

## LECTURE I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

No one who has paid careful attention to the Revelation of St. John will doubt the sincerity of the author of the following lectures when he says that he approaches the subject before him under a profound sense of its difficulties. These do not arise merely from the strange and mysterious nature of the book with which he has to deal. They spring even more from the thought of that amount of feeling which discussion of the topics connected with it seems always to provoke. The Christian community may be said to be divided upon this point into two great classes,—one seeing no meaning in the Apocalypse, the other attaching to it so definite a meaning that it regards as impiety every interpretation but its own. Nowhere is the tendency to dogmatize upon matters that least admit of dogmatism more observable than here. Nowhere do inquirers show less toleration for conclusions differing from those to which they have themselves been led. On no questions of Biblical interpretation are opponents more frequently referred to in terms approaching to

contempt. The fact is discouraging, but it is at the same time a striking testimony to the remarkable interest of the book, and to the power which it exerts over the student. Our effort must be to avoid the spirit thus frequently exhibited by others. In studying the Revelation of St. John, humility, calmness, openness to conviction, singleness of desire to ascertain the truth, and charity are even more than usually required.

There are two important questions connected with the Apocalypse which it is necessary, in the meanwhile, to set aside as unsuitable for discussion in this place and way. They relate to the authorship of the book and to the date of its composition. Consideration of these questions must, therefore, be reserved for an Appendix. For the present it is assumed that the Apocalypse is an authentic and genuine production of its reputed author, and that it was written towards the close of his life, during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian. Such has been the general belief of the Church from the beginning of her history down to very recent times; and, although it cannot be denied that not a few distinguished scholars of all shades of opinion have been led of late to a different conclusion, an effort will be made to show in the Appendix that the belief so long and so universally entertained upon both points is right. No one, therefore, will complain that, as an hypothesis, it is now taken for granted, and its effect upon interpretation tried.

Taking then the book of Revelation as it lies before us in the Bible, the object of the following

lectures is to endeavour, in some degree at least, to dispel the perplexity which surrounds it; to ascertain its meaning; and to claim for it that place in the estimation of Christian men to which it is entitled. It is not enough that every one who sees, or imagines that he sees, a meaning in it should at once acknowledge the singular fascination of the book; that, notwithstanding its difficulties, he should constantly return to it; and that he should, without hesitation, pronounce it to be one of the most sublime, instructive, and consolatory portions of the sacred volume. What it is to such persons it ought to be to all who acknowledge that it is divine.

Notwithstanding this, there is no exaggeration in saying that, to the great majority of Christians, the Revelation of St. John has long been, and still is, an object of suspicion and distrust. In the earlier ages of the Church it was far less read than the other books of Scripture. St. Chrysostom and other eminent Greek Fathers abstain from making use of it;<sup>1</sup> for many centuries we possess no commentary upon it from any writer of the first rank; while its very strangeness led not unfrequently to its being denied canonical authority. In later times Luther undervalued it. Calvin did not venture to comment upon it. Herder refers to those who in his day considered it the mark of a sound understanding to abstain from the study of it. The old Lectionary of the Church of England, replaced by a new one but a few years

<sup>1</sup> Comp. Smith's *Bible Dict.*, iii. 1035.

ago, contained only three lessons from it, while all the rest of the New Testament was read in order three times a year. Even in the new Lectionary portions of it are omitted. Nor is it otherwise with the general body of the Christian community. Multitudes think it wise to neglect it, and to occupy themselves with those other books of the Bible which, whether really more intelligible or not, appear at least at first sight to be so. To numbers it is not only absolutely sealed; they imagine, and are content with imagining, that no loosing of the seals is possible. Sometimes deliberately, almost always practically, the book is laid aside. The effect is more than negative; the result worse than loss. The symmetry and completeness of Scripture are marred. The idea of revelation is disturbed. If one portion of the Divine Word may be dispensed with, why not all? Conclusions of this kind are so disastrous that it seems an imperative duty to attempt to counteract them. The attempt may be reproached or ridiculed; or it may only lead to deepened confusion of thought upon the point. There is no help for it. The book is there, and it must either be excluded from the New Testament, or the Church must continue her struggle to comprehend it until she succeeds in doing so. Consider—

1. In the first place, that we start with the supposition—a supposition denied by none of those to whom these lectures are addressed—that the Revelation of St. John is part of the Word of God. That consideration settles the whole question. The simple fact that a book has been given by the Almighty to man con-

stitutes man's obligation to make every effort to understand it. It may be hard to do so. We may be long defeated. Not less is the effort one that we are bound to make; using all the appliances in our power, and watching, if we still feel that we are in darkness, for the first symptoms of light. Nothing is more certain than that, had it not been intended that we should use this book, the exalted Redeemer would not have given it by revelation to His servant John.

2. In the second place, the language of the book itself confirms what, from the very nature of the case, is a matter of unquestionable inference. Its title is—"The *Revelation* of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to *show unto His servants*, even the things which must shortly come to pass."<sup>1</sup> Some of the earliest words uttered to the Seer by the glorious Person who appeared to him are—"What thou seest, *write in a book, and send it to the seven churches.*"<sup>2</sup> Almost the last instruction of the angel when he had brought to an end the visions of this prophecy are—"Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand;"<sup>3</sup> while, with still more explicit reference to the application to be made of it, the Saviour Himself declares—"I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the churches."<sup>4</sup> The words of this revelation then, unlike the words of Daniel's prophecy of which it was said, "Shut thou up the vision, for it belongeth to many days to come,"<sup>5</sup> were not to be shut up. They

<sup>1</sup> Chap. i. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. i. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xxii. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Chap. xxii. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Dan. viii. 26.

were to be spoken, to be testified, to man; and, if so, can it be for a moment doubted that they were to be listened to, to be apprehended, to be taken home, by man? The exhortation, so solemnly repeated in each of the seven epistles to the churches of Asia, may be applied, if indeed it was not expressly intended to be applied, to the whole of that book with which these epistles are so intimately connected—"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." <sup>1</sup>

3. In the third place, there is even a special blessing promised to the student of the Apocalypse, and a special woe denounced upon him who tampers with it—"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein; for the time is at hand." <sup>2</sup> Such is the preface, and not less striking is the conclusion—"I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book." <sup>3</sup> Words like these are attached to no other book of the Bible; and they constitute an impressive warning not to neglect the visions of the Seer, and a not less impressive call to study them.

The prepossessions hitherto referred to are easily

<sup>1</sup> Chaps. ii. iii.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. i. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xxii. 18, 19.

dispelled. There are, however, other and more serious difficulties not unfrequently leading to the same conclusion. On the one hand, many are offended with the extravagance, the fanaticism, the sensuous and unspiritual ideas of divine things so often associated with the gorgeous pictures of the Apocalypse, and the tendency of which is to destroy every intelligent conception of Christianity in the minds that entertain them. On the other hand, not a few appeal to the endless diversity of interpretations that have been given of the book, to the obviously mistaken conclusions arrived at in connection with it by even the most distinguished expositors of other parts of the New Testament, or to the falsification by the event of every attempt made to fix from it the date of the Second Coming of the Lord; and then they ask, not unnaturally, Is it possible to understand it? Is not rather the impossibility of doing so proved by the whole history of the Church? Is not the book so unregulated not only in its style, but in its thoughts, as to be out of keeping with all ordinary writings, and to be subject to no rules of interpretation, however otherwise well established? May not every inquirer make of it what he pleases? The objections are important and must be answered.

Of the first of them indeed little need be said. If fanaticism has been fostered by false interpretation, it is only the more necessary to reach an interpretation that is true. If calm and rational believers hand the book over to ignorance and folly, what ground have we to expect a satisfactory result? Besides which it is

well to remember that the liability of the Apocalypse to be abused, and made an instrument of nourishing carnal expectations of Christ's kingdom, is neither peculiar to it, nor without analogy in the history of God's dealings with His Church. The prophecies of the Old Testament were not less abused before the First Coming of our Lord. But, because they were so, would it have been better for Israel to have wanted, or to have made no serious efforts to comprehend, them? Surely not. There were always some who used their advantages aright, "searching what *time*, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them;"<sup>1</sup> and, although many took a false view of prophecy, by that very view, when the Redeemer came, they were tried. The dreams, therefore, of enthusiasts who, whether carnally or spiritually minded, have found their strength in a one-sided and imperfect interpretation of the Apocalypse, cannot make us underestimate the real value of that book, or persuade us that it does not attain its end. It is to us what Daniel and Isaiah and Ezekiel and others of the prophets were to the Jewish Church. Many may misapprehend its meaning. Many may gather from its pages those outward notions of Christ's kingdom which are so natural, and so difficult to eradicate. Yet without its prophets Israel could not have prepared itself for the coming of the Son of God in the flesh; and without the revelation of the Apocalypse our know-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter i. 11.

ledge of His coming in glory would be equally imperfect.

The second objection is more important than the first. It is equivalent to a denial of the inspiration of the book. To suppose that the Almighty has given us a sacred writing of which it is as easy to make one thing as another, is to put it out of analogy with what He has done in every other department both of His works and of His Word. That it should be obscure or mysterious would in no way startle us. Obscurity and mystery meet us everywhere. We have no reason to complain of such arrangements. It is an altogether different thing when we are told, not that a part of revelation is difficult, but that it is from its very nature unintelligible, and that it is constructed with so little reference to common processes of thought and rules of language as to place a distinct conception of its meaning beyond our reach. This is simply to deny the operation of the Divine Spirit in the construction of the book. Everything that has proceeded from the Almighty has a meaning distinct, definite, and one. Man may not immediately comprehend it, just as thousands of years passed before he comprehended the structure of the earth, or the movements of the heavenly bodies. But the voice both of the earth and of the heavens was never in itself less fixed or certain than it is now. They were capable of being interpreted; and at last they received their interpretation. It is the same with the book before us. He who regards it as divine must believe that its meaning is as definite as that of sun or

moon or stars or rocks, and as likely to yield itself to carefully conducted and patient investigation. Many mistakes may be made; much disappointment may be experienced; there may be long delay; but the meaning is there. That is the point with which we are concerned, and it brings with it the pledge that we shall one day attain our end.<sup>1</sup>

The whole theory indeed as to the impossibility of understanding the Apocalypse proceeds upon a false notion of the nature of figurative language. It is supposed that figures are amenable to no rule, whereas

<sup>1</sup> Herder, referring to this subject, exclaims, "They (the prophets) have all one spirit, one design. One builds upon another; one explains another; and as gold have all been preserved. No imagery-language has remained purer or been better preserved. None is in any measure so deeply embedded in the genius of the people, its writings and its idiom. Hebrew poetry is as it were all symbol, imagery, holy and lofty diction. Even the prose-writers and historians must needs speak in a tropical way because their language demands it; still more must this be done by teachers and prophets. No language loves and furnishes imagery like this. Here a fiery glance, there a breathing full of the spirit of the Lord. In this way speak the Old and New Testament; and so speaks the Apocalypse which contains the sum of both. It is an anile fable

that a peculiar key belongs to it, or that the key is lost. Who ever writes a book without an adequate key? Specially, who writes such an one for seven churches? Did John attach a peculiar key to it when he sent it to them? How did it look? Who has seen it? How came it to be lost? Is it in the sea near Patmos, or in the Mæander? John writes a book for others, for many; a book about whose contents he was so seriously anxious that he arrays curse upon curse against any one who detracts from it, and blessing upon blessing for him who reads, hears, and obeys it; and yet this book is said to be an unintelligible enigma, a kind of raving wholly sealed up, which no one except its author can understand, and which even he himself perhaps did not understand. Can anything be more absurd?"—*Works*, vol. xxxix. p. 371.

they are not less the expression of thought than the most ordinary terms of speech or writing ; and they are used with a not less definite intention by every one who deals honestly with his audience. We may not always have a right conception of their force, because our modes of thought may differ widely from those of the nation or the age in which the figures were employed. But, considered in themselves, they are not more ambiguous than many terms of the baldest philosophic or didactic treatise. Our commonest words are ambiguous, or even meaningless, to the man who is unable to put their meaning into them. Nothing more is necessary to make figurative language as clear as the plainest, simplest, and most unadorned statements than first, that a writer always use his figures in the same sense ; and secondly, that the reader know the ideas for which they stand. They then take their place along with all those other artificial signs of thought on which we depend for maintaining the daily intercourse of life.

These considerations ought to go some way towards settling an important question which has been raised in connection with the Apocalypse. St. John, it has been said, uses symbolical language in that book on purpose to conceal his meaning from the heathen, especially the Roman, authorities ; and to his dread of drawing down fresh persecutions either upon himself or his fellow-believers we owe in no small degree the obscurity of the book.<sup>1</sup> There is not the smallest

<sup>1</sup> Beyschlag, *Die Offenbarung*, p. 23. Dr. Farrar does not appear to be perfectly satisfied how far the motive alluded to in the text

foundation for the statement. So far is it from being correct that we not only find the Apostle often telling us what his figures mean, as in the case of the stars and of the candlestick in chap. i. 20, of the white-robed company in chap. vii., of the great dragon in chap. xii., and of the New Jerusalem in chap. xxi., but that the very vision in which, according to these interpreters, he ought to have been most reserved, that relating to the beast and the harlot in chap. xvii., is precisely the vision of which he gives the fullest explanation. Besides which, such words as those of chap. xiii. 18, "*He that hath understanding let him count the number of the beast,*" are obviously used not to favour concealment of the mystery, but to provoke to the investigation of it, as one to be known, either then or in due season, by the spiritual mind. The figures of the Apocalypse flow from no effort at concealment, and from no dread of danger. They are the natural result of the Seer's own temperament, training, - circumstances, and mood of mind at the time he writes; and they are designed to lend a force and vigour to his style which would not have been gained by simpler speech.

We must not, therefore, allow ourselves to be startled

prevailed in the age of the New Testament.\* In his *Life of Christ* (vol. ii. p. 173) he accounts for the omission in the Synoptists of the raising of Lazarus by their unwillingness to bring the family of Bethany into "dangerous prominence." But he prefers another explanation of the fact that the

name of Peter (as the assailant of Malchus) is not given in the Synoptists than this, that "it was purposely kept in the background in the earliest cycle of Christian records." Yet this last he thinks neither "absurd nor improbable."—(Vol. ii. p. 323, *note.*).

by the fact that in the case of no other book of Scripture has interpretation been marked by so much unsettledness and diversity of view as in the case of the Apocalypse, that the wildest theories have been connected with it, and that its predictions have been assigned with the utmost confidence to times and places separated from each other by many centuries or by half the circumference of the globe. These things prove no more than the weakness and blindness of men. We dare not allow them to lessen our estimate of the definiteness of the Word of God.

With these preliminary remarks we may now turn directly to the book before us. Our object is to understand it, and so to determine its place and meaning in the scheme of revelation that we may derive from it the instruction or encouragement, the warning or comfort, which its Divine author intended it to convey. We have to lay aside, as far as possible, all preconceived notions of its meaning. The principles of historical criticism must be applied by us with the strictest faithfulness. We must judge of the book mainly by considering its own contents, by taking into account what we otherwise know of the writer, and by keeping in view the special circumstances amidst which he wrote.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "In order to a right interpretation of the Apocalypse, the best help is to be found in the Apocalypse itself. St. Augustine has well observed that this book is composed in such a manner as

to exercise the diligence of the interpreter (*De Civ. Dei.*, xx. 17), and that by comparison of one passage with another the obscure parts may be illustrated and made clear. Indeed there is scarcely a

There can thus be no hesitation as to the course to be pursued in the present lectures. The internal characteristics of the Apocalypse first claim our notice. In proceeding to them it ought to be distinctly borne in mind that our aim is not the gratification of literary curiosity or interest. We desire simply to interpret, or to ascertain the meaning of the book. To this aim everything else must be subordinated. On this everything else must be brought to bear.

1. The first characteristic of the Apocalypse claiming our attention is that the revelation contained in it is given by means of visions. There are indeed one or two parts of the book which seem to be historical,—the first eleven verses of chap. i., in which the writer speaks of himself and relates the occasion of his writing; chaps. ii. and iii., describing the condition of the churches he was commissioned to address; and the two closing verses of chap. xxii. With these exceptions the rest of the book is communicated in visions. St. John was “in spirit on the Lord’s day,”<sup>1</sup> in the small rocky island of Patmos in the *Ægean* Sea. Then the unseen world was opened to him; and, as in a great drama, successive visions—though not, as we shall see, always representing the events with which they deal in chronological order—passed before his view. Whether all the visions of the book were presented to the Seer without inter-

phrase or sentence in the Apocalypse, however difficult it may seem to be at first, which may not be elucidated by means of

some other phrase or sentence in the same book.”—(Bp. Wordsworth, *Introd. to Apoc.*).

<sup>1</sup> Chap. i. 10.

ruption from the beginning to the end, or whether there were intervals of time between the different groups, is not easily determined; and, for the purpose of interpretation, the inquiry is unnecessary. That all were connected with Patmos is unquestionable; and, were we to understand "the Lord's day" spoken of in chap. i. 10 of the first day of the week, the words of the preceding verse, which warrant the conclusion that the visions belong to Patmos, would lead us also to infer that they were granted on the same day.<sup>1</sup> But the expression, "the Lord's day," has in all probability another reference; and, besides this, one statement of the writer distinctly shows us that changes did take place in his condition. At chap. iv. 2 we read, "Straightway I was in *the* spirit," or rather, "I passed into *the* spirit,"<sup>2</sup> although we know that he had been in that state before. There may also have been other points of transition, such as the moment of chap. xvii. 3, "And he carried me away in spirit into a wilderness," and of chap. xxi. 10, "And he carried me in spirit into a mountain great and high." It is unnecessary, however, to determine the

<sup>1</sup> It does not seem necessary to enter upon any lengthened discussion as to the meaning of the expression "the Lord's day." The writer can only say that, in the absence of all proof that the first day of the week was so designated in early Christian times, and taking into account the general tone of the Apocalypse, it seems more natural to understand the Seer as

meaning by that term not any particular day, but the whole of that Christian dispensation which, notwithstanding the sufferings of Christians, was to him, in its deepest characteristics, the day of the Lord—the time when the Lord was ruling in the earth and preparing to make His glory manifest.

<sup>2</sup> ἐγενόμην.

question. On either supposition the meaning of the visions will be the same.

For a like reason it is unnecessary to ask whether the visions passed before the Seer in the forms in which he relates them, or whether, having had only certain truths divinely impressed upon his mind, his poetic fancy led him to clothe these in the shapes before us. Even were the latter supposition correct, it would in no degree modify either the extent of his inspiration or the value of his teaching. The Spirit of God adapts Himself to every method of expression suggested by the peculiarities either of a writer or his age. The human element can no more be excluded from the plainest than the most ornate sentence, from the simplest than the most complex figure. It is not the words but the man who is inspired. It is not with the words as such, but with the truth contained in them, that we have to do. That truth may be conveyed in figures of many kinds determined by the era, the country, or the immediate purpose of the author. If we can learn what the truth itself is, and if at the same time we have reason to believe that it comes from God, we need inquire no further.

Yet there is every reason to think that these visions were granted to the Seer exactly as he records them. They do not stand alone in Scripture, and they probably come under the same law as others which it relates. The state of Abraham must have been similar when, before being warned of the fate that was to overtake his seed, "an horror of great darkness fell upon him."<sup>1</sup> So

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xv. 12.

also must have been the state of Balaam when he "saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open,"<sup>1</sup> while the prophecies of Ezekiel and Zechariah are mainly presented to us in visions of the same character. Nor are visions confined to the Old Testament. St. Paul was favoured with "visions and revelations of the Lord." "I knew a man in Christ," he says, "(whether in the body I know not, or whether out of the body I know not, God knoweth), such a one caught up even to the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in the body, or apart from the body, I know not, God knoweth), how that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter;"<sup>2</sup> and St. Peter is described as having fallen into a trance at the time when the vision which led to the extension of the Gospel to the Gentiles passed before him.<sup>3</sup> In these and in every similar instance it would seem as if the Spirit of God had come upon the subject of His influence with such

<sup>1</sup> Numb. xxiv. 4.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 2-4. Reuss has endeavoured, but without success, to draw a broad line of distinction between the visions of the Apocalypse and those of St. Paul; looking upon the latter as more momentary in duration, more limited in object, and marked rather by a suspension than by a greater than ordinary action of the writer's freedom and spontaneity of spirit (*L'Apocalypse*, p. 23). The first two character-

istics are of too external a nature to justify the distinction drawn; and it may be fairly pled that the spirit of both St. Paul and St. Peter was as active during the visions vouchsafed to them as was the spirit of St. John. St. Paul knew what he had seen and heard, though he felt that it was "unlawful" for him to utter it. St. Peter understood perfectly the bearing of his vision at Joppa after it was over.

<sup>3</sup> Acts x. 10.

an overwhelming power that he was, as it were, lifted out of the body, and swept away into a higher world, where he beheld in sensible expression the realities which had previously only filled his thoughts. Then what are called visions presented themselves to the eye or reached the ear, sights and sounds of an exalted and transcendental nature, the imagination being quickened into a far greater than ordinary activity, though the powers of reflection and of reason remained unshaken. The "Tongues" of the early Church may have been the utterances of a similar state; and hence the words used by St. Paul to denote that gift, when he speaks of it as "spiritual things," or simply as "the spirit."<sup>1</sup>

Visions of this kind were eminently adapted to the position in which St. John was placed, and to the peculiar nature of the task assigned to him. He was an Apocalyptist rather than a Prophet; and the function of the one differed from that of the other, although both had so much in common that the former may not unfrequently be spoken of as prophetic, the latter as apocalyptic, in his work. There seems, however, to have been a real and essential difference between them. Yet that difference did not consist in this, that the Seer "stood upon a loftier altitude than the prophet, and had visions of things to come more explicit, more detailed and consecutive than were afforded to any of the other prophets."<sup>2</sup> Such a distinction touches only the more external characteristics of the work of each. Nor is it

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 1; 1 Thess. v. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Fairbairn *On Prophecy*, p. 120.

to be found in this, that "the prophets of the Old Testament, like the epistolary writers of the New, write primarily and specially for their own times, for the present emergencies of the kingdom of God," while an "apocalypse is not given primarily or specially for present but for future times, is not the immediate product of any particular present emergency, and has as its primary object to serve as a guiding lamp for the people of God during those dark periods when there is no revelation."<sup>1</sup> The last words of this extract may be accepted, but not the rest. No prophet wrote more directly for his own time than the Apocalyptist did. The latter was called forth by "present emergencies" not less than the former. His utterances were emphatically "present truth."<sup>2</sup> The difference between the

<sup>1</sup> An anonymous writer in the *Ecclesiastic and Theologian* for April 1857. Comp. Dr. Westcott in Smith's *Bible Dictionary*, vol. i. p. 391.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel (*the Apocalyptist* of the Old Testament) was, not less than Isaiah, a prophet in the first place *for his own age*. Take, for example, his visions of the Four World-Empires which were to usher in the establishment of the kingdom of God. These giant powers began in Daniel's time. They were not only something new in the world's history; their rise involved of necessity a great change in the outward form of the Theocracy. With them in the field such a monarchy as David's

was impossible. Moreover, they had attractions of their own which might seduce men's hearts from their true allegiance. They awed the imagination by their magnificence and pride; they gave to the nations peace, though at the expense of liberty. Under them even faithful souls might be tempted, on the one hand, to despair of the Theocracy; on the other hand to "wander after" them, and to worship their rulers as earthly deities. Daniel's position as a high minister of state under the two first of those World-Empires—the Babylonian and the Persian—gave him an intimate personal knowledge of them. He was just the man, therefore, for

two would appear to have been of a deeper kind than is expressed in either of the above suppositions. It depended upon the fact that, in the times when the Apocalyptist spoke, prophecy had delivered its message and had little that was new to say. The Apocalyptist then came in as an interpreter rather than as a Prophet. He did not take his stand in the future rather than the present; to him the future was the present, and the present embraced the future. He did not enjoy fuller communications of the Divine purpose than those previously given; he rather only beheld more clearly the contents of what had already been revealed. He belonged to an era in which one Divine Dispensation had either closed or was closing around him, and another was taking possession of the field. With this last as a present era he had to do; and his charge was to set it

his twofold function, (1) to reveal the really brutal and earth-born character of these imposing powers (even the fairest of them—Alexander's—he showed had the insatiableness, if it had also the beauty, of the panther); and (2) to promise that under them all Jerusalem should be preserved till the erection of an everlasting kingdom in the hands of a Son of man. It is indeed much more as unveiling the essential *character* of the world's kingdoms and of Christ's respectively than merely as seeming to fix beforehand the date of Christ's appearing, that Daniel holds his high rank in the pro-

phetic college. Commentators have estimated aright, or undervalued, his importance precisely as they have connected him with, or disconnected him from, the position and the needs of Israel at the time when God raised him up.

In three respects the position of Daniel resembled that of St. John. Both stood at the beginning of long periods of anti-theocratic empire. Both had personal experience of persecution under these imperial foes of God's kingdom. Both had revealed to them the inmost character (and out of that the fortunes) of the powers whose conflict they beheld.

forth in its true character, so that the Church of God might face her inevitable trials in a strong and hopeful spirit. The "prophet" of the Old Testament was succeeded not by the Apocalyptist but by the "teacher" of the New. The apocalyptic function passed from the one Dispensation to the other unchanged in its essential features.<sup>1</sup>

St. John, therefore, had not, like the prophets of the Old Testament, to unfold "by the word of the Lord" successive steps in the evolution of a Divine plan which was to culminate in the appearance of the Hope of Israel. That plan had already culminated in the coming of Christ, although a part of His manifestation of Himself was still awaiting. The Church was already in "the last days," and no further prophetic revelation was needed. Men of God were now to interpret the revelation given in the Son. They were to penetrate more deeply than had yet been done into the mystery of His person and work in its relation to the world, in order that thus unveiling its contents they might apply them, with growing insight, for the warning of the sinner and the encouragement of the saint. Their commission was therefore less to predict the future than to see the present, and to trace in what was happening around themselves the working of those eternal principles which were about to be manifested in their full sweep of power. With events yet to take place, except in so far as these were the natural consequence and outcome of what Christ was known to be, of the contest He was to

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter ii. 1. Comp. Fairbairn *On Prophecy*, p. 131.

carry on, and of the victory He was to win, they had nothing to do. In Christ Himself and in His teaching was included everything of which they needed to be informed; and hence visions of what was to be took the place of prophecy of what was to be. In these considerations we seem to have an explanation of that extraordinary burst of apocalyptic literature which marked the close of the first and the first half of the second century.<sup>1</sup>

While thus adapted to the position of the Seer, visions were not less appropriate to that of those for whom he wrote. They were more concrete and life-like than mere general description would have been. There was a vividness and a graphic power about them far surpassing that of ordinary teaching. They presented pictures to the eye; they appealed to the imagination; they gave scope for boundless range of thought amidst the things which they expressed. Let us place ourselves in the circumstances of the early Christians, with burdens or trials like theirs to meet, and we shall be more alive to the value of the visions of a Seer as compared with the utterances of a prophet.<sup>2</sup>

2. A second characteristic of the Apocalypse is its use of symbols. Its visions are presented to the Apostle

<sup>1</sup> In connection with what has been said in the text it is of great importance to notice the true meaning of John xvi. 13. "The things that are coming" there spoken of are not so much revelations wholly new as new applications of what had already been

revealed, the things that happen when He who is to come begins in the power of His Spirit the conflict of the Church with the world. (*Comp. Comm. in loc.*)

<sup>2</sup> Comp. interesting remarks of Reuss, *L'Apocalypse*, p. 11.

in symbolic forms,—that is, in images drawn from material and earthly objects, or from combinations of impressions produced by them, for the purpose of teaching spiritual and heavenly truth. This method of instruction, more or less resorted to by all nations, is peculiarly appropriate to the religious spirit and the lively imagination of the East. There everything is full of a present Deity, and becomes the utterance of His will. It is equally prominent in the Old Testament, where the Jews, and therefore also the early Christians, had long been familiar with it. The prophecies of Daniel, Ezekiel, Hosea, Zechariah and others abound in symbols. Numerous objects in nature — fire, winds, floods, lightning and thunder, earthquakes, eclipses of sun and moon and stars, cities, buildings, trees, gold, silver, jewels, garments and colours—are constantly laid hold of in order to convey in a more visible and telling manner than belongs to abstract statement, the lessons to be proclaimed. Distinct traces of the same style of thought appear in other books of the New Testament as well as in the Apocalypse. To say nothing of symbolical action, which hardly belongs to our present subject,<sup>1</sup> we find our Lord using symbolical language when he speaks of sitting down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, when He warns the sons of the kingdom that they shall be cast forth into the outer darkness, or when he exclaims, “I beheld Satan

<sup>1</sup> Comp. on this remarks by the *Evangelical Review* for October writer in the *British and Foreign* 1871.

fallen as lightning from heaven.”<sup>1</sup> In the fourth Gospel symbols meet us at every step. All the figures applied in that Gospel to the Saviour—the bridegroom, the vine, the living water, the bread of life, the door of the sheep, the shepherd, the temple—are symbolical. They do not simply compare Him to these persons or things, so that we have to search for the features of resemblance between Him and them: that is a similitude. They do not simply relate incidents of everyday experience in order to illustrate by what passes upon earth the Divine administration of heavenly things: that is a parable. Nor do they employ real or imaginary, though probable, events of this life in order to set forth the manner in which eternal issues are produced: that is an allegory. The symbol differs from these figures of speech in this, that when we hear it its deeper meaning alone starts to view. We concern ourselves about its essence in itself. The object which supplies it has in its own world a purpose, a meaning, a force, a mission, belonging to itself and to no other object. In the higher world, which rests upon the same principles and is ruled by the same laws, the object symbolized has a precisely similar purpose and meaning and force and mission. The symbol guides us straight to these. It is not introduced in a manner leading us to think of the pleasure always experienced when two things in which we did not at first suspect resemblance are shown to resemble one another. It at once suggests the thought which it embodies; and its

<sup>1</sup> Matthew viii. 11, 12; Luke x. 18,

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value consists in its power to flash, by a single stroke, ideas into the mind which might lose much of their force through the number or the weakness of the words that would be otherwise needed to describe them. The basis of the representation is so familiar to us, is so intimately connected with our ordinary lives, that it cannot be mentioned without instantly awakening numerous associations. In spiritual things symbols are not less powerful if the world of spirit is as real to us as the world of nature.

What has been said will be confirmed, and light will be at the same time thrown on the general character of the Apocalypse, if we note one or two particulars connected with its symbols.

(1.) They are for the most part suggested by the religious position, training, and habits both of the writer and his readers. The Apostle had been a Jew, in all the noblest elements of Judaism a Jew to the very core. We know it from what is told us of his history in the Gospels. We know it not less from numerous little marks which stamp the fourth Gospel, penned by him, as one of the most genuine productions of a Jewish mind. It is true that we do not meet in that Gospel figures exactly similar to those of the Apocalypse. The difference is easily explained. In the former St. John was writing narrative and describing facts. In the latter he dwells upon the spiritual impression which the facts produce; and it was natural that, in doing so, he should adopt the method and the style of those old prophets whose work had been the

glory of his nation, and whose words had fed the loftiest and brightest hopes of his own heart. We may expect that what is written from such a point of view will breathe the very essence of Old Testament prophecy more especially in its apocalyptic parts, will be moulded by its spirit, be at home amidst its pictures, and be familiar with its words. Why consider this inexplicable? Why deny to a Christian Apostle the right of clothing his ideas in forms of speech sanctified to him by all that was best in the bygone history of his people and (may we not hope) also sanctified to us? We do not make it an objection to Isaiah or Ezekiel or Daniel or Zechariah that they adopted in their communications with men the style which they actually employed. Why should we complain that St. John adopts a similar style? How indeed could he have done otherwise? Having fired his soul amidst these pictures of his earlier days until he was "weary with forbearing and could not stay;" knowing that God was the same, and man the same, in every age; seeing in the future, by the light of the Incarnation, not a time entirely different from what had been, but only the fulness of a long preparatory course of ages, how could he avoid speaking in the tones most familiar to him, when he spoke upon the same subject? Or how could he fail to behold the fortunes of the Church through the medium of figures that till then had completely possessed his thoughts? These very figures of the Apocalypse, the symbols that it employs, the language that it speaks, are a testimony to the thorough reality

of the writer, to the depth of his convictions, and to the profoundness of the emotions which stirred his soul.

Then, again, we have to remember that he was addressing persons familiar with this style of thought. The Old Testament was the Bible of the Church. The books of the New Testament had not yet been gathered into a volume. If the earlier date of the Apocalypse be correct some of them had not been written. The Christian Church, even among the Gentiles, had been grafted upon the stem of David. She had an interest in Zion and Jerusalem; she saw in Babylon the type of her enemies; she felt herself to be the true Israel of God. She was well acquainted with the tabernacle and the temple, with their pillars and incense, with their different altars, with the high priest's robes, with the seven-branched golden candlestick, with the ark of the testimony, with the hidden manna, and with the parchment rolls written both within and on the back. These symbols were therefore closely adapted to her condition, and must have gone home to her with peculiar power.

(2.) When the symbols of the Apocalypse are not closely connected with the Old Testament, they are drawn from the most familiar objects in nature. The phenomena to which the writer has recourse are, in the forms of their manifestation employed by him, almost peculiar to the East. Lightnings, great thunderings, hail of the most destructive severity, earthquakes, burnings of trees and grass, seas appearing to be mingled with flame, and meteoric stones play their

part. We read of the wilderness into which the woman with the man child was driven; of the dens and rocks of the mountains in which the terrified inhabitants of earth shall hide themselves from the wrath of the Lamb; of the frightful locusts of the fifth trumpet-plague; of fowls that fill themselves with the flesh of men. In like manner we read of eagles, of the sound of the millstone, of olive trees and palm branches, of the vintage, and of the products of an Eastern clime—odours, ointments, frankincense, wine and oil. All these are directly associated with the locality to which the first readers of the book belonged. Even objects well known in other lands are viewed in the light in which the East, herein differing from the West, regards them, as when horses are presented to us not so much in the magnificence as in the terror of their aspect, or as when the sea, instead of being the symbol of beneficence or eternal youth, is spoken of as the symbol of all that is dark or terrible to man. In this respect the symbols of the Apocalypse correspond to those of the Prophets and of our Lord. They are always taken from well-known things. Had it been otherwise the imagery would not have answered its purpose. Drawn from unfamiliar objects it might have been understood, but a much slighter impression would have been produced by it.

Similar remarks may be made with regard to the historical events referred to in the Apocalypse. Such events often lie at the bottom of its symbols, but it

may be doubted if there be a single instance in which the incident taken advantage of by the Seer was not both well known and of the deepest interest to his readers. Nothing, in short, is more marked in the whole character of this book than the desire of the writer to give to the truths with which he deals the utmost possible degree alike of clearness and of fulness of effect.

In connection with this point, and even as in itself a matter of importance for the interpretation of the book, it is interesting to observe that there seems to be no symbol in the Apocalypse taken from heathenism. Such is not the case with the other writers of the New Testament, who do not hesitate to enforce their arguments by considerations drawn from the customs of the heathen lands around them. But the symbolism of the Revelation is wholly and exclusively Jewish. Even "the crown of life" in chap. ii. 10 is not the wreath of the victor in the Grecian games, but the Hebrew crown of royalty and joy—the crown of "King Solomon, wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart."<sup>1</sup> The "white stone," with the new name written in it, of chapter ii. 17, is not suggested by the white pebble which, cast in heathen courts of justice into the ballot box, expressed the judge's acquittal of the prisoner at the bar, but in all probability by the glistening plate borne by the high priest upon his forehead. And all good commentators are agreed that the palms of chap.

<sup>1</sup> Song of Songs, iii. 11.

vii. 9 are not the palms of heathen victors either in the battle or the games, but the palms of the Feast of Tabernacles when, in the most joyful of all her national festivals, Israel celebrated that life of independence on which she entered when she marched from Rameses to Succoth, and exchanged her dwellings in the hot brick-fields of Egypt for the free air of the wilderness, and the "booths" which she erected in the open country.<sup>1</sup>

(3.) The symbols of the Apocalypse are to be judged of with the feelings of a Jew, and not with those of our own country or age. No one will deny that in the symbols, both of the Old Testament prophets and of this book, there are many traits which, looked at in themselves, cannot fail to strike the reader as in a high degree exaggerated, extravagant, and out of all keeping with nature or probability. They are not conceived of according to the laws, as we should consider them, of good taste; and they cannot, without seriously offending us, be transferred from the pages of the book to the canvas of the painter.<sup>2</sup> Take even the sublime description of One like unto a Son of man in the first chapter—"Clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt

<sup>1</sup> Comp. Trench on the *Epistles to the Seven Churches*, p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> To say nothing of others, Albert Dürer attempted this in a series of etchings "illustrative" of the Apocalypse. But not even his genius could achieve the impossible. His drawings are only grotesque, and rather need to be explained by the sacred text than

in any way interpret it. On the other hand the Italian masters who, in the frescoes of the Cathedral of Orvieto—the preaching of Antichrist, etc.—have endeavoured not so much to represent the visions as to interpret them, have at least succeeded in telling very plainly what they understood to be St. John's meaning.

about at the breasts with a golden girdle. And his head and his hair were white as white wool, *white* as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace. . . . And he had in his right hand seven stars; and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword; and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength;”<sup>1</sup> or the description of the Lamb in the fifth chapter—“And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing as though it had been slaughtered, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth. And He came and He taketh the book out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne;”<sup>2</sup> or of the vintage of the earth in the fourteenth chapter—“And the angel cast his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it into the winepress, the great *winepress*, of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and there came blood from the winepress, even unto the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs;”<sup>3</sup> or of the New Jerusalem in the twenty-first chapter—“And the city lieth foursquare, and the length thereof is as great as the breadth; and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs; the length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal;”<sup>4</sup> and we feel at once in all these

<sup>1</sup> Chap. i. 13-16.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. v. 6, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xiv. 19, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Chap. xxi. 16.

instances, as in many others of a similar kind, that nothing can be less in harmony with the realities of things. This incongruity of imagery with nature strikes us even more in the descriptions given of the composite animals in many of the symbols of the book, as in the case of the four living creatures of the fourth chapter, which were "full of eyes before and behind," and which had "each of them six wings;"<sup>1</sup> or of the locusts of the ninth chapter, the shapes of which were "like unto horses prepared for war; and upon their heads as it were crowns like unto gold; and their faces were as men's faces. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses rushing to war. And they have tails like unto scorpions and stings;"<sup>2</sup> or of the beast that rose up out of the sea in the thirteenth chapter, "having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy. And the beast was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion."<sup>3</sup> But the truth is, that in all such cases the congruity of the figure with nature, or with notions of propriety suggested by her, was altogether unthought of. It is possible that the style of some of these representations may have been brought by the Jews from Assyria, the wonderful sculptures of which exhibit the very same features—

<sup>1</sup> Chap. iv. 6, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. ix. 7-10.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xiii. 1, 2.

almost entire ignorance of beauty of form, but massive-ness, power, strength, greatness of conception in what was designed either to attract or overawe or terrify. The sculptor in Assyria, the prophet in the Old Testament, and precisely in the same manner St. John in the Apocalypse, had an idea in his mind which he was desirous to express ; and, if the symbolism effected that end, he did not pause to inquire whether any such figure either existed in nature or could be represented by art. As he felt so did spectators and readers feel. In their eyes it was no objection to the symbol that the combination of details was altogether monstrous. Their sole consideration was whether these details lent a force to the idea which would not or could not have been given to it by other means. When, accordingly, we consider the symbols of the Apocalypse from this point of view, our sense of propriety is no longer shocked. We rather recognise in them a vivacity, a spirit, and a power in the highest degree interesting and instructive.

(4.) There is a natural fitness and correspondence between them and the truths which they are intended to express. In his choice of symbols the Seer was not left to the wildness of unregulated fancy, or to the influence of mere caprice. Consciously or unconsciously he worked within certain limits of adaptation on the part of the sign to the thing signified.<sup>1</sup> Just as in the

<sup>1</sup> Nothing can thus be more unfortunate or confusing to the reader than the rendering of the Authorised Version, which in so many passages of the Apocalypse translates the word ζῷον by our English word "beast," making the object denoted the repre-

parables of our Lord all the representations used by Him rest on the deeper nature of things,—on the everlasting relations existing between the seen and the unseen, on that hidden unity between the different departments of truth which makes one object in nature a more suitable type or shadow of an eternal verity than another,—so is it here. “In the symbol,” says Auberlen, “as well as in the parable the lower is used as a picture and sign of the higher, the natural as a means of representing the spiritual. All nature becomes living: it is a revelation of God and of the divine mysteries and laws of life in a lower sphere, as much as the kingdom of heaven is in a higher. There is a deep fundamental harmony and parallelism between the two grand spheres of cosmic being, that of nature and that of spirit; or, as the latter is twofold, both psychical and spiritual, between the three kingdoms of nature, history, and revelation. It is on this correspondence that symbolism and parabolism are grounded. The selection of symbols and parables in Scripture therefore is not arbitrary, but is based on an insight into the essence of things. The woman could never represent the kingdom of the world, nor the beast the Church. . . . To obtain an insight into the symbols and parables of Holy Scripture, nature, that second or rather first book of God, must be opened as

sentative of brute force and unregulated passion instead of redeemed creation. The term “beast,” or “wild beast,” ought to be strictly confined to the

*θηρία* so often mentioned, and the word ζῶον to be translated “living creature” (comp. Ezek. i. 20, 21; x. 17).

well as the Bible." <sup>1</sup> The principle thus expressed is one of great importance, and the correct interpretation of some of the symbols of St. John depends in no small degree upon its being kept steadily in view.

(5.) In the symbols of the Apocalypse it is not necessary to suppose that each minute particular has a definite meaning; or, if it has, that that meaning must be understood by us before we can appreciate the force of the symbol as a whole. Many of its symbols indeed at once explain themselves. There can be no doubt that the judgments of the Almighty are expressed by thunder, and His mercy by the rainbow; that mountains denote worldly kingdoms, and the roaring of the sea the tumult of the nations; that white is the emblem of purity, red of the thirst for blood, and black of mourning and desolation; other symbols of a much more elaborate character can also be easily and unhesitatingly explained. But there are not a few every detail of which we do not understand, and when, therefore, the objection may be made that we do not understand the symbol.

Is it really so? Let us look at the parables of our Lord. It is probable that even the smallest particulars mentioned in them had a meaning to Himself. We cannot measure the infinite extent of His wisdom or the amount of instruction which, at least to His own mind, lay in His simplest utterance. When He explains some of His parables He includes much in the explanation of which without His guidance we

<sup>1</sup> Auberlen, *Dan. and the Rev.*, p. 87.

should hardly have thought. In the parable of the Sower He shows us that the field, the birds of the air, the heat of the sun, the thorns and brambles, the thirty, sixty, and an hundred fold have all a meaning. Nor is it otherwise in the parable of the Tares and the Wheat. How readily might we suppose that the reapers were only subordinate to the harvest, and that it was unnecessary to connect with them any particular idea. There cannot be a harvest without reapers. Yet "the reapers are the angels."

On the other hand, where no explanations of this kind are given, it is often impossible for us to interpret particulars that meet us in a parable without the risk of our interpretation being either fanciful or erroneous; as when, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, we infer that the robe, the ring, and the shoes given to the returned wanderer denote distinct blessings of the Covenant; or when we imagine that the equal division of the ten virgins into five wise and five foolish, points to an equality of numbers between the saved and the lost. Incidents or notices like these may be introduced simply for the sake of preserving the verisimilitude and heightening the effect of the story. The abuses indeed, which have sprung from the supposed necessity of interpreting every minute particular in a Scripture narrative, will not unfrequently make calm interpreters cling to the belief that their main duty is to gather the general impression. Still it by no means follows that because, by their own confession, they cannot interpret everything, therefore they can interpret nothing.

It is the same with the symbols of the Apocalypse. We may not be able to explain every particular which they contain. But it may not have been intended that we should ; and it is quite possible that, without doing so, we may in each case reach the lesson of the symbol as a whole.

(6.) One remark more has to be made, but one so obvious that, forgotten as it too frequently is, it will not be necessary to dwell on it,—the symbols of the Apocalypse must always be interpreted in the same way. They are a form of speech, and therefore subject to the rules that regulate the interpretation of all speech. The most common words indeed may vary in their signification, and the context may have often to determine their special shade of meaning at a particular time. But where there is nothing to demand the contrary, the same word must invariably be understood in the same sense, and that the sense fixed by usage. This general principle is applicable in all its strictness to symbolical language. There is no reason in the nature of the case why a symbol should be more uncertain in meaning than any other word. The power of that convention which links a certain sense to a certain sound in ordinary terms is not less binding in the presence than in the absence of metaphor of any kind whatever. Thus, where we read in the Apocalypse of the “sea” as an emblem of the troubled and sinful nations of the earth, we are bound, unless forbidden by the context, to carry that interpretation through, and to understand the “sea” spoken of in chap. xx. 13—“And the sea gave up the dead which

are in it"—not of the ocean in which so many have found a "wandering" grave, but of the troubled and sinful world. In the same way, when we find the expression, "they that dwell on the earth," unquestionably used on many occasions not of all the inhabitants of the world but of the wicked as distinguished from the good, we are bound to apply it always in this sense unless it can be shown that the writer would himself lead us by his other statements at the time to a different conclusion.<sup>1</sup>

Still more important is the application of this rule to the numbers of the Apocalypse. That many of these numbers are without a doubt symbolical is admitted by every interpreter of the book. Instances might easily be produced in which no one would think of maintaining that the number 7 meant seven, or the number 3 three, or the number 10 ten. Notwithstanding this there has been a tendency on the part of even eminent interpreters to play fast and loose with the apocalyptic numbers. More particularly has this been the case, for example, with the number 7. It is admitted by all interpreters worthy of regard that, when applied to the seven churches of Asia, that number represents not seven in the numerical scale, but the idea of totality; and

<sup>1</sup> The difficulty of applying this rule is undoubtedly great. Probably every commentary will supply illustrations of it. No one has seen the rule more clearly than Dr. Fairbairn, of whose valuable work on prophecy the portion devoted to the Apocalypse is by no

means the least important. Yet even he supposes the "great city" of chap. xvii. 18 to be a city situated on seven literal mountains, because in verse 9 we read that "there are seven mountains on which the woman sitteth," p 372.

the same thing may be said of it in many other passages of the book. When, accordingly, we read in chap. xvii. 9 that "the seven heads are seven mountains upon which the woman sitteth," it is impossible at once to draw the conclusion that the city spoken of was built literally upon seven hills; and, in like manner, when we read in the same chapter of "seven kings," it is not less at variance with strict rules of interpretation to maintain that these must be seven emperors of Rome, because a king is an emperor and seven is seven. The first and most legitimate inference in both cases is rather that we are dealing with a seven which must again in one way or another express a totality. Similar remarks may be made with regard to the two witnesses of chap. xi., the three and a half years of chap. xii.,<sup>1</sup> and the thousand years of chap. xx., figures which have been claimed as an exception to the ordinary practice of the Seer, and have been supposed to refer literally to witnesses in number two, or to years in number three and a half or a thousand. No wonder that a book is dark where the best understood rules of interpretation are systematically neglected. The darkness is largely due, not to it, but to ourselves. We have only to adhere faithfully to the common and well-understood laws of language in order to see much at least of its obscurity disappear.

<sup>1</sup> By what right can Renan be allowed to interpret the three and a half years literally, and yet the "one hour" of chap. xvii. 12 as *un temps limité*? (*L'Antechrist*, p.

433), or how can Volkmar be justified in making three and a half years equal thirty-five years, while a thousand years are literal years? (*Comm.*, p. 9, 301).

In conclusion, it may be remarked that the principle now spoken of, applicable to all books, is peculiarly applicable to the Apocalypse, for no one who has paid attention to that book can fail to have been struck with the singular care bestowed on its composition. Everything connected with it bears witness to the fact that in general structure, in selection of figures, and in the choice of particular constructions and words, there has been exercised an amount of deliberate thought and plan certainly never surpassed, perhaps hardly ever equalled, in either secular or sacred literature. So far from being wild and unregulated, never was a book written displaying on the part of the writer a clearer consciousness of the aim which he had in view, or showing even in minute particulars more pains to reach it. The result may be something to which we are wholly unaccustomed; but it is needless to say that in proportion to the perfection of that result must have been the deliberate and fixed nature of the steps by which it was attained. In the nature of things, therefore, a book so written ought to admit of a definite sense being assigned to it. It is not the careful but the careless, not the perfect but the imperfect, structure that at once baffles our efforts and excuses our failure to comprehend it. The more real the meaning of any work of art, the more ought that meaning to disclose itself to the diligent and persevering student.