numerous illustrations of these remarks might easily be given both from the Old and the New Testament,¹ but it is unnecessary. Everywhere in both we encounter structures that may at first sight be deemed simply artificial. But they are so in nothing but appearance. In reality all is natural, and the mind of the writer is only unfolding itself in artistic arrangements as plants shape themselves into their forms of symmetry and beauty. If, therefore, we meet artificial form in all parts of Scripture, even in prosaic passages, much more may we expect it in a book written like the Apocalypse in the noblest spirit of prophetic and poetic enthusiasm. Several particulars demand attention.

I. The first particular to be noticed is the singular extent to which the structure of the Apocalypse is moulded by the use of numbers. Many numbers play a part in it, but we may confine ourselves to one or two which even the superficial observer cannot fail to notice. These are seven, four, and three.

¹ Reference may be made in the Old Testament to such passages as the following :—Psalm cxix. ; the Lamentations of Jeremiah ; Pro- verbs xxxi. 10-31 : in the New Testament—John x. 14, 15 ; Romans, iii. 7-10.

Let us take in the first place the number seven, and that not merely as it is used to denote so many individual objects, but as, without being expressly named, it influences the structure of the book. With its use as a number every one is familiar. There are "seven spirits which are before the throne of God," "seven churches," "seven golden candlesticks," "seven stars" in the right hand of Him who is like unto a Son of man, "seven lamps of fire burning before the throne," "seven horns and seven eyes" of the Lamb, "seven seals" of the book in the right hand of Him who sat upon the throne, "seven angels" standing before God, "seven thunders" uttering their voices, "seven thousand" slain in the great earthquake which attends the ascent of the two witnesses into heaven, "seven heads" of the great dragon and "seven diadems" upon his heads, "seven heads" of the beast that came up out of the sea, "seven angels" with seven trumpets, and again with the seven last plagues, "seven mountains" upon which the mystic Babylon is seated, and "seven kings," of whom five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come.

All this is in itself sufficiently remarkable, but the use of the number is still more worthy of notice when we find it moulding the structure of the narrative in many a passage where no direct mention of it is made.¹ Thus in chap. v. 12 seven attributes of praise,

¹ The principle of structure here noticed is to be found also in the Old Testament. One interesting illustration may be given. The blessing on Jacob in Gen. xxviii.

13-15 divides itself naturally into seven parts, of which the fourth and central is the great covenant promise, "And in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the

“power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing,” are ascribed by the multitude about the throne to the Lamb that was slain. In chap. vii. 12 the white robed company worship God with a similar number, saying, “Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever.” And in chap. ix. 7-10 the terrible locusts of the fifth trumpet are described in seven particulars. They have on their heads as it were crowns like unto gold; their faces are as faces of men; they have hair as hair of women; they have teeth as teeth of lions; they have breastplates as it were breastplates of iron; the sound of their wings is as the sound of chariots of many horses rushing to war; they have tails like unto scorpions and stings. Even longer and more varied passages are dominated by the number seven. The preparatory vision of chap. xiv. 6-20 consists of seven parts, each part except the fourth, which in a series of seven is always the central and most important, being introduced by an angel,¹ while in the fourth part we have the leading figure of the movement, *one* like unto a Son of man sitting on a white cloud, on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.² Similar observations apply to a still more lengthened passage extending from chap. xvii. 1 to chap. xxii. 5, where it will be found that three angels introduced at

earth be blessed.” The three parts preceding this are promises of a general character, the three following are special to Jacob. The punctuation adopted by the Re-

visers shows that they had failed to notice the correct division of these parts.

¹ See verses 6, 8, 9, 15, 17, 18.

² Verse 14.

chaps. xvii. 1, xviii. 1, and xviii. 21 precede the fourth part, the appearance of the conquering King of kings at chap. xix. 11, and are followed by other three angels at chaps. xix. 17, xx. 1, and xxi. 9, no angel appearing at any intermediate point, and these seven appearances embracing the whole closing drama of the book from the time of the judgment on Babylon to the establishment upon earth of the New Jerusalem.

Nay, not only does the remark apply to both the shorter and the longer passages of the book, it applies also to the Apocalypse as a whole. There is no small reason for adopting the idea that it contains seven visions or sets of visions ;¹ and, whether we agree with this or not, it naturally divides itself into the seven sections that have been already spoken of.

The number four plays if not so important yet a similar part throughout the book. "Four living creatures full of eyes before and behind" are seen in the midst of and round about the throne ;² "four angels" stand at the "four corners of the earth," holding the "four winds of the earth ;"³ "four angels" are bound at the great river Euphrates, prepared for a moment fixed in the counsels of the Almighty, and noted by the mention of four periods of time—an hour and day and month and year.⁴ The blood of the winepress extends to 1600 furlongs, that is to the square of 4 multiplied by 100 ;⁵ and the New Jerusalem lieth foursquare.⁶

¹ Comp. Züllig, vol. i.; *Parousia*, p. 377, and many others.

² Chap. iv. 6.

³ Chap. vii. 1.

⁴ Chap. ix. 14, 15.

⁵ Chap. xiv. 20.

⁶ Chap. xxi. 16.

Again also, as in the case of the number seven, the thought of four often regulates the structure without our attention being expressly called to it. In the visions of the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls, the first four numbers of each series refer to objects different in character from those of the last three, and constitute separate groups of four. The inhabitants of the earth are summed up in "tribes and tongues and peoples and nations;"¹ prophecy is to be uttered over "peoples and nations and tongues and kings;"² when authority is given to Death upon his pale horse to kill over the fourth part of the earth, he is to do so "with sword, and with famine, and with pestilence, and by the wild beasts of the earth;"³ when the judgments of God are about to be revealed, there are "thunders and voices and lightnings and an earthquake;"⁴ guilty Babylon solaces herself with four classes of musicians, "harpers and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters;"⁵ and when the kings of the earth turn round upon the harlot to destroy her, they "hate her, and make her desolate and naked, and eat her flesh, and burn her with fire;"⁶ the sins of which men repented not, even after the desolation caused by the horses of the sixth trumpet, are classified as "murders and sorceries and fornications and thefts;"⁷ and they that have their part in the burning lake are divided into two successive groups of four, or four successive groups of two.⁸

¹ Chap. v. 9.

² Chap. x. 11.

³ Chap. vi. 8.

⁴ Chaps. viii. 5 ; xvi. 18.

⁵ Chap. xviii. 22.

⁶ Chap. xvii. 16.

⁷ Chap. ix. 21.

⁸ Chap. xxi. 8.

More remarkable still is the use of the number three, so remarkable and continuous indeed that it would require an analysis of the whole book for its perfect illustration.¹ And again it is not simply the mention of the number that arrests us, as when we read of the "three" woes, of the "three" unclean spirits like frogs, of the "three" parts into which Babylon is divided, or of the "three" gates on each side of the foursquare Jerusalem. It is the mode in which this number is mixed up with the entire structure of the book that is especially worthy of notice. A few illustrations only can be given. The first three epistles to the seven churches are evidently distinguished from the remaining four by the place assigned in them to the call, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." The last three Seals are not less clearly separated from the first four, and the same remark applies to the Trumpets and the Bowls. In chap. iv. 5 three things, "lightnings and thunders and voices," proceed out of the throne. In the same chapter the four and twenty elders have three characteristics—they sit, they are arrayed in white garments, they have on their heads crowns of gold.² When they pay homage to Him that sits upon the throne three acts of homage are ascribed to them,—falling down, worshipping, and

¹ A very long and apparently exhaustive inquiry into the use of the number three in the Apocalypse will be found in Stuart's *Introduction to his Commentary upon the Book*, section 7 a. The

same author inquires with a large amount of care into what he calls the "numerosity" of the Apocalypse generally.

² Chap. iv. 4.

casting their crowns before the throne ; and when they lift their song to their Lord and their God, they celebrate Him as worthy to receive three things, the glory, the honour, and the power.¹ In the same chapter we meet with the *Trisagion* "Holy, Holy, Holy," and that *Trisagion* is sung to Him who, as "the Lord," has three attributes of glory,—God, the Almighty, He which "was" and which "is" and which "is to come," the last of the three again consisting of three parts.² In chap. vii. 1 three things are mentioned on which the wind is not to blow. In chap. xi. 1 three things are to be measured, and in chap. xii. 16 the earth does three things for the woman's help. In chap. xviii. 8 three plagues come upon Babylon in one day ; and in the same chapter, verses 9-19, three classes of persons are introduced, one after another, lamenting over her fall. One other illustration of the point before us must suffice. Let us look at the first chapter of the book. That chapter consists of three parts :—

1. Description of the book, and its importance, verses 1-3.
2. Salutation of the writer to the persons addressed by him, verses 4-8.

¹ Chap. iv. 10, 11.

² Chap. iv. 8. This is one of those passages, and there are not a few of the same kind throughout the book, in which attention to the structure of the Apocalypse supplies an important rule of interpretation. In the Authorised Version we read, "Holy, holy,

holy, Lord God Almighty," etc. ; in the Revised Version "Holy, holy, holy, *is* the Lord God, the Almighty," etc. But Westcott and Hort, in their Greek text, punctuate otherwise and rightly. They place a comma after *κύριος* "Lord," thus yielding the translation given above.

3. Vision of the great Priest and King presiding over His Church, verses 9-20.

Let us take now the first of these parts—verses 1-3, and it again divides itself naturally into three.

1. The source of the revelation, verse 1 to the words “shortly come to pass.”

2. The medium of the revelation, verse 1 at the words “and he sent” to the end of verse 3.

3. The importance of the revelation, verse 8.

Once more let us take each of these three subordinate divisions, and it will be found that it also is distinguished by triplicity of parts ; for in the first division we have mention of three persons,—Jesus Christ, God, and the servants of Jesus ; in the second division we find a threefold description of that to which witness is borne by the Seer,—the Word of God, the testimony of Jesus Christ, and all things that he saw ; while in the third division the persons for whom a blessing in connection with it is reserved are portioned off into three groups,—“he that readeth,” “they that hear the words of the prophecy,” and “they that keep the things that are written therein.”¹

Enough has been said to show to how great an extent the structure of the Apocalypse is dominated by numbers. But they who would form an impression upon the point as strong as is warranted by the facts must examine for themselves. The more they do so, the more will they be struck with the singular extent to which numbers rule the plan of the apocalyptic writer ;

¹ Comp. *Biblical Review*, vol. i. p. 423.

and the more powerfully this conviction is brought home to them, the better will they be prepared for the interpretation of his book.

II. The second particular to be noticed in connection with the structure of the Apocalypse is the symmetrical arrangement of its parts. Even in smaller sections this symmetry forces itself upon our notice. The seven epistles contained in the second and third chapters are composed upon precisely the same plan. They consist of seven parts, following each other in the same order in each epistle—the superscription to the church addressed; a special aspect of the Saviour who addresses it; an account of the spiritual condition of the particular church; words of commendation or censure adapted to its state; exhortations founded upon that state; promises to him that overcometh; and a call to every one to hear. One part of the arrangement may indeed seem to disturb the symmetry; for in the first three epistles the general exhortation, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches,” occurs in the middle of the epistle, immediately before the promises; whereas in the last four it is transferred to the close. This, however, is universally admitted to be part of that higher symmetry, meeting us in other portions of the book, by which the number seven is divided into its two parts three and four or four and three.¹

When we turn to the body of the Apocalypse sym-

¹ The writer would refer for an attempt to explain the division of seven into three and four, rather than four and three in these epistles, to his paper in the *Expositor*, second series, vol. iv. p. 57.

metrical arrangement presents itself in a still more striking light. Comparing the first four numbers of each of the three groups of the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls, we see at once that they all relate to the same objects taken in the same order¹—

SEALS.		TRUMPETS.		BOWLS.
Chap. vi.		Chap. viii.		Chap. xvi.
1.)		1.)		1.)
2.)	}	2.)	}	2.)
3.)	}	3.)	}	3.)
4.)	}	4.)	}	4.)
Earth. ¹		Earth.		Earth.
		Land.		Land.
		Sea.		Sea.
		Rivers, etc.		Rivers, etc.
		Sun, etc.		Sun.

At the introduction of the fifth number of each group the scene is changed, and in a similar direction, from the world of sense to that of spirit—

SEALS.		TRUMPETS.		BOWLS.
Chap. vi. 9.		Chap. ix. 1.		Chap. xvi. 10.
Altar in heaven.		Pit of the abyss.		Throne of the beast.

For reasons springing out of considerations adduced in the last lecture, the symmetry of the sixth and seventh numbers of the groups is to be expected only in the case of the Trumpets and the Bowls, and then it comes before us in a marked degree—

Sixth Number.

TRUMPETS.		BOWLS.
Chap. ix. 13.		Chap. xvi. 12.
The river Euphrates.		The river Euphrates.

Seventh Number.

TRUMPETS.		BOWLS.
Chap. xi. 15.		Chap. xvi. 17.
The close of all.		The close of all.

¹ It is important, in confirmation and illustration of what is said in Lecture ii. p. 50, to notice here the *general* character of the

Seals as compared with the more *detailed* statement of the Trumpets and the Bowls.

Still further, it is to be observed that, except in the case of the Bowls, the several numbers of these groups do not run on in uninterrupted succession to the end of the group. Between the sixth and seventh Seals the two visions of the sealing of the 144,000 and of the great multitude standing before the Lamb are interposed;¹ and, exactly in the same way, between the sixth and seventh Trumpets we meet the visions of the measuring of the temple, and of the two witnesses who were faithful unto death and triumphant over it.² These are visions of comfort, episodes of consolation, intended to sustain our hope in the last great outburst of the wrath of the Most High; and if, in the case of the Bowls, the similar visions of chap. xiv., instead of coming before the seventh Bowl, precede the series, the reason seems obvious, that the Lord is now rapidly winding up the present dispensation, and, with the suddenness of a thief in the night, making a short work upon the earth.³ When the struggle is over, and the end come, that is our consolation, and we need no more. The element of climax, in short, here modifies that of perfect regularity; but only in conformity with a higher principle, for visions of consolation are still afforded, though at an earlier point.

Another illustration of the symmetrical structure of the Apocalypse lies upon its surface. Of the seven parts into which it naturally divides itself, the first, the prologue, corresponds to the seventh, the epilogue; the second, the Church in her mixed earthly condition, to

¹ Chap. vii.

² Chap. xi. 1-14.

³ Chap. xvi. 15.

the sixth, the true members of the Church in their ideal repose ; the third, pictures of the Church's victory anticipated, to the fifth, her victory realised ; while the fourth or main section of the whole occupies, as according to the structural efficacy of the number seven it ought, the central place. This symmetry of the Apocalypse, alike appearing in its smaller parts and marking it as a whole, more particularly this correspondence of each pair of its leading sections, when they are counted either from the centre to the circumference or from the circumference to the centre, deserves the most careful observation.

III. A third particular to be noticed in the structure of the Apocalypse is the synchronism, rather than the chronological succession, of its visions. These visions are for the most part comprised in the groups of the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls. Now it is no doubt true that the three groups follow one another. It was absolutely necessary that they should do so, both in the visions of St. John and for the apprehension of his readers. The one could not see, the other could not apprehend, them all at the same moment. But they do not on that account contain a definite succession of events extending from the opening of the first to the close of the third group. The first group, on the contrary, brings us to the end ; and the next two groups, so far at least begin at the beginning, that they present to us the evil world and the degenerate Church as exposed throughout all their history to the just judgments of God, although the heaviest judgments are reserved for the close.

Let us look at the Seals. The first Seal introduces the horseman upon a white horse, who "comes forth conquering and to conquer."¹ It is undeniably the opening of the gospel age. The sixth Seal (the peculiarity of the seventh will be noticed by and by), after a striking description of convulsions of nature and terrors of men, speaks of "the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and of the wrath of the Lamb ; for the great day of their wrath is come, and who is able to stand?"² These words can hardly refer to anything but the final judgment. They describe no partial manifestation of Christ made at some intermediate point of the Church's history, but the great day of the Lord itself. And this interpretation is confirmed, were more needed to convince us, by comparing the words of the Seer with those of Christ in Matt. xxiv. 29, 30, in which the phenomena are the same, are spoken of in almost the same language, and are followed by expressions that can be understood of nothing but the winding up of the world's history.

Let us look at the second or Trumpet group of visions. When the seventh angel sounded, we read that "there followed great voices in heaven, and they said, The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ : " and again the four and twenty elders said, "Thy wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to Thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear Thy name, the small and the great ; and to destroy them that destroy the earth." ³ Whether we

¹ Chap. vi. 2.

² Chap. vi. 12-17.

³ Chap. xi. 15, 18.

interpret these words in themselves, or in their relation to other and similar expressions in the same book, they lead directly to the final issues of the present dispensation, so that we are thus anew conducted to a point previously reached, and are compelled to regard the two groups of the Seals and of the Trumpets as synchronous rather than as historically successive.

This conclusion is greatly strengthened when we turn to the third group of visions (that of the Bowls) which, like those of the two groups going before, are also seven in number, giving evidence by this very fact of their completeness in themselves in that line of things of which they treat. At the pouring out of the seventh Bowl we are told that "there came forth a great voice out of the temple, from the throne, saying, It is done;" while a little farther on it is said that "every island fled away, and the mountains were not found." In neither case can these words lead us to anything but the end, while in the latter they have the closest possible resemblance to those words of chap. xx. 11, which are referred with the unanimous consent of interpreters to the final judgment, "and I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them." The succession of these three groups of visions cannot therefore be chronological. It must be one of ideas and not of time.

The view thus taken is confirmed by the singular parallelism running through the judgments of the Trumpets and the Bowls, and exhibited in the following table:—

	TRUMPETS		BOWLS
	Relating to		Relating to
First.	The earth, chap. viii. 7.		The earth, chap. xvi. 2.
Second.	The sea, chap. viii. 8.		The sea, chap. xvi. 3.
Third.	{ Rivers and fountains of the waters, chap. viii. 10. }		{ Rivers and fountains of the waters, chap. xvi. 4. }
Fourth.	{ The sun and moon and stars, chap. viii. 12. }		{ The sun, chap. xvi. 8. }
Fifth.	{ The pit of the abyss, chap. ix. 2. }		{ The throne of the beast, chap. xvi. 10. }
Sixth.	{ The great river Euphrates, chap. ix. 14. }		{ The great river Euphrates, chap. xvi. 12. }
Seventh.	{ Great voices in heaven, fol- lowed by lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail, chap. xi. 15, 19. }		{ A great voice from the throne, followed by lightnings, and voices, and thunders, a great earthquake, and great hail, chap. xvi. 17, 18, 21. }

A simple inspection of this table is of itself almost sufficient to convince us of the great improbability of the supposition that the two series in question embody a succession of time rather than of thought. "It is surely," says the late Principal Fairbairn in adverting to it, "against all reasonable probability to suppose that these two lines of symbolic representation, touching at so many points, alike in their commencement, their progress, and their termination, can relate to dispensations of providence wholly unconnected, and to periods of time separated from one another by the lapse of ages. It is immeasurably more probable that they are but different aspects of substantially the same course of procedure, different merely from the parties subjected to it being contemplated in somewhat different relations. Nor would it be possible, if two entire series of symbolical delineations following so nearly in the same track were yet to point to events quite remote and

diverse, to vindicate such delineations from the charge of arbitrariness and indetermination." ¹

The conclusion thus come to, and certainly supported by a comparison of the three leading series of visions in this book, may be confirmed by other illustrations. Thus at the beginning of chap. xii. we have the vision of the woman clothed with the sun, and the bearer of a man child who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron. This vision, in so far as it refers to a historical event, can refer only to the birth of Christ, and yet it comes in *after* the visions of the Seals and of the Trumpets have both been closed, a clear proof that the Seer is not guided by the thought of historical succession. We have another striking instance of the same kind in the same chapter, where the flight of the woman into the wilderness at verse 6 is not a different flight from that spoken of at verse 14, the two being only different aspects of the same event. In both we have a flight into the same wilderness, for the same purpose, and for the same space of time,—the one only bringing out the particulars in a way different from the other.² So also the assault of the beast upon the two witnesses in chap. xi. 7 is the same assault as that described in chap. xiii. 7. The war to which the kings of the whole world are gathered in the great day of God, the Almighty, at chap. xvi. 14, is the same war afterwards more fully described in chap. xix., with all its disastrous consequences to the enemies of the Lamb. Finally, though more will need to be hereafter said upon the point, the description given

¹ On *Prophecy*, p. 402.

² Comp. p. 120.

of the binding of Satan in chap. xx. 1-3 is not essentially different from his being cast out of heaven into the earth in chap. xii. 9, while the reign of the saints in the same chapter (verses 4-6) is but a fuller expression of what we are told at chap. xii. 5 of the catching up of the man child unto God and unto His throne.

These considerations establish the conclusion that one of the structural principles of the Apocalypse is to set before us different series of pictures relating not so much to successive events as to the same events under different aspects, each series complete in itself, and inviting us to think less of its temporal relation to those which precede and follow it, than of the new and different light in which it presents an idea common to itself and them. The principle was not a new one when St. John wrote. It had been familiar to the sacred writers, and especially when they wrote in a prophetic or poetic strain. The Song of Songs and the book of Daniel display a similar plan; and the same principle is followed by our Lord, not only, as we have seen, in Matt. xxiv., but when, in the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, He points to the doom of those who reject His messengers.¹ The dominating thought in the three messages of the owner of the vineyard, and in the threefold rejection given to them, is not that of succession of time, as if each later rejection involved certain historical events subsequent to those of the rejections preceding it. Our attention is called to the same picture of criminality throughout, although the guilt of the

¹ Luke xx. 9-16.

husbandmen is marked by special characteristics in each case. A certain succession of time there no doubt is, for the rejection of a second message must follow that of a first, and the rejection of a third that of a second; but the main consideration is, that this succession of time is subordinate to that of the stages of an ever-deepening obstinacy and sinfulness, yet an obstinacy and a sinfulness which may belong, in different individuals, to any part of the whole period embraced within the scope of the parable.

Thus also with the visions of the Apocalypse. There may be in them succession, even in a certain sense succession of time. But it is succession of another kind upon which we are asked to dwell; and the point to be now mainly noticed is, that the different visions of the book do not follow one another in such a manner that each takes up the thread of a continuous history where the one before it ends. Each of the three groups, in particular, of the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls, starts from the beginning of the Church's fortunes upon earth, and takes us by its own path to their close.¹

¹ This idea of synchronism, rather than of succession, in the visions of St. John, was entertained at an early period in the history of the Church. Thus we find Victorinus, Bishop of Pettau, who flourished towards the end of the third century, in his comment on Rev. vii. saying, "We must not regard the order of what is said, because frequently the Holy Spirit, when he has traversed even

to the end of the last times, returns again to the same times, and fills up what He had (before) failed to say. Nor must we look for order in the Apocalypse; but we must follow the meaning of those things which are prophesied" (Clark's *Anten. Libr. Tertullian*, vol. iii. p. 414). The same view was taken by Augustine in the fourth, and by Berengaudus in the eighth century. The thought of chrono-

IV. A fourth particular marking the structure of the Apocalypse is the element of climax. This meets us everywhere throughout the book, and not unfrequently in the most unexpected ways. Let us look at the Epistles to the churches, and the theme so frequently referred to in them, the Second Coming of the Lord. In each of the Epistles, except that to Smyrna, the Second Coming has a place; but, taking first the first group of three, it will be observed that to Ephesus it is said, "I come to thee;" and to Pergamum, "I come to thee quickly."¹ Proceeding to the second group of four, a difference in the same direction is perceptible. To the first of the four, Thyatira, is said only "Till I come;" to the second, Sardis, "I will come as a thief;" to the third, Philadelphia, "I come quickly;" to the fourth, Laodicea, "Behold I stand at the door and knock."² As

logical succession appears to have come in only in the fourteenth century, when it began to be supposed that the Apocalypse contained a prediction of the main events in the history of the Christian Church, from the days of the apostles to the end of time (Todd, *Lect.*, p. 50). The correctness of this method of interpreting was, however, by no means universally conceded, and it was again departed from by many. Daubuz (on *Rev.*, p. 22) says that Mede was the first to return clearly to the idea of synchronism, and the principle may be said to be now accepted by a great number of the most distinguished modern in-

terpreters. It is indeed characteristic of the Hebrew prophetic literature to set forth in each prophetic vision some new phase of what had been already treated of. Either the whole delineation is resumed and lifted up to a higher platform, or details noticed only generally in an earlier part of the prophecy are separated from their former setting, and dwelt upon more at length. *Comp. Renan, L'Antchr.*, p. 391; Isaac Williams on *Rev.*, p. 392; Wordsworth, *Lect.*, p. 96; Fairbairn *On Prophecy*, p. 396.

¹ Chap. ii. 5, 16.

² Chaps. ii. 25; iii. 3, 11, 20.

we pass from church to church the Coming draws continually nearer, till at last He who comes is heard knocking at the door.

A similar climax is observable in the promises to "him that overcometh" contained in these Epistles. From those of the first group to those of the second there is distinct advance. In the first all is quiet, appealing to the gentler susceptibilities of the soul. Believers are rewarded with the privileges and enjoyments of a child that has not yet left its father's garden, or known the struggle of the world. In the second we enter upon bolder and more manly figures, which presuppose fiercer trials and a hotter conflict, and are therefore full of a more glorious reward.

Again the element of climax meets us, when we compare the consolatory visions between the sixth and seventh Seals and those occupying a corresponding position between the sixth and seventh Trumpets. Chap. vii. gives the one, but it is simply a vision of Christians "sealed;" and even if, in the second vision of that chapter, we are told of saints that "have come out of great tribulation," we have not seen them suffering. Chap. xi. gives us the other, and when we read it we feel at once that there is progress in the thought. It is no longer the waiting, but the working, witnessing Church with which we have to do; and, instead of the simple mention of sufferings past, and probably forgotten, we behold them inflicted by the beast with all that rage and power with which he ascends out of the very centre of his dark and cruel kingdom.¹

¹ Chap. xi. 7.

The same element of climax is also to be traced in the fact that, in interpreting the several members of the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls, we are not to imagine that the plague of each successive member is completely over before that of the next is inflicted. Each successive plague would seem rather to be added to those that go before, so that under the operation of each its predecessors are still active, until all the terrors of the Divine judgments are concentrated in the last.¹

Again the same principle applies to the three great groups of visions, the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls, considered in the totality of their effect. Parallel and synchronous as they largely are, they are not repetitions of one another. They are exhibitions of the same principle under different aspects and in different circumstances; and the judgments of which they warn us go on in an ascending line. Comparing, *e.g.*, the Trumpets with the Seals, the very fact that the former are trumpets indicates a higher, a more exciting, a more terrible, unfolding of the wrath of God than in the latter. The trumpet is peculiarly the warlike instrument, summoning the hosts to battle: "Thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war;"² "That

¹ The point noticed in the text is one of great importance for the general interpretation of the plagues. It seems to come very clearly out in the case of the Bowls. Thus, on the pouring out of the fourth Bowl, we read that men "blasphemed the name of God which hath the power over these plagues," not "that plague"

(chap. xvi. 9). Thus also in verse 10 of the same chapter the mention of the gnawing of the tongue for pain is remarkable, for the pain could not proceed from the darkness of the fifth Bowl. It could only come from the effects of the previous plagues.

² Jer. iv. 19.

day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities.”¹ It is thus peculiarly associated with the judgments of God, “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the earth tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, and it is nigh at hand.”² The trumpet has also, no doubt, other associations in the Old Testament; but, used by St. John in connection with judgment, there can be little doubt that it intimates more terrible judgments than under the Seals. That the Bowls again are still more potent than the Trumpets appears both from their position in the book and from the manner in which they are introduced. As to the former, they naturally succeed the Trumpets, for the plague is first called for by the Trumpet, and is then poured out of the inverted Bowl. As to the latter, we read in chap. xv. 1, “And I saw another sign in heaven great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.” They are the “*last*” plagues; the wrath of God is “*filled up*” in them; they are the consummation of all judgment, the most complete manifestation of Him who not only prepares His reward for the righteous, but who, throughout the whole of this book, is a God judging in the earth.

The fact now before us becomes more obvious when we bring into comparison the individual members of the

¹ Zeph. i. 15, 16.

² Joel ii. 1.

groups. In the first four Trumpets judgment is more definite and precise than in the first four Seals. The objects upon which it falls are detailed at greater length, and the "fourth" part spoken of in the earlier passes into a "third" part in the later plagues. The climax is still more marked when we turn to the first four Bowls and compare them with the first four Trumpets. The first Trumpet affects only the third part of the earth and the trees, and all green grass:¹ the first Bowl affects men.² Under the second Trumpet the third part of the sea becomes blood, and the third part of the creatures which are in the sea die, and the third part of the ships are destroyed.³ Under the second Bowl the third part of the sea is changed for the whole; the blood assumes its most offensive form, "as the blood of a dead man;" and not the third part only but "every" living thing dies in the sea.⁴ The same change takes place under the third and fourth Bowls compared with the third and fourth Trumpets, for under the latter the great star falls only upon the third part of the rivers and upon the fountains of the waters, and only the third part of sun and moon and stars and day and night is smitten (chap. viii. 10-12); whereas under the former all the rivers and the fountains of the waters become blood, and the whole of the sun has power given him to scorch men with fire (chap. xvi. 4, 8). This higher potency of judgment, seen in the first four members of each of our three groups, continues to make itself felt in

¹ Chap. viii. 7.

² Chap. xvi. 2.

³ Chap. viii. 8, 9.

⁴ Chap. xvi. 3.

the remaining members. At the fifth Seal heaven is opened, and the heavenly altar is disclosed to view, having under it "the souls of them that had been slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held" (chap. vi. 9); under the fifth Trumpet the bottomless pit is opened, and terrible locusts come forth so tormenting men that they shall "seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them" (chap. ix. 6); while the fifth Bowl is poured out upon the throne of the beast, "and his kingdom is full of darkness, and they gnaw their tongues for pain, and blaspheme the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores" (chap. xvi. 10, 11). At the sixth Seal there is a great earthquake and the day of God's wrath is come, but all the men "of the earth" have time to flee to the dens and rocks of the mountains (chap. vi. 12, 15); under the sixth Trumpet the four angels bound by the great river Euphrates are loosed, and an innumerable army of horsemen ride forth actually destroying the third part of men (chap. ix. 14-19); while under the sixth Bowl, poured out upon the great river Euphrates itself, unclean spirits go forth out of the mouth of the three great enemies of the saints, and gathering together all the powers of earth at the place called Har-Magedon, prepare them for their immediate and final overthrow (chap. xvi. 12-16). At the seventh Seal we are told only of "silence in heaven about the space of half an hour (chap. viii. 1); under the seventh Trumpet this silence gives place to "great voices in heaven, intimating

that the world is subdued and the time of judgment come" (chap. xi. 15, 18); while under the seventh Bowl "a great voice comes out of the temple of heaven from the throne, saying, It is done." Judgment actually falls. Every island flies away, and the mountains are not found (chap. xvi. 17-20). The climax in these individual members of the three groups cannot be mistaken.

If, instead of looking at the members individually, we look at the three groups as a whole, the same thing will appear. In the series of the Seals we have the effects of the proclamation of the Gospel presented to us in their most general point of view. They describe indeed the judgments of God, and thus imply the sinfulness of man, for otherwise there would be no judgment; there would be simply peace, not a sword. But this sinfulness of man is not brought to light, and the specific reference of judgment to it is not unfolded. Even the souls under the altar are only told that their brethren shall be killed. The killing itself is reserved for a later stage; and the different riders who come forth upon their horses are described as "having power given them" to inflict judgment, rather than as exercising their power. The series of the Trumpets marks an advance on this. It is not merely hinted now that the saints shall suffer upon earth. They *have* suffered. The Christian brethren who, like the Old Testament saints of the fifth Seal, are to be killed, have not only been presented to us in the second consolatory vision of chap. vii. as persons who have "come out of the

great tribulation;" they have been sending up their prayers, before the series of the Trumpets opens, to Him who will avenge His elect. The judgments now inflicted are accordingly a direct answer to these prayers, and they are spoken of with specific and minute detail through all the members of the Trumpet group. The same progress is continued in the Bowls, not so much in time, in historical succession, as in the wickedness of those who suffer, and in their deliberate and determined rejection of the truth. We pass from a sinful world to a faithless Church, from those who have never known that the Lord is gracious to those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, and yet have fallen away. Which class is the most guilty? Surely there has been advance in sin. Prophecy has again been uttered before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings (chap. x. 11). The faithful witnesses have witnessed and been slain, and have ascended up to heaven in the cloud; but they that dwelt upon the earth have only rejoiced over them, and made merry, and sent gifts one to another (chap. xi. 10). The dragon, the beast, and the false prophet have successfully played their part (chaps. xii. xiii.) Therefore judgment falls, and falls naturally, with intensely increased severity.

Thus it is that we mark a more important succession in the visions of this book than any mere succession of time. As sin deepens, judgment deepens. Every abuse

of mercy brings with it increased punishment. This shall be the case not in future ages only but now. A Divine vindication of righteousness is always pressing on the skirts of sin, and the one shall always be in strict proportion to the other. There is a climax in that succession upon which our thoughts are fixed.

PART II.

The particulars spoken of in the first part of this lecture are of themselves sufficient to establish the artistic nature of the plan upon which the Apocalypse is constructed. To such an extent, however, does the interpretation of the book depend upon this fact that it seems desirable to illustrate it with still greater fulness. Two or three minor points connected with the structure adopted by the Seer therefore claim our notice.

I. The principle of contrast. In their broader features the contrasts of the Apocalypse at once strike the eye. No reader can fail for a moment to perceive that, like Aaron when he stood between the dead and the living,¹ St. John stands in this book between two antithetical and contrasted worlds. On the one hand he sees Christ, life, light, love, the Church of the living God, heaven, and the inhabitants of heaven; on the other he sees Satan, death, darkness, hatred, the syna-

¹ Numb. xvi. 48.

gogue of Satan, earth, and the dwellers upon earth. In all history, whether during the time of the old covenant or the new, he beholds a record of the struggle between these opposing forces,—the former often apparently crushed, but destined to ultimate triumph; the latter not unfrequently to the eye of sense victorious, but doomed in reality to ignominious and everlasting defeat. It is not enough, however, to observe this. The contrasts of the book are carried out in almost every particular that meets us, whether great or small, whether in connection with the persons, the objects, or the actions of which it speaks.

If, at one time, we have an ever-blessed and holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,¹ at another we have that “great antitrinity of hell,” the Devil, the Beast, and the False Prophet.² If we have God Himself, even the Father, commissioning the Son and clothing Him with His authority and power,³ we have the dragon commissioning the first beast and giving him his “power, and his throne, and great authority.”⁴ If the Son, when He manifests the Father and conveys His message to mankind, appears as a Lamb with seven horns,⁵ the dragon, when he speaks in the second beast or false prophet (for the first beast has no message; he opens his mouth only to blaspheme), has two horns like a lamb, though he speaks as a dragon.⁶ If the name of the one is Jesus or Saviour,⁷ the name of the other is

¹ Chap. i. 4, 5.

² Chaps. xii. xiii.

³ Chap. i. 1; vi. 2.

⁴ Chap. xiii. 2.

⁷ Chap. xxii. 16.

⁵ Chap. v. 6.

⁶ Chap. xiii. 11.

Apollyon or Destroyer.¹ If the one is the bright, the morning, star shining in the heavens,² the other is a star fallen out of heaven into the earth.³ If the one has the keys of death and of Hades, opening and none shall shut, shutting and none openeth,⁴ the other has the key of the pit of the abyss.⁵ If the one has His throne,⁶ the other has also a "throne," not (as the Authorised Version unhappily renders it) a "seat."⁷ If the one is celebrated in the Old Testament as having none like unto Him,⁸ the followers of the other magnify him with the words, "Who is like unto the beast?"⁹ If the one in carrying out his great work on earth is the Lamb "as though it had been slaughtered,"¹⁰ the other, as we are told by the use of the very same word (a point unfortunately missed both in the Authorised and Revised Versions), has one of his heads "as though it had been slaughtered unto death."¹¹ If the one rises from the grave and lives,¹² there cannot be a doubt, when we read in precisely the same language of the beast that he hath the stroke of the sword and lived,¹³ that here also is a resurrection from the dead. If the description given of the Divine Being is "He which is, and which was, and which is to come,"¹⁴ that given of diabolic agency is that it "was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss;"¹⁵ and if in the one case, when the Lord is thought of as come, the last term of the description is dropped,¹⁶ in

¹ Chap. ix. 11.⁷ Chaps. ii. 13; xvi.¹¹ Chap. xiii. 3.² Chap. xxii. 16.

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¹² Chap. ii. 8.³ Chap. ix. 1.⁸ Psalm cxiii. 5; Isai-¹³ Chap. xiii. 14.⁴ Chaps. i. 18; iii. 7.

ah xl. 18.

¹⁴ Chap. i. 4.⁵ Chap. ix. 1.⁹ Chap. xiii. 4.¹⁵ Chap. xvii. 8.⁶ Chap. iii. 21.¹⁰ Chap. v. 6.¹⁶ Chap. xi. 17, R. V.

the other case, when the beast comes in his final manifestation, a similar omission is made.¹ In the hour of His judgment we read of the "wrath of the Lamb,"² and when the devil, cast out of heaven, goes down unto the earth and the sea, we are told that he has "great wrath," knowing that his time is short.³

Many other particulars meet us in which the same principle of contrast rules. Believers are sealed with the seal of the living God;⁴ unbelievers are marked with the mark of the beast.⁵ The seal is imprinted upon the forehead;⁶ the mark upon the forehead or the hand.⁷ The contents of the seal are the name of the Lamb and of the Father.⁸ The contents of the mark are the name of the beast or the number of his name.⁹ The "tribes of the earth" are in contrast with the tribes of Israel;¹⁰ the false apostles of Ephesus with the true apostles of the Lord;¹¹ and the harlot Babylon¹² with the Bride, the Lamb's wife, the holy city Jerusalem.¹³ Nay, the contrasts even go at times beyond the facts specifically mentioned in the book to facts only known to us through the Gospel history; for, as already in part noticed, it is hardly possible not to feel that, in the binding of Satan at the beginning of the thousand years, in the casting him into the abyſs, in shutting it, and sealing it over him,¹⁴ we have a counterpart of the bind-

¹ Chap. xvii. 11.⁶ Chap. vii. 3.¹⁰ Chap. i. 7.² Chap. vi. 16.⁷ Chaps. xiii. 16 ;¹¹ Chap. ii. 2.³ Chap. xii. 12.

xx. 4.

¹² Chap. xvii. 18.⁴ Chap. vii. 2.⁸ Chap. xiv. 1.¹³ Chap. xxi. 10.⁵ Chap. xiii. 17.⁹ Chap. xiii. 17.¹⁴ Chap. xx. 2, 3.

ing and burial of our Lord, and of the sealing of His tomb.¹

II. The principle of *Prolepsis* or Anticipation; that is, the tendency of the writer to anticipate in earlier sections, by mere allusion, what he is only to explain at a later point of his revelation. This principle is exemplified in the promises made to "him that overcometh" in each of the Epistles to the seven churches of Asia, for all of these find their fuller explanation and application in subsequent chapters of the book. The tree of life of the first Epistle meets us again in the description of the New Jerusalem.² The second death, spoken of in the second Epistle, is not explained till the final judgment is complete.³ The writing upon believers of the new name promised in the third Epistle is almost unintelligible until we behold the 144,000 upon Mount Zion.⁴ The dominion over the nations, and more especially the gift of the morning star, referred to in the fourth Epistle, cannot be comprehended until we are introduced to the vision of the thousand years and the last utterances of the glorified Redeemer.⁵ The white garments of the fifth Epistle can hardly be rightly understood until we see the white-robed company standing before the throne and before the Lamb.⁶ The mention in the sixth Epistle of "the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God," remains a mystery until we actually witness her

¹ Comp. Matt. xxvii. 60, 66; John xviii. 12, 24.

² Chaps. ii. 7; xxii. 2, 14.

³ Chaps. ii. 11; xx. 14.

⁴ Chaps. ii. 17; xiv. 1.

⁵ Chaps. ii. 26, 28; xx. 4, 5; xxii. 16.

⁶ Chaps. iii. 5; vii. 9, 14.

descent.¹ And, finally, the sitting in Christ's throne of the seventh Epistle is only elucidated by the reign of the thousand years *with Him*.²

Not a few other illustrations of the same principle are to be met with. Thus it is that we are told of the two witnesses that "they went up to heaven in the cloud, and their enemies beheld them,"³ but we only know what "the cloud" means when later in the book we read of "a white cloud, and on the cloud one sitting like unto a Son of man,"⁴ for "the cloud" is not a cloud to veil the witnesses from view: it is that on which the Lord Himself, accompanied by His people, comes to judgment.⁵ Thus it is that, in the account given us of the fate of the same two witnesses upon earth, we find mention of "the beast that cometh up out of the abyss, who shall make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them,"⁶ while it is only after a considerable interval that we are made fully acquainted with this terrible enemy of the children of God."⁷ Thus it is that an angel at one point of the visions of the Seer proclaims "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great,"⁸ although a lengthened period has to pass before the guilty city is actually overthrown.⁹ Thus it is that "the beloved city" in chap. xx. 9 is an anticipatory notice of the New Jerusalem to be fully described in chap. xxi.; and finally, it is thus that the Elders in their triumphant song under

¹ Chaps. iii. 12; xxi. 2, 10.

² Chaps. iii. 21; xx. 4. Comp. Trench, *The Seven Epistles*, p. 87.

³ Chap. xi. 12.

⁴ Chap. xiv. 14.

⁵ Comp. chap. xiv. 14-16.

⁶ Chap. xi. 7.

⁷ Chaps. xiii. xvii.

⁸ Chap. xiv. 8.

⁹ Chap. xviii.

the seventh Trumpet speak of a judgment of the dead as come,¹ while the judgment itself does not take place till we are near the close of the book, after the thousand years are finished.²

Other illustrations of the same principle abound, but those given are sufficient to show that we have often to pass from one part of this book to another, and to bring its later parts to supplement its earlier, sometimes its earlier its later, if we would understand the Seer.

III. The principle of double representations or pictures of the same thing. It is impossible to discuss this point at any length. But the principle, strange to us, was natural to a Jew. It seems to have been characteristic of the Hebrew mind that, in uttering its thoughts, it loved to express the same or nearly the same thing twice, the second expression rising higher than the first. The speaker or writer was not satisfied with one utterance. After he had spoken for the first time he brought the same point a second time before him, worked upon it, enlarged it, deepened it, and set it forth in stronger and more vivid colours. The whole system of Hebrew parallelism is an illustration of the principle, although there the element of climax may not be always present. Simple repetition gave the sentiment force, and brought it home to the mind with greater power than it would have possessed had it been stated only once. In a narrative belonging to the earliest times of the Old Testament we may find the explanation. When Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's

¹ Chap. xi. 18.

² Chap. xx. 12.

dreams of the fat and lean oxen and of the full and blasted ears of corn, he added, "And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice, it is that the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass."¹ The doubling of the dream lent it impressiveness and certainty. A similar remark may without hesitation be applied to Joseph's own two dreams of the sheaves in the field and of the sun and moon and eleven stars doing him obeisance.² The prospect of more sure and speedy execution was associated with the repetition of a thought ; and hence the words of the Psalmist, "God hath spoken once ; yea, *twice* have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God."³

The principle finds its application in not a few passages of the Apocalypse. When we read in chap. xi. 18 of "the saints and of them that fear Thy name," we shall be mistaken if we suppose two different classes to be alluded to. The two are in reality one, though they are beheld by the Seer in two aspects, the first taken from the sphere of Jewish, the second from that of Gentile, thought. They who are to be rewarded in the great day spoken of are at once the true Israel of God and those whom God has redeemed out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Similar observations apply to what may at first sight seem to be descriptions of two different classes of heretics in the Church at Pergamum, "some that hold the teaching of Balaam," and "some that hold the teaching of the

¹ Gen. xli. 32.

² Gen. xxxvii. 7, 9.

³ Psalm lxii. 11.

Nicolaitans.”¹ Between these two there is in reality no difference, for the best (to say nothing of its seeming to be also the most generally accepted) explanation of the word Nicolaitan regards it as not derived from Nicolas, mentioned in Acts vi. 5, but as compounded of two Greek words equivalent in meaning to the two component parts of the Hebrew name Balaam. Thus the Balaamites and the Nicolaitans are the same, considered in the one case from a Jewish, in the other from a more general, point of view. In like manner the “song” of chap. xv. 3 is not a double but a single song, its first appellative “of Moses, the servant of God,” awakening the remembrance of all that God did for Israel through Moses, the great deliverer of the Old Testament dispensation; its second pointing not less clearly to the sun and centre of the universal dispensation of the New Testament,—“the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of *the world*.”² Even the two figures of the seven candlesticks and the seven stars in chap. i. seem to be best explained when we consider them as a double figure of the Church, which is a “golden candlestick” while she burns in the secret place of the Most High unnoticed by human eyes, but a “star” when, set in the firmament of heaven, she diffuses her light far and wide, and shines not for God only but for man. Finally, the same principle explains the essential sameness of the two consolatory visions of chap. vii.—those of the sealing of the 144,000 and of the white-robed multitude—the persons in both cases

¹ Chap. ii. 14, 15.

² John i. 29.

being the same, though they are first contemplated as a Church gathered out of the tribes of Israel, and next as gathered out of the tribes of the earth.¹

In all these cases we see a principle of structure not dependent upon facts, but deliberately adopted, and faithfully carried out by the writer because it expressed certain ideas of his own.

A fourth point is closely connected with the last.

IV. In double descriptions of the same thing the first seems to be not unfrequently occupied with the ideal, the second with the actual aspect of the object spoken of. The Apocalypse itself supplies us with the explanation of this characteristic of the writer's style. Part of the song of the four and twenty elders, when they celebrate in chap. iv. the glory of Him that sat upon the throne, is in the following words,—“Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they were (not, as in the Authorised Version, ‘are’,) and were created.”² They “were,” and they “were created.” How could they be before they were created? One explanation alone is possible. God knew what He would make before He made it.³ There exists in the Divine mind an eternal type of everything that is called into existence. There is a pattern in the mount

¹ This interpretation of chap. vii. is no doubt much disputed. For a full defence of it see *Comm. in loc.*

² Chap. iv. 11.

³ “For He was not ignorant of what He was about to create when He did create. No accession

to His knowledge comes from His creatures to Him, nor did He know them after He had created them in any other way than before; but they existing when, and as, was meet, His knowledge remained as it was.”—S. Augustine.

after which each pin of the tabernacle is fashioned. There is an ideal before there is an actual.

Let us apply this principle to the difficult task of grouping the paragraphs of chap. xii., and it will afford us help of which we shall be otherwise in want. The relation of the first paragraph of this chapter (verses 1-6) to the third (verses 13-17) has long been a matter of dispute. In the one we read of the woman's flight into the wilderness and of her nourishment there for a thousand two hundred and threescore days (verse 6). In the other we read of what appears to be the same flight and the same nourishment (verse 14). The second passage is, in consequence, often regarded as a mere repetition of the first, or as a more specific detail of what had been mentioned in verse 6, after the natural course of events had been interrupted by verses 7-12. But, rightly regarded, the first and third scenes of the chapter are not the same, nor is the narrative interrupted at verse 7 in order that the war in heaven may be described, and again resumed at verse 13. There is a marked difference between the two scenes contained in verses 1-6 and verses 13-17, and the difference consists in this, that the first is ideal, the second actual. Strictly speaking, the woman in verses 1-6 is neither the Jewish nor the Christian Church. She is light from Him "who is light, and with whom is no darkness at all," light which had been always shining before it was partially embodied either in the Church of the old or the new covenant. Her actual conflict with the darkness has not begun. We behold

her in her own glorious existence, and it is enough to dwell upon the potencies that are in her as "a light of men." In like manner the dragon is not yet to be identified with the devil or Satan. That identification does not take place till we reach verse 9. The former differs from the latter as the abstract and ideal power of evil differs from evil in the concrete. As the woman is at first ideal light, light before it appears in the Church upon earth, so the dragon is ideal darkness, the power of sin before it begins its deadly warfare against the children of God. Thus also we learn what is intended by the Son who is born to the woman. He is not the Son actually incarnate, but the ideally incarnate Son, "the true light, which lighteth every man coming into the world" (John i. 9). More difficulty may be felt in answering the question whether, along with the Son Himself, we are to see in this "Son, of man's sex," the true members of Christ's body. Ideally, it would seem that we are to do so. All commentators allow that in the Son's being "caught up unto God and unto His throne" there is a reference to the Ascension and Glorification of our Lord. But, if so, it is hardly possible to separate between the risen, ascended, and glorified Lord and those who are in Him risen, ascended, and glorified. We cannot part Him from them or them from Him. Everything therefore in these verses is ideal. We see light and darkness, their natural antagonism to each other, the fierce enmity of the darkness against the light, the apparent success but real defeat of the darkness, the apparent quenching but

real triumph of the light. All this, however, we see ideally. The actual forces are not yet upon the field.

In the third paragraph we have the actual Church before us in her conflict, her flight into the wilderness, her nourishment there, and her victory. We have a translation into the concrete of what we had previously witnessed in the abstract.

The second paragraph of the chapter (verses 7-12) is thus no interruption to the narrative. It is a distinct advance upon the first, and an equally distinct preparation for the third. We pass from the dragon, the ideal representative of evil, to the devil or Satan, known to us as the source of all the sin and misery from which earth suffers. Further, we learn why the Church on earth has to contend with this great adversary. He has been cast with his angels out of Heaven. It is God's decree that the main and last struggle between good and evil shall be fought out on earth. Among men, not angels, the issues of the plan of redemption shall be achieved. To impress these thoughts upon us—thoughts necessary to the comprehension of the conflict—is the reason why the second paragraph of this chapter has its place assigned to it in the grouping of the several parts.

The whole chapter presents a most striking parallel to the opening paragraphs of chap. i. of the Gospel of St. John.

If the principle now advocated be just, we venture to ask whether it may not be applicable to a still more important passage—the description of the first beast in

chap. xiii., with the mention of which are associated the mysterious numbers six hundred, sixty, and six. The identity of this beast with that of chap. xvii. has been eagerly disputed;¹ and it must be allowed that on ordinary methods of interpretation there is some difficulty in maintaining it. Yet if there be a difference between them the whole narrative is thrown into confusion. May the principle now advocated afford us light? May the description in chap. xiii. be ideal rather than actual, the first beast of that chapter being thought of in its existence in itself, while only in chap. xvii. do we see it in its real manifestation? Some points of the description favour this conjecture. Thus in chap. xiii. the beast is spoken of as if it were *come*, but in chap. xvii. its coming is rather a thing of the *future* than the present. In chap. xiii. 1 it comes up out of the "sea," thus leading us to the thought of its *original* source; but in chap. xvii. 8 it comes up out of the "abyss," into which it is only plunged when, *in the course of history*, conquered by the Redeemer (chap. xx. 1). In chap. xiii. 2 we are told what it was like, but no mention is made of its "scarlet" colour, that fact being reserved for chap. xvii. 3, when its bloody conflict with the saints is before the Seer's mind. In chap. xiii. 3 we read of its head slaughtered and cured; but in chap. xvii. this is not mentioned, apparently because it is now *acting* in its capacity as a beast risen from the dead, come up out of the abyss. In chap. xiii. 2 also the gift to it by the dragon of the dragon's power and

¹ As, *e.g.*, by Züllig.

throne and great authority has the appearance of an original investiture. The same remark applies to the *gift* in verse 5 of the mouth speaking blasphemies, and of *authority to continue* for a certain time ; as well as of the *gift* to make war in verse 7, the word "given" in the language of St. John leading us back to the primal rather than the historical grant. In like manner, if the description of the second beast of chap. xiii. be, not less than that of the first, ideal, we may better understand why we are not led to know it as "the false prophet" until we reach a later period of the book.¹ This character may properly be attributed to it only when it speaks to men. If there be any ground for these remarks they will help to confirm, what indeed may be otherwise proved, that in the mysterious eighteenth verse of the chapter the *abstract thought* of the name corresponding to the number, rather than the concrete name itself, is the point upon which we are to dwell. "His number is six hundred and sixty and six." These ominous numbers describe primarily the *character*, and only subordinately the *name*, of the beast referred to. The words of the same verse, "for it is the number of a man," will then mean that, just as the name of a man is, or originally was, an expression of his character, and may be given in numbers which, when properly interpreted, afford the same expression of it, so the number of the beast will be found in due time to correspond to a name equally pregnant with the thought of wickedness and of woe to the saints of God.

¹ Chaps. xvi. 13 ; xix. 20 ; xx. 10.

One more particular of structure must be briefly noticed.

V. The use of Episode. Every student of the Apocalypse is familiar with this point, and it is not necessary to enlarge on it. The visions of consolation in chap. vii. are strictly episodic. They interrupt the narrative of the opening of the Seals. The words of chaps. viii. 13; ix. 12; and xi. 14, have a similar character. So have the consolatory visions of chap. xi. and chap. xiv. Episodic remarks also frequently occur, as in chaps. xiii. 18; xiv. 13; xix. 9. Finally, along with this may be noticed the tendency to go back upon a thought the moment it is uttered with the view of presenting it in that contrasted aspect by which it may be made fuller and more impressive, as in chap. ii. 9, "which say they are Jews, *and they are not*, but are a synagogue of Satan;" and chap. iii. 9, "which say they are Jews, *and they are not*, but do lie."

The use to be made of all these particulars will appear in the next lecture.