

## LECTURE VI.

### EXPOSITION OF CHAPS. XIX. 11 TO XXII. 5.

A FITTING close to these Lectures might have been found in giving, had it been possible, a short summary of the teaching of the Apocalypse in its successive paragraphs. General principles and views have engaged so much of our attention, that even those who have listened to all that has been said may complain that the meaning of any particular passage is still dark to them. A running commentary upon the whole book would therefore have been desirable.<sup>1</sup> But it is out of the question to attempt this now, and all that can be done in that way is to select some one part of the visions before us for such treatment. The portion of the book extending from chap. xix. 11 to chap. xxii. 5 may be appropriately chosen for this purpose ; partly, because it contains the most interesting and difficult visions recorded by the Seer ; but especially, because the interpretation of these particular visions has a closer than ordinary bearing

<sup>1</sup> The author may be permitted to refer his readers to his "Commentary on the Apocalypse" in the last volume of the *Commentary*

*on the New Testament*, edited by Prof. Schaff, D.D., etc., and published by Messrs. Clark, Edinburgh.

upon the principles to be applied to the interpretation of the others. It has been urged in these lectures that the Apocalypse contains nothing that is not found elsewhere in Scripture, and more particularly in the discourses of our Lord. Here, if anywhere, objection may be taken to the statement. Have we not, it may be said, in the part of the Apocalypse referred to, the Millennium and the New Jerusalem? Is not the reign of the saints for a thousand years entirely new? Is not the descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven, in like manner, if not wholly, yet almost wholly, new? By these passages, more than by any others of the book, may we test the theory that the Apocalypse is no more than the expansion, in its own peculiar form, of ideas taught in other passages of the New Testament.

At the point, then, where we stand, chap. xix. 10, Babylon, the degenerate and apostate Church, has fallen, and at verse 11 another vision follows. Heaven is opened, and the victorious Redeemer comes forth upon a white horse, the armies of heaven following Him "upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean." It is the beginning of the picture of final triumph over every foe, when all Christ's enemies shall be made His footstool. Christ Himself is arrayed in a garment sprinkled with the blood of His enemies; many diadems, symbols of the many kingdoms now owning His authority, are upon His head; and He has on His garment and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. He is the suffering and conquering Messiah, and all His enemies are

now to be destroyed for ever. In the first place, therefore, they are gathered together to meet their fate,—kings, and captains, and mighty men, and horses, and they that sit thereon, and all men (that is, obviously, all wicked men), both free and bond and small and great. In this the last moment of their career their old enmity is still unsubdued. Their opposition to the Lamb is not less fierce than formerly; and to bring this out, it is said in the nineteenth verse of the chapter that they “gathered together to make war against Him that sat upon the horse, and against His army.” The battle is not to be thought of as literal. It is but a figure to set forth the fixed, undying hatred of the world to God and His people. But no hatred is of avail against the overwhelming power of Him whom the world would oppose. The beast and the false prophet are taken and cast alive into the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone; and the rest, consisting of the kings of the earth and their armies, and of all who set themselves up against the Lord and His anointed, are slain with the sword of Him that sat upon the horse, even the sword which came forth out of His mouth; and all the fowls are filled with their flesh. Thus we reach the end of chap. xix.

In now approaching chap. xx., with all its yet unsolved difficulties of interpretation, it is of essential importance to observe, in the first place, the relation of the chapter to what immediately precedes. It is not an entirely new subject on which the Seer is entering; on the contrary, he is distinctly continuing the prosecution

of a theme he had before begun. In the previous portion of his book three great enemies of the saints of God had been introduced to us—the devil, the beast, and the false prophet. These were the main opponents of the Lamb, in one way or another stirring up all the efforts that had been made against Him by the kings of the earth, their armies, and their followers. For a time they had appeared to succeed. They had persecuted the saints, had compelled them to flee, had overcome them, and killed them. This, however, could not continue; and it was to be shown that in the end complete victory shall rest with those who had suffered for the sake of righteousness. In chap. xix. we have the beginning but not the close of this victory. Of the three great enemies only two, the beast and the false prophet, perish in that chapter. The destruction of the third is reserved for chap. xx., and is effected at the tenth verse of the chapter. The following verses, from verse 11, then describe the judgment of those who had listened to these enemies, but who, though defeated or even killed<sup>1</sup> or devoured by fire out of heaven when in their service,<sup>2</sup> had not yet been consigned to their final doom. Thereafter nothing remains, in order to complete the victory of Christ and His saints, but that death and Hades shall also be removed from the scene and cast into the lake of fire.

These considerations are of themselves sufficient to show that *the overthrow of Satan*, and not the reign of a thousand years, is the main theme of the first ten verses

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xix. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. xx. 9.

of the chapter. So far is the latter topic from being the culminating point of the whole book, that it is not even introduced as the beginning of any new and important section. It starts no fresh series of visions. It comes in indirectly, in the midst of a section devoted to an entirely different matter.

But what is the meaning of this reign of the saints with Christ for a thousand years; of this binding of Satan, and casting him into the abyss, and shutting it, and sealing it over him, for the same period, so that "he should deceive the nations no more until the thousand years should be finished"? And further, what is the meaning of Satan's being loosed out of his prison at the end of the thousand years, and going out to deceive the nations until he is at last defeated and destroyed?

Before giving a direct answer to these questions two interpretations of the passage must be noticed.

The first of these is that a lengthened period of prosperity and ease for the Church of Christ on earth is to intervene between the close of the present Dispensation and the general Judgment. Almost everything indeed connected with this period is a matter of dispute among those who accept the main idea—its length, the number and class of the believers who shall be partakers of its glory, the condition in which they are to live, the work in which they are to be engaged, the relation in which the exalted Redeemer is to stand to them. These differences of detail it is impossible to discuss as if they were so many separate theories, but the more important will be noticed as we proceed.

The second explanation demanding notice is that which supposes the thousand years to be a figure for the whole Christian age, from the First to the Second Coming of the Lord.

I. Turning to the first of these explanations, it would seem as if the difficulties surrounding it were nearly, if not wholly, insurmountable.

1. In the form in which it supposes a resurrection of the saints in which they shall reign upon the earth with a body similar to that which they now possess, it is inconsistent with that *spiritual character* of the resurrection body, which is so important an element alike in the resurrection of our Lord and in that promised to His people. The Christian looks forward not merely to a resurrection similar to that of Lazarus—a return to an earthly mode of life on this earthly scene, but to a glorification of his body as well as his spirit. From this point of view Scripture represents even the appearances of the risen Lord as manifestations specially vouchsafed for a special purpose. After His resurrection His proper home was heaven. He rose not to remain here, but to ascend. Only He showed Himself for our sakes; and St. Peter says that we look, not for a reign on earth, but for “new heavens and a new earth”—

New heaven and earth

Meet for our new immortal birth.

From the first this was the feeling of the Christian Church. Any other view seemed to the fathers to be carnal, to be a forgetting of the glory of our hope. To entertain the idea, therefore, of a future Millennium

during which believers shall, after resurrection, possess their present bodies, is to place ourselves at variance with one of the great truths of Scripture, and one upon which we have need, both in season and out of season, to insist.

But difficulties do not disappear if we abandon this thought, and adopt the idea that during a Millennium upon earth the saints shall possess a glorified body. It is not less impossible, upon this view, to form any reasonable conception of their condition during the thousand years. Multitudes of them, it is allowed, have been raised from their graves through Him who is "the first fruits of them that sleep," while those who are alive at the beginning of the thousand years, and are to share the Millennial glory, are "changed." Whether raised or changed they are thus "in glory;" and we have presented to us the absolutely inconceivable spectacle of glorified saints living in a world which has not yet received its own glorification, and is in consequence completely unfitted for their residence. Nor is this difficulty obviated by either of two suppositions which have been suggested for the purpose:—first, that only Jerusalem and the Holy Land shall be transfigured, the "nations" occupying the remainder of the earth as it now is; or secondly, that the saints shall reign not upon the earth but from heaven over it. For, as to the first of these suppositions, nothing can be more remote from all reasonable probability than the idea of an earth, one part of which shall be transfigured without the rest; while the part chosen for this purpose is far too small

to accommodate those who are to occupy it. The second supposition, again, is not less difficult to apprehend. Were it indeed meant that a certain class of the saints shall reign in glory with their glorified Lord for a thousand years before the general resurrection; in other words, that their eternal and heavenly bliss shall simply begin a thousand years sooner than that of the other saints who shall afterwards share it with them, the idea would be intelligible. But, unless compelled by the special requirements of the passage, few surely will be prepared to adopt such a supposition. It is at once too trifling, and too much opposed to the general meaning of a vision which certainly draws a distinction, in one form or another, between millennial and eternal reward. The thought of a reign *in relation to the earth* must be accepted by all, and upon that point the second supposition now before us throws no satisfactory light. The saints are with their Lord in heaven. How do they communicate with the inhabitants of earth? Will they be visible or invisible? Will their work be missionary or punitive? At this point, indeed, we are brought face to face with some of the greatest difficulties attending the view now under consideration. What are to be the relations between the saints in their millennial glory and "the nations" so much spoken of throughout these verses? Different answers are given to the question, and it is not easy to gather them together in a few sentences. But it may be enough to say that "the nations" are generally regarded as either subject to the saints, and ruled by them in peace, or as the objects

of their missionary enterprise. They are thus either harmless innocents, the absence of Satan preventing all combination and organised manifestation of evil, or they are peculiarly accessible to the grandeur of the spectacle which they behold in the glorified Saviour and His people. It is needless to reply that for all this, and much more of a similar kind, there is not the slightest foundation in the apostle's words, the total absence of any mention of relations between the saints and "the nations" until we come to verse 7 being one of the most remarkable characteristics of the vision. Evidently the Seer has no thought of any complex state of matters such as would spring out of the long dwelling together of these different classes. Or, if there is to be a fresh duration of existence, is there also to be *another probation* for "the nations," a Gospel preached under circumstances very different from what we have known, and constituting a new Dispensation; while yet there is the *same* Judgment at the end, and the conditions for entrance into happiness or woe continue as before?

The difficulties now mentioned are increased when we endeavour to conceive of the relations between the devil and "the nations" during the thousand years. Satan is bound, is cast into the abyss, is shut into it, and has it sealed over him for a thousand years, so that during all that period, by most interpreters of this class made indefinitely longer than a thousand years, "he should deceive the nations no more."<sup>1</sup> Yet these nations are "the nations," enemies of Christ, outside His kingdom, ready

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xx. 3.

to obey the behests of the devil, and to war against the saints the moment the thousand years are finished. Whence comes the evil of this long period? How is sin maintained and kept in vigour during the thousand years? This continued state of sin marking the nations is not in the circumstances more conceivable than the state of grace and glory of the saints.

The whole conception, in short, of the chiliastic view of the thousand years' reign is compassed about with so many difficulties and improbabilities, with so many notions of which we can form no clear conception, or which, when we think that we understand them, are so incredible in themselves, that, unless it be forced upon us by fairness of interpretation, there is no alternative except to abandon it. But fair interpretation, instead of demanding it, strengthens the argument for its rejection. For

2. If we interpret the thousand years literally it will be a solitary example of a literal use of numbers in the Apocalypse, and this objection alone is fatal. If, on the other hand, we regard the thousand years as denoting a period of *indefinite* length, such interpretation is not less opposed to the genius and spirit of the book. The numbers of the Apocalypse are no doubt symbolical, but the symbolism has always a *definite* meaning. They express ideas, but the ideas are distinct. They may belong to a region of thought different from that with which arithmetical numbers are concerned, but within that region we cannot change the numerical value of the numbers used without at the same time changing the thought.

Substitute the number eight for the number seven, or, in like manner, four for three or twelve for ten, and the idea which the writer intended to express by the number actually employed by him immediately disappears. We are not to imagine that numbers, in the allegorical or spiritual use made of them by the Jews, may be tossed about at our pleasure, or shuffled like a pack of cards. They are a language; and the bond between them and the ideas that they involve is quite as close as it is between the words of ordinary speech and the thoughts of the mind which utters them. Thus 1000 years cannot mean 2000 or 10,000 or 20,000 or 365,000 years, as the necessities of the case may afterwards demand. If they are a measure of time the measure must be fixed, and we ought to be able to explain the principle leading us to attach to the number one thousand a value different from that which it naturally possesses. To all this it is no answer that, as three and a half years are described in chap. xii. 12 as "a short season," though extending over the already almost two thousand years of the present Dispensation, so the thousand years may indicate a period of proportionally long duration, or, in other words, a long season without stating how long. The three and a half years do not primarily embrace the thought of a course of years, whether short or long. They embrace the thought of the *whole* Christian age, from its beginning to its close, as of a broken, interrupted, troubled time; and they bring into view the character, not the length, of their "short season." In contrast with three and a half therefore, we are entitled to urge that character, not length, is the idea of the

number one thousand in the passage before us. Thus only do we gain the *definiteness* which must belong to the apostle's language. No man can say how long the present Dispensation may still last, but the number three and a half takes it all in, and conveys to us a distinct impression of the light in which it is regarded by the Seer. In like manner no one can say how long or how short a time the Millennial years may last. The number one thousand has nothing to do with such a question. In contrast with three and a half it does not express length as distinguished from shortness of time, but rather the idea of what is unbroken, uninterrupted, free from trouble, and full of heavenly glory.

3. There are other particulars in the vision which forbid any such interpretation as that against which we contend. The mention of "souls," for example, in verse 4 is inconsistent with the idea that the Seer beholds risen and glorified saints, clothed with the bodies, of whatever kind they be, in which they are to pass the ages of eternity. The word occurs once before in the visions of the Seer, in a connection somewhat similar to the present. In chap. vi. 9 St. John sees underneath the altar the "souls" of them that had been slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held. These "souls" are obviously the spirits of saints, the spirits of the saints of the Old Testament Church, as they wait for their brethren of the New Testament. Here too, therefore, St. John would certainly not have spoken of "souls" had he meant believers in their complete personality raised and glorified.

The ideas, too, involved in the word "reign" are not

those of a royal dignity during the continuance of which subject nations admire the splendour of saints seated on their thrones. It has been well pointed out that the conception of Christ's βασιλεία or kingdom, instead of being that of a long reign of blessedness, is rather that of a powerful and prompt overthrow of His foes.<sup>1</sup> When the end comes no thousand years are needed to effect His purpose. He destroys His enemies with a sudden destruction, like a thief in the night, or like the lightning's flash.

4. Another difficulty presented by this view of the Millennium arises from the teaching of Scripture elsewhere upon the points involved in it. The difference is not simply negative, as if the rest of the New Testament only failed to fill in certain details of events more largely described in the Apocalypse, but upon the whole substantially the same. It is also positive, and in some of its features irreconcilable with what we are taught by others of the sacred writers. If we suppose that the saints who are made partakers of millennial glory are a selected company, we introduce a distinction between different classes of believers at variance with the general tenor of the word of God, in which all believers enjoy the same privileges on earth, share the same hope, and are at length rewarded with the same inheritance, though, according to their capacity of receiving, in different degrees. Even if we reject such distinctions among believers themselves, and suppose that all of them share the millennial glory, we are not entitled, unless there be

<sup>1</sup> Kliefoth, *in loc.*

no alternative, to separate between them and unbelievers in such a way as to interpose a thousand years between their respective resurrections. It cannot be denied that the New Testament always brings the *Parousia* and the general Judgment into the closest possible connection. When Christ comes again it is to perfect the happiness of all His saints and to make all His enemies His footstool.<sup>1</sup> The teaching of the Apocalypse itself in other passages corresponds with this.<sup>2</sup> The idea of masses of the nations continuing to be Christ's enemies for years or ages after He has come again is not only entirely novel, but is inconsistent with the teaching of the other sacred writers. Again, the New Testament elsewhere knows only of one, and that a general, resurrection (John v. 28, 29); and the passages usually quoted as containing partial indications of two resurrections, such as 1 Cor. xv. 23, 24 and 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17, fail to support the conclusion drawn from them. In the meantime it is sufficient to notice the fact that, while the "first resurrection" is supposed to take place a thousand or even thousands of years before the end, it is distinctly said in our Lord's discourse in the sixth chapter of St. John that the resurrection of believers takes place "at the last day" (John vi. 40).

5. Once more, the idea that before the end the Church is to enjoy a long period of prosperity and rest on earth with her Lord reigning in her midst, is inconsistent with that teaching of Scripture, which seems

<sup>1</sup> Matt xxv. 31-46; John v. 16; 1 Thess. iv. 17; 2 Thess. i. 28, 29; Acts xvii. 31; Rom. ii. 5-7; 2 Peter iii. 8-13.

<sup>2</sup> Chaps. iii. 20, 21; xi. 17, 18.

distinctly to imply that her history down to the close of her pilgrimage shall be one of trouble. That this is the meaning of the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew can hardly be disputed, and the argument from that chapter is the stronger because, as we have seen, the discourse of Christ contained in it lies at the bottom of the Apocalypse, and the writer of the latter could not contradict the very authority upon which his delineation is founded. On the other hand, if it be said that Christ is to come again in person not at the beginning but at the end of the period of millennial bliss, it is not easy to understand how that bliss should be spoken of in the terms actually applied to it. Scripture leads us to believe that only in the immediate presence of their Lord shall the saints be perfected, that only as *following* Him shall they attain the consummation of their happiness. The words also contained in verse 6 of this very passage lead to the same conclusion,—they “shall reign *with Him* a thousand years.”

On these grounds alone, without mentioning others, we seem called upon to reject the view which sees in the thousand years a period of prosperity and joy, either of definite or indefinite length, appointed to come between the resurrection of the righteous and the general Judgment, and either with or without the immediate personal presence of the Lord.

II. The second interpretation, of which it is necessary to say a few words, is that which understands by the thousand years the whole Christian age from the First to the Second Coming of Christ. That there is an element

of truth in this view we shall see by and by ; but, looking at it in the form in which it is usually presented, it is not possible to accept it. The number one thousand is inappropriate to the purpose to which it is applied. The period in question has already been made known to us as three and a half years. To make it a thousand years now would be to throw everything into confusion. Again, the "reign" of a thousand years is obviously granted not to the generation of believers only who are alive at the Coming of the Lord, but to all who in any age have been faithful unto death. And how can it be said of them that, in whatever era they departed, they "shall reign with Christ a thousand years," if by these years we are to understand the whole period of the Christian Dispensation and that alone? Once more, we cannot speak of Satan as having been bound and shut up in the abyss during all those ages in which the Church of Christ has carried on her conflict with the world. That there is a sense in which he is so *as regards the righteous* must be allowed, and we shall afterwards see what that sense is. But he is still permitted to act upon them. Our Lord Himself had to contend with his temptations. Can we suppose that His people shall be exempted from them when they are "made partakers of His sufferings"? Not only so. In His high-priestly prayer our Lord prayed on behalf of His disciples, not that His Father should take them out of the world, but that He should keep them out of the evil one ;<sup>1</sup> and He taught them also to pray for them-

<sup>1</sup> John xvii. 15.

selves "Deliver us from the evil one." <sup>1</sup> Words like these undoubtedly presuppose such action on the part of Satan during the militant history of the Church as is absolutely inconsistent with the supposition that he has been bound and cast into the abyss, and the abyss shut and sealed over him during all that time. The same point is equally clear when we think of Satan's action upon "the nations." That action has never ceased. He has been their betrayer and destroyer in every age. When he was cast out of heaven in the twelfth chapter of this book he was "cast down into the earth," and there he persecutes the woman which brought forth the man child "for a time, and times, and half a time." <sup>2</sup> So far from his being shut up and sealed into the abyss, the language of St. Peter is a more correct description of the case, when that apostle speaks of him as "a roaring lion, walking about, seeking whom he may devour." <sup>3</sup> This view too, not less than the one last considered, perplexes our ideas as to what is to happen when the Christian Dispensation has run its course. At that point the thousand years expire; and, as they have been understood of time, it becomes necessary to allow some additional space of time for the closing war. We are thus brought into fresh conflict with other statements of Scripture relating to the same subject. The second proposed solution is not more satisfactory than the first. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. xii. 9, 14.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter v. 8.

<sup>4</sup> It may be well to notice here

a theory proposed by Canon Medd in his work on *The one Mediator*, which, from its simplicity, seems at first sight to have much

Having set aside these two views let us turn directly to the explanation now to be offered of this passage. Two preliminary points have to be noticed.

I. The fundamental principle to be kept clearly and resolutely in view is this, that the thousand years express no period of time. Like so many other expressions of the Apocalypse, their real is different from their apparent meaning. They are not to be taken literally. They embody an idea; and that idea, whether applied to the subjugation of Satan or to the triumph of the saints, is the idea of *completeness*. Satan is bound for a thousand years—*i.e.* he is completely bound. The saints reign for a thousand years—*i.e.*

to commend it. Canon Medd (p. 353) understands "the things which must shortly come to pass" of Rev. i. 1 as a series of things closing with the destruction of Jerusalem, upon which "was to follow the millennial period, a long, but wholly indefinite period, to be closed by the general resurrection and judgment." Such an interpretation assigns an importance to the destruction of Jerusalem inconsistent with the remarkable declaration of our Lord to the high priest in Matt. xxvi. 64, "Nevertheless I say unto you, from this time forth (not as the Authorised Version, "hereafter," or even as the Revised Version "henceforth") ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

The events to which our Lord alludes were to begin, not thirty-five years afterwards, when Jerusalem fell, but *ἀπ' ἀπρὸς*, immediately, with His crucifixion, resurrection, and glorification,—what St. John calls His being "lifted on high." Canon Medd's view is equally inconsistent with the tenor of the Apocalypse generally, the first nineteen chapters of which must then precede the destruction of the holy city. The "age to come" does not begin with the downfall of Jerusalem (p. 352), but with the completion of the work of Jesus upon earth, in His resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of the Father. Comp. the words of Jesus on the cross, "It is finished," and Daniel ix. 26, 27.

they are introduced into a state of perfect and glorious victory.

That years may be understood in this sense there can be no doubt. In Ezek. xxxix. 9 it is said that the inhabitants of the cities of Israel shall prevail against the enemies described, and "shall set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the hand-staves and the spears, and they shall burn them with fire *seven years*."—*i.e.* they shall utterly destroy them, not a vestige shall be left. Again, at the twelfth verse of the same chapter, when the prophet speaks of the burying of "Gog and all his multitude," he says, "and *seven months* shall the house of Israel be burying of them, that they may cleanse the land." In these passages the *seven years* or *seven months* mark only the thoroughness with which the weapons should be burned, and the land cleansed from heathenish impurity. The use of "years" in the passage before us seems to be exactly similar; and the probability that it is so rises almost to certainty when we remember that, as proved by the vision of Gog and Magog in the subsequent part of the chapter, this prophecy of Ezekiel is before the Seer's eyes, constituting the foundation upon which his whole delineation rests.

The only difficulty in connection with this view is that afforded by verses 3 and 7, where we read of the "finishing" of the thousand years and of that "loosing" of Satan which is to follow "after this." But the difficulty is more specious than real. Let us familiarise ourselves with the thought that the thousand years, regarded simply

as an expression, may denote completeness, thoroughness, either of defeat or victory. Let us remember that the Seer has expressed the defeat of Satan by the statement that he was bound for a thousand years. Finally, let us notice that, as we shall immediately see more fully, this defeat has reference only to the righteous, and that although bound, defeated, in regard to them, Satan is to go forth on his malign mission against the unrighteous, and we shall immediately see that in no way could this latter onset be more appropriately expressed than by saying that it took place when the thousand years were finished. The thousand years being a symbol not of time but of completeness, it belongs to the same symbolism to use the word "after," not in a chronological sense, but rather with the force of subordinating the secondary to the primary effect. To revert for a moment to the image of Ezekiel, when he said that Israel should burn the weapons of its enemies "with fire seven years,"<sup>1</sup> let us suppose that the prophet had next wished to describe some secondary effect of the great victory which preceded the burning, and what more suitable expression could he have used than either "after this" or "after the seven years were finished"? The one expression is only the natural consequence of the other.

II. A second preliminary point is the meaning of the last words of verse 3, "he (*i.e.* Satan) must be loosed for a little time." What is this "little time"? Is it a little time following the thousand years which had, in their turn, followed the close of the present dispensation? No.

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xxxix. 9.

It is something altogether different. The words take us directly to that conception of the *Christian age* which is so intimately interwoven with the whole structure of the Apocalypse—that it is all a “little time.” We see this in the application of the very same words to the souls under the altar in chap. vi. 11, “and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a *little time*, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, which should be killed even as they were, should be fulfilled.” The “little time” there is undeniably the whole Christian age.

But, if it be so there, we are entitled to suppose that the very same expression, when used in the passage before us, will be used in the same sense, and that when it is said Satan shall be loosed “for a little time,” the meaning is that he shall be loosed for *the whole Christian age*. Again, in chap. xii. 12, we read “the devil is gone down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time.” The “short time” here referred to must include the whole period of Satan’s action in this world, and the manner in which that period is designated corresponds closely with the description of the time during which he is to be loosed. Again, in chap. x. 6, the angel swears that there shall be “time” no longer, using the same word for “time” that we meet with in the verse now under consideration, so that it would appear as if to the author of the Apocalypse the word “time” or “season” were a kind of technical term by which he was accustomed to denote the whole period of the Church’s probation in this world. Lastly, this conclusion is powerfully confirmed by the many passages

of the Apocalypse in which it is clear that the Christian Dispensation from its beginning to its end is looked upon as a "little while," as *hastening* to its final issue, and as about to be closed by One who cometh quickly.<sup>1</sup> The "little time," therefore, of chap. xx. 3, the "little time" during which Satan is loosed, and which, when more fully expanded, is the time of the war described in verses 7-9 of the chapter, is the historical period of the Christian Dispensation during which Satan is permitted to deceive the nations and to lead them to the war against the camp of the saints and the beloved city. It is, in short, the time between the First and Second Coming of our Lord. *The period, so often sought in the thousand years of verse 2, is really to be found in the "little time" of verse 3.*

Keeping these two preliminary points distinctly before us, we may now apply to the whole passage the hypothesis which they suggest, and may ask whether we do not thus obtain for it a clear, appropriate, and Scriptural meaning.

It has been already stated that the main object of the Seer in chap. xx. is to describe, in continuation of the preceding chapter, the overthrow of Satan, and not any Millennium of the saints. But before he proceeds to this, before as in the case of the beast and the false prophet he even mentions "war," he is invited to behold in vision the complete security of those over whom Satan has no power. Whatever influence the great adversary may exert over others, *they* are safe. They

<sup>1</sup> Chaps. i. 3; ii. 16; iii. 20; xvii. 10; xxii. 20, etc.

belong to Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, who rules in the armies of heaven, and who will not suffer one of His faithful warriors to perish. How suitable was it that such a vision should be presented to St. John's view! About to follow Satan to his final overthrow, he sees him gathering his hosts to the war in which he shall be signally defeated. But, before he describes that war, it is in harmony with his whole method of delineation that he shall find utterance for that preliminary truth which here fills his mind. Again and again throughout his book he has done the same, and before speaking of the trials of the righteous has shown us that they shall be affected by no judgment, however terrible, by no hosts of evil, however mighty. They have been purchased with the blood of Christ. They have died, yea rather, they have risen again to glorious and endless life. They share the throne of their glorified Lord. His rule is their rule, His kingdom their kingdom. Satan cannot harm them. He is already bruised beneath their feet.

From this point of view let us trace, as briefly as possible, the course and meaning of the vision that is here presented to us.

1. In the first place, let us look at the condition of Satan. That head of all evil is bound for a thousand years, and is cast into the abyss, which is shut and sealed over him, so that he shall deceive the nations no more until the thousand years should be finished. The meaning of this is simply that, by the work of Christ, Satan in his character as the deceiver of the nations has

been in principle, completely, and for ever, overcome. It was not at the end of a long series of ages that the Redeemer was to conquer the great enemy of man. He did it once for all by that redemptive work which He accomplished. Satan's power was then wholly broken. He had no longer either right or authority to act in his proper character,—that of the deceiver of the nations. He met in reality the fate which he was able, in a shadowy and temporary form, to inflict on Jesus,—he was bound and shut up in the abyss, and the abyss was sealed over him. Such is always the teaching both of St. John elsewhere and of our Lord Himself. To both the judgment of Satan is not so much a future as a present thing: "For this end Christ was manifested, that," from His incarnation onward, "He might destroy the works of the devil."<sup>1</sup> Jesus Himself, *when He was upon earth*, exclaimed, "*Now* is the judgment of this world; *now* shall the prince of this world be cast out."<sup>2</sup> He declared that "the prince of this world (not is or shall be but) *hath been* judged."<sup>3</sup> In conformity with these passages He elsewhere said, "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven."<sup>4</sup> He gave His disciples reason to hope that they should "bind the strong man."<sup>5</sup> He told them that they had authority from Him "to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy;"<sup>6</sup> and He granted them a foretaste and experience of this authority when He enabled them to heal those that were possessed with

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iii. 8.<sup>3</sup> John xvi. 11.<sup>5</sup> Matt. xii. 29.<sup>2</sup> John xii. 31.<sup>4</sup> Luke x. 18.<sup>6</sup> Luke x. 19.

demons. There is a sense, therefore, in which, *for the followers of Jesus*, from the very beginning of their Christian career, the devil is not a foe to be conquered, but one already bound, shut into an abyss, and the abyss sealed over him—the very lesson of this vision. “This is the *victory* that hath overcome the world, even our faith;”<sup>1</sup> the victory before the war.

2. In the second place, before noticing the loosing of Satan, let us look at the condition of the righteous as it is here depicted. In doing so, a passage in the fifth chapter of St. John’s Gospel ought to be distinctly in our minds. “Verily, verily,” are there the words of Jesus, “I say unto you, the hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that have heard shall live;”<sup>2</sup> and again, a little later in the same discourse, “Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth.”<sup>3</sup> Compare these two verses with one another, and we discover the source whence the idea of the “first resurrection” comes. It is not an actual resurrection from the grave, although that resurrection is potentially involved in it. It is a spiritual resurrection in an hour “*that now is.*” This is “the first resurrection” of the Apocalypse, and the fact that it is so is brought out still more clearly by the intimation that what St. John saw was “souls,” whose resurrection bodies had not yet been given them.

Nor is this all. The other features of their condition correspond with the ideal conception of the condition of

<sup>1</sup> 1 John v. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Verse 25.

<sup>3</sup> Verse 28.

the righteous even in a present world. They sit upon thrones: but we have been already told, at chap. v. 10, that they "reign upon (or rather 'over') the earth," and the whole description is but another way of expressing what St. Paul has said when he speaks of believers as already blessed with every spiritual blessing "in the heavenly places in Christ."<sup>1</sup> "Judgment is given them," words which seem only capable of bearing that sense which is so peculiar to St. John—that for believers there is no judgment; all the judgment through which they have to pass is over. They "live" with Christ; but Christ Himself had said in the Gospel, "Because I live, and ye shall live."<sup>2</sup> They "reign" with Christ; but that is only another method of saying that they sit on thrones. Over them the "second death hath no authority"—they have passed from that death with which judgment is connected into life.<sup>3</sup> Nothing is said of them that does not find its parallel for the *present* life of believers either in St. John's other writings or in the later writings of St. Paul. Still further, it is to be observed that this picture of the blessedness of the saints during the thousand years is really the counterpart of that ascension of Jesus to His heavenly Father which had been described in chap. xii. before the troubles of the saints began. In that chapter it is said of the Son, the man child, who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron, that immediately after His birth "He was caught up unto God and unto His throne,"<sup>4</sup> and then the statement

<sup>1</sup> Eph. i. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. xiv. 19, R. V., margin.

<sup>3</sup> John v. 24; 1 John iii. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Verse 5.

follows that "the woman fled into the wilderness." Two things have to be remembered here; first, that Christ and His people are (throughout the Apocalypse) so identified that it is impossible to separate them from one another; and secondly, that it is the manner of St. John to give more fully in one place what he touches more lightly on in another. When we remember this, we can hardly fail to see that the two visions now spoken of are the counterpart of one another. Before Christ suffers in the members of His Body He is safe within the throne of God: before the members suffer they are safe, sitting upon their thrones, and reigning in the glory of their Head and King.

Putting all these circumstances together we can have no difficulty in understanding either the binding of Satan or the reign of the saints for a thousand years. The vision here presented to us describes no period of blessedness to be enjoyed by the Church at the close of the present dispensation, between the first resurrection of the saints and the general resurrection to follow, when a thousand years expire; nor is it a picture of the Church's history from the beginning to the end of the Christian age. Alike negatively and positively, alike in the binding of Satan and in the reign of the saints for a thousand years, we have simply an ideal picture of what was effected by the Redeemer for His people, when for them He lived and suffered and died and rose again. Then He bound Satan for them; He cast him into the abyss; He shut him in; He sealed the abyss over him—so that against them he could effect nothing.

He is a bruised and conquered foe. He may war against them, afflict them, persecute them, kill them, but their true life is beyond his reach. They live already a resurrection life, an ascended life; for it is a life hid with Christ in God, a life in that "heaven" from which the devil has been finally and for ever expelled. They rest upon, they live in, a risen and glorified Redeemer; and, in whatever age or country or circumstances their lot is cast, they sit with their Lord in the heavenly places and share His victory. He has been always triumphant. At the opening of the first Seal He had gone forth "conquering and to conquer,"<sup>1</sup> and in every song of praise which meets us in the book, sung by the Heavenly host the Church and redeemed creation, His had been "the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever."<sup>2</sup> In this triumph of Christ the saints on earth not less than the saints in heaven have their share. The glory which the Father gave to the Son the Son has given them.<sup>3</sup> They cannot sin because they are begotten of God.<sup>4</sup> He that was begotten of God keepeth them, and the evil one toucheth them not.<sup>5</sup> This is the reign of the thousand years, and it is the portion of every believer who in any age of the Church is a sharer in the life of his risen and exalted Lord.

3. In the third place, we may now easily comprehend what is meant by the loosing of Satan when the thousand years are finished. No point in the future is

<sup>1</sup> Chap. vi. 2.

<sup>3</sup> John xvii. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Chaps. v. 13; vii. 12; xi. 15;  
xv. 3; xix. 7.

<sup>4</sup> 1 John iii. 9.

<sup>5</sup> 1 John v. 18.

there referred to. The point of time when Satan was loosed is in the past. He was loosed to exert his rage in the world immediately after he was completely conquered. He was loosed as a great adversary who, however he may persecute God's children, cannot touch their inner life, and who can only "deceive the nations,"—the nations that have despised and rejected Christ. He has never been really absent from the earth. He has gone about continually, "having great wrath, knowing that his time is short."<sup>1</sup> But he has never been able to "hurt" those that have been kept in the hollow of the Lord's hand. No doubt he has tried it. That is the meaning of the description extending from verse 7 of this chapter to verse 9—the meaning of the war which Satan begins against the camp of the saints and the beloved city when the thousand years are finished. In other words, no sooner was Satan, as regarded *the saints*, completely bound than, as regards *the world*, he was loosed; and from that hour, through the whole past history of Christianity, he has been stirring up the world against the Church. He has been summoning the nations that are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war. But all in vain. They war, but they do not conquer, until at last fire comes down out of heaven and devours them; the devil that deceived them is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xii. 12.

The whole picture of the thousand years thus presented to us is, in all its main features, in the binding of Satan, in the security and blessedness of the saints, and in the loosing of Satan for the war, a striking parallel to the scenes in chap. xii. of this book. There Michael and his angels contend with the devil and his angels, and the latter prevailed not (comp. the very remarkable parallel in John i. 5, "and the darkness overcame it not"), but were cast out of heaven into the earth, so that the inhabitants of heaven are for ever safe from them. There the child who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, and from the thought of whom it is impossible to separate the thought of those who are one with Him, is caught up unto God and unto His throne. Finally there also the dragon, though unable really to hurt the saints, "the rest of the woman's seed which keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus," makes war upon them, but without result. This picture in chap. xx. is a repetition, but at the same time a fuller development, of that in chap. xii.; and when we call to mind the peculiarities of apocalyptic structure formerly spoken of, we seem in this fact alone to have no small evidence of the correctness of the interpretation now proposed.

Finally, it may be observed that the solution of the difficulties of chap. xx. here offered is not arbitrary, or framed to suit the exigencies of a theory. It rests upon a careful examination of the Seer's own words and a faithful application of well-known and universally recognised exegetical laws. That it is wholly free from

difficulty would be too much to say ; but it is presented to the Church as being, first, a fair interpretation of the passage ; secondly, as avoiding the insuperable difficulties of other interpretations ; and thirdly, as in harmony with the general teaching of Scripture, and especially of the Apocalypse itself, on the points with which it deals.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to defend at length the interpretation of this difficult passage here proposed. One or two very brief remarks may be permitted. The writer would ask his readers to bear in mind, in considering it (1) That no interpretation hitherto proposed has succeeded in commending itself to anything like general acceptance ; (2) That the interpretation now offered, whatever may be the difficulties attending it, is in thorough harmony with all the other teaching of Scripture upon the point. This applies in even a special degree to the interpretation of the words of verse 3, "a little time." Yet the interpretation is in no degree the result of any effort to harmonise Scripture. It suggested itself gradually to the writer's mind, and as the result of the combined interpretation of many passages, each considered independently and on its own merits.

There are, however, two great difficulties connected with it that may be noticed, the one presented by a clause in verse 3, the other by a clause in verse 5.

1. In the first of these two verses we read that Satan was

bound and shut up into the abyss, "that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished." Those words seem to mean that there must be a time during which Satan, because bound, does not "deceive the nations," while we have urged in the text that he was no sooner completely subjugated for the righteous than he was let loose to deceive the unrighteous. In reply to this difficulty we suggest that the words, "that he should deceive the nations no more," are not designed to indicate that action on Satan's part was for a time to cease, but rather to bring out and express that aspect of Satan by which he is specially distinguished in the Apocalypse. In chap. xiii. 9 we have been taught to know him as "the deceiver of the whole world"—words which describe him as he *is*, and not simply in what he *does*. The clause now under consideration, therefore, may mean that Satan was bound and shut up in the abyss in that character which best describes him—the deceiver of the nations. The meaning of the passage will then be, that the

A description of judgment follows, in which it is too often supposed that both the righteous and the wicked are included. Such, however, is not the case. For the righteous there is no judgment. Judgment, as we read

*main* result of our Lord's redemptive work was the securing His own people in their state of exalted and glorious privilege, or, in the language of the apocalyptic writer, in their reign of a thousand years. Until this was done we can only think of Satan, the deceiver of the nations, as conquered and in the abyss. But as soon as victory over him was gained, and we see that it was gained, our thoughts are free to pass on to the fact that for the world, for the nations, for the ungodly, he is loosed. Thus may it be said that the abyss was sealed over Satan, that he should deceive the nations no more until the thousand years should be finished, *i.e.* that he should not be himself, or be permitted to act like himself, until the saints were ideally secured in all the privileges of their new estate.

The interpretation of verse 3 now proposed will be rendered more probable should it be allowed that it may not be necessary to understand the words τὰ ἔθνη in that verse in the strict sense of the *ungodly nations*, but in the wider sense of the nations generally, without special regard to their spiritual condition. In that

case the meaning above suggested will be still more obvious, and there will be little difficulty in taking the words, "that he should deceive the nations no more until," etc., as simply meaning that Satan, *the deceiver*, was bound until, etc. But this interpretation has much to confirm it. More particularly is the special definition of verse 8 worthy of notice, "*the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog.*" Why this definition here? Why this limitation of "the nations," unless it be to draw a distinction between the nations of verse 3 and those of verse 8? It may be further noticed that in chap. xxi. 3 we read of the redeemed as the Lord's "peoples" (λαοὶ not λαός). If under the theocratic notion "peoples" many nations may be included, so in the worldly designation "nations" peoples of God may have a place. It appears also from John xi. 50-52 that there is a sense in which the theocratic people are "a nation," and the heathen gathered into the flock of Christ a part of His "people" (comp. Comm. *in loc.*). Lastly, the distinction drawn in the fourth Gospel between "the Jews" and "the multitude" may supply an

in verse 4, had long before been "given them." They may, indeed, as the Shorter Catechism puts it, be "openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment," but there "remaineth" for them even now

important Johannine parallel. These two classes in the Gospel are always to be carefully distinguished from each other, the one being self-steeled against the truth, the other presenting a field open for its reception. It may be so here. The nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, may find their parallel in "the Jews," the nations generally in "the multitude." The object of the middle clause of verse 3 may then simply be to tell us that Satan, *the deceiver*, was no longer permitted to carry on his work of deception until, after having been first completely conquered, he was again let loose.

If this view of these words be admitted, no difficulty need be felt with regard to those of verse 7, "and when the thousand years are finished," or rather, "when the thousand years should be finished," for the word *τελευτησθη* ought certainly to be translated in the same way as in verses 3 and 5. We have here simply the second, because subordinate, half of the thought of which we have already spoken, —when the saints are secured in their position Satan is permitted

to resume his work of deceiving the nations.

2. The second difficulty demanding notice is presented by the clause in verse 5 in which we are told that "the rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished." This difficulty may perhaps be met in either of two ways.

a. "The rest of the dead" may be understood to mean the ungodly; but there is a serious obstacle to this, in so far as we shall thus be compelled to lower the meaning of the word "lived" in the same clause, and to understand it simply in the sense of coming into the field of action. In other words, the meaning will be that at the moment of Christ's completing His victory there was a pause. After the victory was completed the ungodly again stirred, moved, acted, "lived." In this we should have a close parallel to John xviii. as compared with xvii. But even although at the close of verse 4 it may not be necessary to connect "lived" as well as "reigned" with the words "with Christ" (comp. verse 6, where we read only "they shall reign"), it is not easy to take its high spiritual mean-

no condemnation or judgment tending to it. They are "in" Christ, who sits upon the seat of judgment. They have long since passed out of death into life.<sup>1</sup> The wicked alone are judged and cast into the lake of fire; while death, the last enemy, and his follower Hades, are also judged, and are cast into the same lake of fire.<sup>2</sup>

One vision still remains, described in chap. xxi. and in the first five verses of chap. xxii. The new heavens and the new earth are beheld wherein dwelleth ing out of the Johannine "lived."

b. A second solution is suggested by a valued friend, who asks whether these "rest of the dead" in verse 5 may not be the Old Testament saints of chap. vi. 9. These Old Testament saints were, by the completion of the Lord's redeeming work, brought up to the level of the New Testament Church (comp. Comm. on vi. 9, etc.) May not the meaning of chap. xx. 5 therefore be, The New Testament Church had *first* bestowed upon it a complete redemption, and only *after that* were the same white robes given to the Old Testament Church, the succession being again one of thought rather than time. The advantages of this rendering appear to be—first, that it marks out *all* the members of Christ's body as having been *vekpoi* before they "lived," thus identifying them with their Lord in chap. i. 18; secondly, that

"*the rest of the dead*" then belong to the *same* class as that previously spoken of, and not to a different class; thirdly, that it makes the position of the words at the close of verse 5, "this is the first resurrection," more natural, when they thus follow what is *wholly* a description of the blessed; and fourthly, that we preserve by this rendering the full Johannine meaning of the word "lived." Upon the whole the second rendering is to be preferred, and it appears to offer a fair solution of the difficulty. But, whether that difficulty is solved or still awaits solution, the writer of these Lectures trusts that the explanation proposed in the text may be accepted as in the main correct, or as, at all events, helping forward the interpretation of the passage by leading to further investigation.

<sup>1</sup> Comp. John v. 24.

<sup>2</sup> This point will be further spoken of in Appendix II.

righteousness. The holy city, New Jerusalem, the true Church of God wholly separated from the false Church, is beheld coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Her eternal marriage with the Lamb takes place—a marriage in which there shall be no unfaithfulness on the one side and no reproaches on the other, but in which, as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, the Lord shall for ever rejoice in His people, and they in Him. The tabernacle of the Lord is pitched among men, and He dwells among them. They are His people, unchangeably, eternally His, free from sin and free from sorrow. The tears are wiped away from their eyes; and there is no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, for the former things are passed away, and all things are made new.

Then follows, still further to enhance the picture, a description of the true Church under the figure of the city which had just been spoken of. The treasures of language are exhausted that the thought of her beauty and her splendour may be suitably impressed upon our minds. In her foundations, in the courses of stones resting upon them, in her height and fair proportions, she is thought of as ideally perfect, and not according to the strict realities or possibilities of things. All the outward helps actually needed by men to aid them in leading the life of God in their present state of imperfection are dispensed with. There is no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. It has no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God lightens it, and

the Lamb is the light thereof. There is no sin there, and every positive element of happiness is provided in abundance for its blest inhabitants. The river of the water of life, full and clear, flows there ; and on either side of the river is the tree of life, not bearing fruit once a year only but every month ; not yielding one only but twelve manner of fruits, so that all tastes may be gratified, having nothing about it useless or liable to decay. Its very leaves are for the healing of the nations, and it is evidently implied that they are always green. Finally, the curse is for ever removed. The servants of the Lord serve Him. They see His face. His name is in their foreheads. They are priests unto God in the service of the heavenly sanctuary, and they reign for ever and ever.

One question still remains. What aspect of the Church does the holy city Jerusalem, thus come down out of heaven from God, represent ? Is it the Church as she shall be in the supposed days of millennial bliss, the Lord Himself reigning in it among His people ? Or have we before us an ideal representation of the true Church of Christ as she exists now, and before a final separation has been made between the righteous and the wicked ? After all that has been said there ought to be little difficulty in answering the question ; and hints in the passage appear to confirm the answer that must be given. *The New Jerusalem is an ideal picture of the true Church now.* Just as we saw that the Millennium is come, as it came with the finished work of Christ, as it comes in principle to every heart that rests upon its Lord in faith, so the New Jerusalem has come, has been in the

midst of us for more than eighteen hundred years, is now in the midst of us, and shall continue to be in the midst of us wherever its King has those who love and serve Him, walk in His light, and share His peace and joy. Let us look at the words of chap. xx. 9, where we read of "the beloved city." That city is none other than the New Jerusalem about to be described in the following chapter, and yet it is spoken of as *in the world*, and as the object of attack by Satan and his hosts *before the judgment*. Let us look at chap. xxi. 24, where we read, "And the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it." Who are these "nations" and these "kings of the earth"? The constant use of the same expressions in other parts of the book, in which there can be no doubt about their meaning, compels us to understand them of nations and kings beyond the pale of the covenant, who must therefore be still existing in the world *after* the descent of the New Jerusalem. Let us look at chap. xxi. 27, where we read, "and there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they which are written in the Lamb's book of life," and these words distinctly intimate that the time had not yet come for that separation of which we read in chap. xx. 15, "And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire." Finally, let us look at chap. xxii. 2, where we are told that "the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations," and we see that even after the city had descended to earth there were nations to be healed.

Nor are even those parts of the description which it appears at first sight most difficult to reconcile with the idea that we have before us the true members of Christ's Body upon earth, and not the Church in heaven, out of keeping with other statements of the New Testament. The intimation of verses 8 and 27 that sin is banished from the city is not stronger than the words of St. John in his First Epistle, "Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God;"<sup>1</sup> while the assurance of verse 4, that "the first things are passed away," has its perfect parallel in the language of St. Paul when, writing to the Corinthians and occupied with the very same thought of the risen Lord as that which is here prominent, he exclaims, "The old things are passed away; behold, they are become new."<sup>2</sup> In addition to this it is well to remember that the most glowing descriptions of the Old Testament, when it speaks of the coming kingdom of Messiah, apply to the age now passing over us; and these descriptions the Apocalypse adopts and seals.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chap. iii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. v. 17.

<sup>3</sup> It may be well to notice in a note another consideration upon this point, which will be allowed to be of weight by those who admit the existence of that principle of structure in St. John's writings upon which it rests. St. John is often marked by a tendency to return at the close of a section of his writings to what he had said at the beginning, and to shut up, as it were, between these two

statements all he had to say. So here in chap. i. 3 he introduces his Apocalypse with the words, "for the time is at hand." In chap. xii. 10 he returns to the thought, "Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand." That is, the whole intervening Apocalypse is enclosed between these two statements; all of it precedes the "time" spoken of; the New Jerusalem comes before the end.

In the New Jerusalem, therefore, we have essentially a picture, not of the future but of the present, of the ideal, condition of Christ's true people, of His "little flock" upon earth in every age. The picture may not yet be realised in fulness, but every blessing lined in upon its canvas is in principle the believer's now, and will be more and more his in actual experience as he opens his eye to see and his heart to receive. We have been wrong in transferring, as we have done, the thousand years' reign and the New Jerusalem to the future. They belong to the past and to the present. They are the Church's heritage at the very time that she wars and suffers ; and the thought of them ought to console her amidst her trials, and to make her burdens easy to be borne. Oh, if the Church, if believers, only felt this more, what a *millennium* of happiness and glory would each enjoy ! With what triumph would each lift up his head as he paced the streets of that New Jerusalem of which he is a citizen ! And in what a light would he feel called upon to present himself to the eyes of men, not mingling in the strife of human tongues, or interested in worldly wealth and honour, but already radiant with the glory of his heavenly home ! The Church has mistaken her mission, and has misinterpreted the Scriptures of the possession of which she boasts. She has transferred all her blessedness to the future, and has asked men to accept for the realities of the present and the seen her dim and shadowy, too often her fantastic, pictures of the future and the unseen. That is not the method of our Lord or of His servant John in

the Apocalypse. They do not try to convert men by hopes of heaven. They deal with realities now to be grasped, with visions of glory now to be realised. They invite us, indeed, to a glorious and eternal future ; but, as at once the evidence and the beginning of that future glory, they invite us, in the first place, to the possession here and now of "things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man."<sup>1</sup> They tell us that the brightness of the New Jerusalem ought to be within us and around us, shining through every earthly sorrow, so that we may lighten the dark places of "the nations" with its purity and peace and joy.

It is unnecessary to dwell upon the Epilogue which begins at chap. xxii. 6. With the previous verse the special visions of the Apocalypse had come to an end, and the book which had presented so many dark traits of Paradise lost had closed with the glorious picture of Paradise regained. Only one thing more was needed—that the Lord Himself, long waited for, should come, to transmute each promise into fulfilment and each ideal into its corresponding real. Even so. "Amen : come, Lord Jesus." Meanwhile we cannot doubt that to St. John the lone isle of Patmos was lightened with the glory of what he saw ; and, be it that we too are in our Patmos, the same glory will lighten us, if only we are among them which keep the sayings of this book.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 9.