

## LECTURE II.

### INFLUENCES MOULDING THE CONCEPTION OF THE APOCALYPSE.

WE have considered the form—that of visions and symbols—in which the revelation contained in the Apocalypse is presented, and we may turn now to the influences moulding the conception of the book. Novel and strange as its contents appear at first sight to be, we shall find that they exhibit a singular amount of dependence upon what is otherwise well known to us, and must have been equally well known to the Seer and his immediate readers.

In entering upon this inquiry no one surely will imagine for a moment that any doubt is thrown by it on the belief, always and reasonably entertained in the Church, that the visions of the Apocalypse are substantially due to that glorified Lord who alone knows the end from the beginning. But we are dealing with historical phenomena which must be investigated on the same principles as all other phenomena of a similar kind. Our sacred books claim to be received as historically authoritative, and we can only respond to their appeal

when we have examined them as we examine every historical document submitted to our judgment. No inquiry is more legitimate than that relating to the origin of any one of the four Gospels. Whence did the writer gather his materials? Was it from general tradition, from the information of immediate eye-witnesses, or from personal recollection? What motives prompted him to write? What influences shaped his work? Answers to these questions need not of themselves disturb our conclusions as to the reality or extent of the Divine inspiration under which he wrote; for no one will deny that the Spirit of God, in fitting His instruments for their task, avails Himself of the preparation afforded them by the ordinary course of Providence. Similar questions therefore cannot unfavourably affect our estimate of the Divine origin of the Apocalypse, but they may exert an important influence on its interpretation. Let us look at the facts.

I. In the first place, the Apocalypse is moulded by that great discourse of our Lord upon "the last things" which has been preserved for us in the first three Gospels.<sup>1</sup> The parallelism between the two is to a

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiv. 4-xxv.; Mark xiii. 5-37; Luke xxi. 8-36; comp. xvii. 20-37. It is remarkable that we find no account of this discourse in the Gospel of St. John; nor does it seem a sufficient explanation of the omission that the later Evangelist was satisfied with the records of the discourse already given by his predecessors.

The author of *Parousia* has adverted to this fact, and has suggested that "the difficulty is explained if it should be found that *the Apocalypse is nothing else than a transfigured form of the prophecy on the Mount of Olives,*" p. 374. The explanation seems by no means improbable.

certain extent acknowledged by all inquirers, and is indeed in many respects so obvious that it can hardly escape the notice of even the ordinary reader. Let any one compare, for example, the account of the opening of the sixth seal in Rev. vi. 12-17 with the description of the end in Matt. xxiv. 29, 30, and he will see that the one is almost a transcript of the other. Or let the three series of apocalyptic visions,—the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls, be compared with the other parts of the discourse, and it will be found that, speaking generally, they are filled with the same thoughts,—with wars, pestilences, famines, earthquakes, signs in sun and moon and stars, false teachers doing wonders and trying to deceive the very elect, the elect preserved, angels sent forth to gather them with the great sound of a trumpet, the victorious progress of the Gospel, the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, the final deliverance of the good, and the just judgment of the wicked. These things reveal in a way not to be mistaken a very intimate relation between the last prophecy of Christ and the Revelation of St. John. When we look still further into the matter, the correspondence is much more marked. The main particulars only can be here adverted to.

In the first place, we have to determine the manner in which we are to divide our Lord's discourse into its different parts. This question has exercised the thoughts and taxed the powers of every student of the Gospels; but it is impossible to speak now of what has been done by others. The matter must be approached

directly. As given in its greatest fulness in the twenty-fourth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, the discourse before us is an answer to a question of the disciples contained in the third verse of the chapter,—“Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the consummation of the age?” The chief part of the answer to the question occupies the verses extending from the fourth to the thirty-first. The verses preceding these relate the circumstances under which the question was asked; the verses following give the practical application of what had been said. We may confine ourselves at present to the central and most important part of the discourse—verse 4 to verse 31.

This portion of the chapter ought to be divided into three, and not, as sometimes, into two; or, as at other times, into many parts.

The first of the three extends from verse 4 to verse 14, and contains in its most general form our Lord's reply to the question of the disciples in verse 3. That question had been apparently a double one—(1) “When shall these things be?” When shall that overthrow of the temple take place of which Jesus had spoken in verse 2, and the thought of which had produced so profound an impression on His hearers? (2) “What shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the consummation of the age?” But, though apparently double, the question had been in reality a single one. The disciples had mixed up two things with one another. Our Lord distinctly separates the two, and in verses 4 to 6 He

confines Himself to the first, warning the disciples that the signs by which the destruction of Jerusalem should be preceded were not intimations of "the end." "The end," He said at the close of verse 6, "*is not yet.*" At this point, at verse 7, He turns to the second element in the disciples' question,—*"the consummation of the age."* He regards the present dispensation as a whole, and follows it to its "end." No longer occupied with the interests of the disciples as Jews, or with the events, however important, that were to happen in Judea, He looks at "*all the nations,*"<sup>1</sup> and occupies Himself with the fortunes of His Church on her widest scale. A multitude of particulars are grouped together in brief and rapid outline upon the canvas—wars; famines; and, as St. Luke adds,<sup>2</sup> pestilences; earthquakes in divers places; and, as St. Luke again adds, terrors and great signs from Heaven.<sup>3</sup> For the followers of Christ there shall be hatred and tribulation and death; or, in the still more graphic language of St. Luke, they shall be delivered up to synagogues and prisons, and shall be brought before kings and governors for Christ's name's sake.<sup>4</sup> The effect of all this shall be, that *many* shall stumble and many be led astray by the false prophets who shall arise; and that, because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. Yet, in the midst of calamity and defection, the true children of God, as we read especially in the second and third Gospels, shall be preserved; the very malice of their

<sup>1</sup> Verses 9-14.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxi. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xxi. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Luke xxi. 12.

enemies shall turn unto them for a testimony; not a hair of their head shall perish; and he that endureth to the end the same shall be saved.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile the preaching of the Gospel of the kingdom shall be extended to "the whole inhabited earth for a testimony to all the nations," and "then shall the end come" (verse 14).

Such is the first picture of the discourse. It is particularly to be observed that it relates *both* to the Church and to the world; and it is obvious that it carries us down to the final judgment. Many traits of it are wholly inconsistent with the idea that it is limited to the time preceding the destruction of Jerusalem. The mention of "all the nations," the preaching of the Gospel "in the whole inhabited earth," and more especially the contrast between the words of verse 6, "but the end is not yet," and those of verse 14, "and then shall the end come," are conclusive upon the point. It is only, however, in great and general outlines that the picture is drawn. The history of the Church, and of the world in its relation to her, are both set before us in their broadest features.

The second great picture follows at verse 15 and extends to verse 28. There is no chronological continuation of the first, and there could not be, for the first had already brought us to "the end." We return rather to the beginning, and we have again before us the whole history of the Christian Church from the moment when she was planted in the world to the moment when her

<sup>1</sup> Comp. Mark xiii. 11, 13; Luke xxi. 14, 15, 18.

Lord shall come again to introduce her to everlasting blessedness. We are not dealing with Jewish Christians alone. It is true that the fall of Jerusalem is especially mentioned in these verses, that we read of them that are "in Judea" fleeing to the mountains, and that the disciples are instructed to pray that their flight may not be on "a Sabbath."<sup>1</sup> But the words of verses 17-19 were words used by our Lord, as we learn from the third Gospel, with a universal application.<sup>2</sup> We cannot confine the words "no flesh" of verse 22 to Jews; and the remarkable omission by St. Mark, in his report of the discourse, of the words "on a Sabbath"<sup>3</sup> is a clear proof that the exhortation of Jesus was understood by him to apply also to the Gentiles. St. Luke, as might be expected from the object of his Gospel, is still more specific. He not only omits the words "on a Sabbath," but speaks of "the times of the Gentiles,"—those times which were to prevail everywhere and to the end—of distress of nations "upon the *earth*," and of the things that were coming upon "the world" or "*the inhabited earth*."<sup>4</sup> Throughout this second part of the discourse the whole world is before us; and, as is distinctly shown by the word "immediately" of verse 29, is before us to the end.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Verses 15, 16, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Comp. Luke xvii. 30-37.

<sup>3</sup> Mark xiii. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Luke xxi. 24-26.

<sup>5</sup> It is one of the subordinate testimonies to the correctness of the arrangement here proposed

that we are able to understand the *εἰθένως* of the original (verse 29) in its natural and necessary sense. The torture to which that word has been exposed forms a curious chapter in the history of New Testament Exegesis (comp. Morison *in loc.*).

Still more important, however, is it to observe, in connection with these verses (15-28), that they really divide themselves into two parts dominated by entirely different thoughts, the first part extending from verse 15 to verse 22, the second from verse 23 to verse 28. In the former we have the *external* history of the Church in the world, and her preservation in the midst of all the trials that surround her there. The "great tribulation" spoken of bears less immediately upon her than upon those who are opposing and afflicting her. The woes that here come upon the earth are woes occasioned by its own sinfulness; and they would be much greater than they are, were it not that for the elect's sake the days shall be shortened. These shortened days must thus, from the very circumstance that their "shortening" is referred to as it is, be the days that immediately precede "the end." The latter half of the passage (verses 23-28) gives us the *internal* history of the Church. It begins with a direct address to "the elect," who had been spoken of at the close of the preceding paragraph, and its object is to warn them to resist apostasy and to flee from the judgments by which apostasy shall be overtaken. It exhorts to watchfulness against declension; and the dangers to which it alludes are not so much those of the world as of the Church. Finally, therefore, its threatenings are not directed against unbelievers, but against professing Christians who deny their faith; and the "carcase" spoken of in verse 28 is not that of the world but of all who in any age or in any land—"wheresoever the carcase is"—act

over again the part of degenerate Jerusalem and of the false theocracy. A "carcase" is something that has fallen from life, not something that was always dead.<sup>1</sup> Once more, it may be observed, we are at "the end."

The third great picture is easily understood. It is given in the verses extending from verse 29 to verse 31, and it presents us with a view of what is to happen when the present Dispensation has run its course. It takes up "the end" mentioned in verse 4, and to the beginning of which we had been brought in verses 23 and 28, as come, and it describes the different fate in store for the foes and for the friends of Jesus,—the one wailing at His presence, the other (still styled His "elect") "gathered together from the four winds, from the one end of heaven to the other."

Such are the leading particulars of this great prophecy of Christ, and such is the manner in which it seems proper to arrange it.

When we turn to the Apocalypse and compare it, from the point at which the action opens, that is from chap. vi., with the discourse now spoken of, more especially when we compare with that discourse the three great series of visions, the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls, the parallelism between the two is of the closest and most remarkable kind.

<sup>1</sup> It is in this sense that the word *πτῶμα* is to be here understood, not as referring to a world sunk in corruption (Morison, Meyer, *in loc.*). It might thus be applied to Jerusalem, did not everything else in the prophecy

compel us to think of something wider. The main point is that the saying, whether proverbial or not, is here applied by our Lord not to the world but to a degenerate Church.

Let the following particulars be noted :—

1. As compared with the Trumpets and the Bowls the Seals are general.<sup>1</sup> There is less minute specification of details ; and the subject with which they deal corresponds exactly to that dealt with in the first section of our Lord's discourse (Matt. xxiv. 7-14). There are the same wars and famines and pestilences ; there is the same wide preaching of the Gospel, and the same preservation of the elect. But the whole series is of a general and preparatory kind, although in the space of time which it embraces it reaches to "the end."

2. The two series of the Trumpets and the Bowls are in a certain sense to be taken together, in this respect exactly corresponding to the second section of our Lord's discourse—that section which, as we have already seen, presents a second picture of the whole history of the Church from two different points of view (verses 15-28). It has indeed been maintained by many inquirers that the three series of the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls are entirely independent of one another ; by many that they are developed out of one another,—the Trumpets out of the Seals and the Bowls out of the Trumpets. A closer examination of the text will satisfy us that both alternatives are wrong. The opening verses of chap. viii. clearly show that there is an intimate connection between the Trumpets and the Seals—"And when he opened the seventh seal, there followed a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I

<sup>1</sup> Comp. Lecture iii. p. 93.

saw the seven angels which stand before God ; and there were given unto them seven trumpets,"<sup>1</sup> after which comes the incident of the prayers of all saints ; and only at the sixth verse of the chapter do the angels prepare themselves to sound. We cannot, therefore, separate the Trumpets from the seventh Seal. The former are not independent of the latter, but are evidently developed out of it, although the succession is one of thought rather than time. When we turn to the seventh Trumpet at the close of chap. xi. there is no similar connection with the immediately following series of the Bowls. There is no introduction, there is no mention, of the Bowls. An entirely new start, taking us back to the beginning, is made in chap. xii., and not until we reach chap. xv. 7 do we read of the seven angels to whom were given the seven Bowls full of the wrath of God. The contrast with the transition from the Seals to the Trumpets is striking, and it warrants the conclusion that the Bowls do not stand to the Trumpets in the same relation as the Trumpets to the Seals. There is no development now of the one out of the other. The legitimate inference is that there is a sense in which the Trumpets and the Bowls taken together form one great section of the Apocalypse, that, however distinct from one another, there is some thought common to them both, that there is a point of view from which (like the verses in Matt. xxiv. 15-28) they constitute one series, and that both are developed out of the Seals. They are a fuller, a more detailed, a more definite ex-

<sup>1</sup> Chap. viii. 1, 2.

plication of what the Seals contain. In other words, the two later series taken together stand to the earlier series in precisely the same relation as that in which the second section of our Lord's discourse, with its two divisions, stands to the first.

3. This inference will be confirmed, and the parallelism insisted on will be brought still more fully out, if we further attend to the contents of the Trumpets as distinguished from the contents of the Bowls. That both these series embrace the whole history of the Church will be afterwards more fully seen; but they embrace it with a difference.

The Trumpets refer peculiarly to judgments on the world and to the preservation of the elect in the midst of them. That the elect are affected by the judgments is true.<sup>1</sup> They live in the same world as the wicked, engage in the same occupations, discharge the same duties, are exposed to the same trials, are mingled with them in the same bonds of the family, the neighbourhood, and the state. The time has not yet come for the separation which shall finally take place. Were the tares to be rooted up the wheat would be rooted up with them. But although the righteous suffer,

<sup>1</sup> This had been the experience also of the Old Testament Church. No distinction was made between Israel and the Egyptians till the close of the third plague. The waters were turned into blood for both alike; the frogs and the lice were upon both alike. It will be noted that the judgments

under the Trumpets in the Apocalypse are called plagues (chap. ix. 20), and that several of them just reproduce in an intenser form the plagues of Egypt—the water turned into blood (*ibid.* viii. 8), the darkness (*ibid.* viii. 12), and the locusts (*ibid.* ix. 3).

the judgments of the Trumpets fall directly on the world alone. Numerous indications prove this.

Thus it is of importance to notice the manner in which the Trumpet judgments are introduced. They are an answer to the prayers of "all saints," which were offered up by the angel of chap. viii., along with the incense which he presented upon the golden altar that is before the throne. But these prayers are directed against the world that has persecuted the Church, against those who are spoken of under the fifth seal as "they that dwell on the earth."<sup>1</sup> It is true that the apostate Church is a persecutor, in this book even the great persecutor, of the people of God. But against her the saints cannot pray. To them she is still the Church. God alone can separate the true from the false within her pale. That against which the prayers of all saints are offered is the world. Again, in chap. viii. 13, the three woes of the three last Trumpets are denounced upon "them that dwell on the earth," an expression invariably applied in the Apocalypse to those who are partakers of the sinful spirit of the world. Now it is a principle of interpretation, to be applied to all the three series of the Seals the Trumpets and the Bowls, that what is mentioned under any one member of each series belongs equally to its other members, and that the judgments, while in a certain sense seven, are in another one. The three woes therefore express the character of the whole group to which they belong. Again, in the account given of

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

the fifth Trumpet at chap. x. 4, the children of God are clearly separated from the ungodly, so that judgment shall not touch them. The locusts of that Trumpet are not to "hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree, but *only such men as have not the seal of God in their foreheads.*" Finally, let us notice that the seventh Trumpet, in which the Trumpets culminate, and in which therefore the special character of the whole series is expressed, deals peculiarly with judgment on the world: "*The nations were angry, and Thy wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged . . . and to destroy them that destroy the earth.*"<sup>1</sup> When we put all these circumstances together, we shall be satisfied that the series of the Trumpet-plagues presents us with the same thought as the first half of the second section of our Lord's discourse. It deals not with the Church but with the world, or with the world in its relation to the Church.

If from the Trumpets we turn to the Bowls the following particulars claim our notice:—(1) The very mention of Bowls at once connects us not with the world but with the Church. The vessels so designated were not vials but bowls or basins, broad and shallow rather than narrow and deep. They were gifts presented by the princes of the twelve tribes of Israel for the service of the Tabernacle,<sup>2</sup> and they were used for offering on the golden altar of the sanctuary the incense which had been kindled by coals from the altar in the court. They were thus instruments of religious

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xi. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Numb. vii.

service, and were peculiarly fitted, according to the *lex talionis*, the law of recompense in kind pervading the whole Apocalypse, to contain those judgments of the Almighty which were designed not for the world but for the faithless Church. It was thus that in Malachi the corrupt Jewish Church was threatened, "I will curse your blessings" (chap. ii. 2; comp. Psalm lxix. 22, 23). (2) A similar remark applies to the fact that, as mentioned in chap. xv. 6, the angels which bear the seven last plagues come forth from the "temple" or innermost shrine of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven, dressed as priests in pure white linen and with golden girdles. Nothing of this kind is said of the angels of the Trumpets in chap. viii. The thought of the *lex talionis* again leads us to the degenerate Church as the object of the judgments to be inflicted by these angels. (3) By the time we reach the judgments of the Bowls in chap. xvii. the peculiar struggle of the children of God with their great adversaries has begun. The three enemies of them that "keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus"<sup>1</sup> have been described in chaps. xii. and xiii. The preservation of the sealed has been set before us in chap. xiv.; and in chap. xv. they that come victorious from the beast, and from his image, and from the number of his name, have been beheld upon the glassy sea, having harps of God and singing the song of Moses the servant of God and of the Lamb. Like the great leader of Israel of old, like the Lamb of God Himself in the days

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xii. 17.

of His flesh, they have conquered not merely the world in its coarser forms, but a degenerate theocracy, the world in the Church. (4) The contents of the third Bowl are discharged upon those who had "poured out the blood of saints and prophets,"<sup>1</sup> and it has already been remarked that the object of judgment mentioned under any one member of a group throws light upon the object of judgment under its other members, although under them it may not be so distinctly noted. But this description of those who are judged under the third Bowl is elsewhere applied in almost the same terms to Babylon the apostate Church.<sup>2</sup> (5) The seventh Bowl, like the seventh Trumpet, treats of the final judgment, yet with the obvious difference that, while the latter, as we have seen, deals with the "world" and the "nations," the former deals with "the great city" and "Babylon" — "and the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath."<sup>3</sup> This "great city," this Babylon, is the apostate Church.<sup>4</sup> (6.) On the supposition now before us it becomes possible to give an easy and natural explanation of the words of chap. x. 11, "And they say unto me, Thou must prophesy, a second time, over many peoples and nations and tongues and kings." Why do these words come in at the point at which we meet them? Because we are about to pass from the world considered in itself

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xvi. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. xviii. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xvi. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Comp. p. 181.

to the world as the theatre of the Church, as the stage upon which the Church's fortunes are the chief object of interest to angels and awakened men. There is a fitness, therefore, in calling our attention to that second proclamation of the Gospel by which the Church was constituted among the Gentiles.<sup>1</sup>

Let us again put these circumstances together, and we shall be led to the conclusion that the series of the Bowls has a special relation not to the Church in the world but to the Church considered in herself, and to her internal rather than her external history. In other words, the series of the Bowls gives expression throughout to the same thought as the second half of the second section of that discourse of Jesus with which we are now comparing the Apocalypse.

On the correspondence between the third section of our Lord's discourse and the closing scenes of the Apocalypse it is unnecessary to dwell.

Thus strikingly then do the leading visions of St. John correspond to that discourse of Jesus in which He pointed out in great lines to His disciples the nature of the events that were to happen between His own day and "the consummation of the age." The correspondence is not merely general, it is minute and special;

<sup>1</sup> It is not without interest to compare the words of chap. x. 11 with those in the Gospel of St. John iv. 54. The importance which St. John attached to this latter statement, as shown in the very peculiar structure of the

verse, has been pointed out in the Comm. (*in loc.*). In Rev. x. 11 we have again his *πάλω*, and that in connection with the very same thought—the extension of the Gospel tidings to the Gentile world.

and it exists to such a degree as to admit of only one conclusion, that the Apocalypse is the enlargement of the discourse. This conclusion is more than interesting and curious: it is in the highest degree important. Two consequences in particular may be noticed. (1) The Revelation of St. John is at once separated from all the other apocalyptic writings with which it is so often compared. The direct authority of the Saviour is lent to it, and we see at least how naturally it may have been the production of that disciple who knew so much of the mind of his Master. (2) The book being the enlargement of the discourse, it is not unreasonable to think that what the discourse contains is contained also in the book, and that what the discourse does not contain is not to be looked for in the book.

It may be well, before passing on, to present the above analysis of Matt. xxiv. and of the Apocalypse in a tabular form, taking in only for the sake of completeness the whole discourse:—

I. The situation, Matt. xxiv. 1-3.

II. The discourse, part i., Matt. xxiv. 4-31.

1. Reply of Jesus to the first part of the question after He had separated it into its component elements, When shall these things be? (verses 4-6).
2. Reply of Jesus to the second part of the question, What shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the consummation of the age? (verses 7-31, in three parts).

- a.* General outline of the history of the Church and of the world to the Second Coming (verses 7-14); corresponding to the seven Seals of the Apocalypse.
- b.* Same subject resumed under two special aspects (verses 15-28).

*First Aspect.*

The Church in her relation to the evil world (verses 15-22); corresponding to the seven Trumpets of the Apocalypse.

*Second Aspect.*

The Church in her relation to the evil in herself (verses 23-28); corresponding to the seven Bowls of the Apocalypse.

- c.* The Second Coming (verses 29-31).

## III. The discourse, part ii., Matt. xxiv. 32—xxv. 46.

Application to the truths stated in part i.

1. To question regarding the destruction of the temple (verses 32-35).
2. To question regarding the consummation of the age (chap. xxiv. 36—xxv. 46).

II. In the second place, the conception of the Apocalypse is powerfully moulded by St. John's recollections of the life of Jesus. What these recollections were we know from that Gospel which is also the production of his pen; and the strong individuality of which, stamped upon its every line, reveals not the influence of a general tradition as it appears in the three earlier Gospels, but the manner in which St. John himself recalled the life of his Divine Master upon earth. The remarkable fact, then, with which we have now to do is this, that the

parallelism just spoken of between the Apocalypse and our Lord's discourse to His disciples upon "the last things" is not more close or striking than is that between the same book and the delineation of the life of Christ contained in the fourth Gospel. When we compare the two we shall find that, alike in general scope and in particular details, the Gospel is the model of the Apocalypse; that all the lines of the one are followed in the other; and that, separated as the two books are in many of their outward features by what is often thought an impassable gulf, the later is yet, in the deeper conceptions which pervade it, a repetition of the earlier.

One point of distinction must indeed be kept steadily in view. The two books are written from a different standpoint. The Gospel is the record of the Word made flesh, of the Life come down from heaven to give life unto the world, of the creation of the union between Christ and His people. In the Apocalypse this union has been formed and is seen subsisting. The Son of God in the glory of His Ascension-state is still the Son of man, and the latter aspect of His Person becomes prominent. In the very first vision He is spoken of as "like unto a Son of man."<sup>1</sup> He is the great High Priest and King of His people, not so much the eternal Logos (although He is that also) as He who became dead, and behold, He is alive for evermore. He holds the seven stars in His right hand, walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; and is the constant and

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

faithful Guardian of His flock. It is Christ in His Church, therefore, rather than in Himself; or, in other words, it is the Church as she is in Christ, and is one with Him, whose fortunes we are here to follow.

With this thought, however, another immediately connects itself,—that union with Christ not only in inward spirit but in outward fortune is the abiding mark of the Church, one of the deepest and most essential characteristics of her life; that the Church must tread the same path as that which her Redeemer trod; that she must drink the same cup and be baptized with the same baptism. Hence the life of Christ, remembered as St. John remembered it, supplies the type to which the history of His people shall be conformed; or, in other words, the Gospel of St. John moulds the conception of the Apocalypse.

We see it in the general arrangement of the seven successive parts of the book, in every one of which a thought may be observed precisely parallel to that which appears in the corresponding stage of the life of Jesus.

The prologue in chap. i. corresponds to the prologue of the Gospel, with the difference in the aspect of Jesus already noticed (comp. John i. 1-18). Then the presentation of the Church as she occupies her position in the world, in chaps. ii. and iii., corresponds to the presentation of Jesus on the field of human history (comp. John i. 19—ii. 11). Chaps. iv. and v., which follow, contain pictures of coming victory in every respect analogous to those found in the third section

of the Gospel, so that before the conflict with the world begins the mind is filled with confident and joyful hope as to the issue (comp. John ii. 12—iv. 54). The conflict itself, extending from chap. vi. to chap. xviii. 24, is next presented to our view, reminding us of the conflict of Jesus with His enemies, containing similar opposition, similar triumph over it, similar advance in judgment, and similar pictures, marked by ever-increasing brightness, of the security of the righteous. Yet, strange to say, it closes with the same sad tones; for the Church of Christian, no less than of Jewish, times has become degenerate, and God's faithful ones can only be saved by listening to the cry, "Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (comp. John v. 1—xii. 50). The conflict is next followed by the pause of rest and accomplished victory, from chap. xix. 1 to chap. xix. 10; and it is impossible to mistake the resemblance to that blessed pause in the life of Jesus when, His conflict over, and every element of darkness driven away, He celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples, addressed to them His last words of peace, and poured forth His heart in that high-priestly prayer in which we breathe the very atmosphere of heaven (comp. John xiii.-xvii.). The resemblance is so close that, just as in chap. xiii. of the Gospel the Last Supper is celebrated, so even in the Apocalypse *there is a supper*. For the first time in the book we read of "the supper of the marriage of the Lamb,"<sup>1</sup> for that "marriage is come

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

and the Lamb's wife hath made herself ready." <sup>1</sup> But the pause is not to last (chap. xix. 11 to chap. xxii. 5). The eternal rest is not yet come. There is a fresh outbreak of war at chap. xix. 11. First, the Lord Himself appears in all the glory of His victorious might; and the description is peculiarly interesting because it takes up again several of the most striking particulars contained in the description given of Him on His first appearance, and not since that time alluded to. He rides upon His white horse; He is called Faithful and True; in righteousness He judges and makes war; His eyes are as a flame of fire; out of His mouth proceedeth a sharp sword; He ruleth the nations with a rod of iron; He is King of kings and Lord of lords.<sup>2</sup> Next "the beast" is seen with "the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against Him that sat upon the horse and against His army," and he is accompanied to the field by "the false prophet that wrought the signs in his sight." Lastly the devil himself comes forth "to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war."<sup>3</sup> The war thus spoken of corresponds to that renewed outburst of evil, occurring at chap. xviii. of the Gospel after the rest of Jesus, which here as well as there is unsuccessful, and which, followed in the history of our Lord by the "lifting on high" of the cross and the resurrection, is followed in the visions of the Seer by the casting of the

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xix. 7.

vi. 2; i. 5; iii. 14; i. 14; i. 16; ii.

<sup>2</sup> Comp. with the particulars of the description in the text, chaps.

27; i. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xx. 8.

Church's last enemies into the lake of fire, and the perfecting of the happiness of the saints amidst the glories of the New Jerusalem (comp. John xviii.-xx.). Of the epilogue (chap. xxii. 6-21) in the Apocalypse it is unnecessary to speak. It ends, as the Gospel does, with the Second Coming of the Lord (comp. John xxi.)<sup>1</sup>

In reviewing these particulars there is a risk that they may appear to many too artificial to be true. But the more they are reflected on the more will this impression disappear. Let us once satisfy ourselves, and no student of St. John can long be insensible to the fact, that union, that identification, of Christ's people with their Lord was one of the deepest convictions of the beloved disciple; let us learn from all his writings how strongly he felt that every member of Christ's Body must share the fortunes of its Head, and we shall not be surprised that his conception of the history of the suffering Church should shape itself in his mind according to the history of the suffering Lord.

Not only, however, does the idea now spoken of appear in the general conception of the book, it appears also in individual passages.

Let us turn, for example, to the history of the two witnesses in chap. xi., and we can hardly fail to see

<sup>1</sup> The writer may be permitted to refer to his paper in the *Expositor* (second series, v. p. 102) in which the above point is more fully dwelt on. Any difference of view now expressed relates only to the point at which section vi. of the Apocalypse should begin, there at chap. xx. 7, here at chap. xix. 11.

that the description of their death in the seventh and eighth verses of that chapter is suggested by the closing hours of the Redeemer's life. The opening words, "And when they shall have finished their testimony," take us at once to the scene on Calvary as it is described in the fourth Gospel—"When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished : and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost."<sup>1</sup> Other particulars of the correspondence are not so minute; but few will doubt whence the general idea of them is drawn,—“And the beast that cometh up out of the abyss shall make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.” A similar remark is applicable to the vindication which the witnesses receive at the hands of God. Probably no commentator hesitates to recognise in it particulars furnished by the Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord,—“And after the three days and a half the breath of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which beheld them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they went up to heaven in the cloud; and their enemies beheld them.”

Again, in chap. xii. 4, the attitude of the great red dragon towards the woman delivered of the man child is thus described: “And the dragon stood before the woman which was about to be delivered, that when she

<sup>1</sup> John xix. 30.

was delivered, he might devour her child." Whatever else may be implied in this, it surely reflects that fact in the history of Jesus with which St. John, though he does not mention it in his Gospel, must have been perfectly familiar,—that Herod sought the young child's life to destroy him,—a fact again repeated in the history of the Church. And when, at verse 5 of the same chapter, the child is caught up to God and to His throne, what is this but the catching up of the faithful (for they are included in the child) to the heavenly places, after the manner of Him who ascended to "His Father and our Father, to His God and our God"?

Again, the relation now spoken of between the fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse explains the representation given in the latter of the great enemies of the Church. In the Gospel the enemies of our Lord are three in number, the devil, the Roman Government, and that degenerate Judaism which persuaded the Roman Government to become the tool of its guilty purposes. But three great enemies appear also in the Apocalypse, the dragon, the first beast, and the second beast. That the dragon of the Apocalypse is the same as the devil of the Gospel admits of no dispute. In chap. xii. 9 he is expressly said to be "the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan." The second enemy, or the first beast of chap. xiii., is almost universally allowed to be the power of the world represented at the time by that of Rome; and the more carefully the particulars mentioned of the second beast of the same chapter are examined, the more will it appear that the description

rests upon that fanatical spirit of "the Jews" which led them to incite Pilate to the condemnation of the Christ at the moment when he himself, saying "I find no fault in Him," sought to release Him.<sup>1</sup> There may be nothing surprising in the fact that a writer who delights as much as St. John in the use of the number 3 should see especially three enemies bringing about the death of Jesus ; but that, when he comes to the history of the Church, the same three should again appear cannot fail to show us how closely the fortunes of the Church are moulded upon those of Christ.

One other passage may be referred to in illustration of this point. At chap. xvii. 16 we read, "And the ten horns which thou sawest, and the beast, these shall hate the harlot, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and shall burn her utterly with fire. For God did put it in their hearts to do His mind, and to come to one mind, and to give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished." The passage is one of the most startling in the book of Revelation, and its statement comes upon us as a result totally unexpected and unaccounted for. The harlot had been sitting on the beast, and guiding the beast in perfect harmony with its designs. The two are friends and fellow-workers. All at once the scene is changed. Defeat has taken place, and what is its effect? The bond which in prosperity had bound together the partners in wickedness is dissolved; they who had co-operated in sin fall out; the one turns round upon the

<sup>1</sup> John xix. 6, 12.

other ; and she who had found ready instruments in the beast and its heads for accomplishing the work to which she had spurred them on, now sees them, in the hour of their common despair, fall upon herself and mercilessly destroy her. We need not ask whether events then future, or future still, are symbolized by this language. A great principle, one often exemplified in the world, is proceeded on,—that combinations of the wicked speedily break up, leaving the guilty associates to turn upon and destroy one another. The question that at present mainly concerns us is, What are the historical circumstances lying at the bottom of the vision? And, when we ask that question, it is difficult not to think that there was one great drama present to the mind of the Seer and suggestive of the picture of the harlot's ruin, that of the life and death of Jesus. The degenerate Jewish Church had then called in the assistance of the world-power of Rome, had stirred it up, and had persuaded it to do its bidding against its true Bridegroom and King. An alliance had been formed between them ; and, as the result of it, they crucified the Lord of glory. But the alliance was soon broken ; and, in the fall of Jerusalem by the hands of her guilty paramour, the harlot was left desolate and naked, her flesh was eaten, and she was burned utterly with fire.<sup>1</sup>

It is possible that other illustrations of the point now

<sup>1</sup> The quarrel of the fallen Jewish Church and the Roman power was *consummated* in the fall of Jerusalem. But the beginning of the quarrel took place *as soon*

as our Lord was delivered up. St. John notes it in the words of Pilate in chap. xix. 22—“What I have written, I have written.”

before us may be found ; or, if the principle of contrasts, which we have yet to see plays a large part in the structure of the Apocalypse,<sup>1</sup> be resorted to, the conclusion arrived at may find support in it, for the binding of Satan and the sealing of the abyss in chap. xx. seem to be a mocking counterpart to the binding of Jesus and the sealing of the stone rolled against the mouth of His tomb. Enough, however, has been said to show that the Apocalypse is penetrated in a remarkable manner by the tendency to present the history of the Church as corresponding in every respect to the history of the Church's Lord.

To such an extent is what has now been said the case, that the Apocalypse may without impropriety be spoken of as the complement of the fourth Gospel. It stands to it in a relation similar to that of the Acts of the Apostles to the Gospel of St. Luke, or of the Epistle to the Ephesians to that to the Colossians. We may divide into two parts the words of our Lord's high-priestly prayer, "As Thou didst send Me into the world, even so sent I them into the world;" and, if we do so, they will severally describe the books before us, "As Thou didst send Me into the world,"—that is the Gospel;—"Even so sent I them into the world,"—that is the Apocalypse. But the one is history, the other is apocalyptic vision; and in giving the latter through the Seer the Spirit of God simply availed Himself, as He always does, of the preparation found in the Almighty's providential arrangements, and of the mould made ready to His hand in the prophet's mind.

<sup>1</sup> P. 110.

These considerations will afterwards help us to understand the mysterious book with which we are dealing. In the meantime it is enough to say that the mistakes committed in its interpretation have flowed mainly from this, that men have not apprehended with sufficient clearness the singleness, the simplicity, and the purity of the ideas which it is its purpose to unfold.

The fact now adduced draws again a wide line of demarcation between the Apocalypse and the general apocalyptic literature of the time. It connects it with the rest of the New Testament in a manner and to an extent totally wanting in the other books of a similar character which have come down to us. It makes it the unfolding of a thoroughly Christian idea, and it even helps to give us a standard by which our interpretation of particular passages may be tried. Here, if anywhere indeed, it would seem that we are to find the key of apocalyptic interpretation; for the whole Apocalypse is but a presenting over again, in the mould supplied by our Lord's own history, of the difficulties, the sorrows, the conflicts, and the triumphs of the members of His Body.

III. In the third place, the Apocalypse is largely moulded by the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament. No characteristic of it is more remarkable than the extent to which this is the case. That a great resemblance should exist between the two might have been expected. As He who is the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob is the God of His people now; as He who guided Joseph like a flock is the ever-living

Shepherd of Israel, it is natural that His dealings with the saints of old should be viewed by the Christian mind as typical of His dealings with their children and their children's children to the end of time. The prophets too extended their glance not merely to the coming of Christ into the world, but to the final issues of the Christian dispensation. They testified not only the sufferings of Christ, but the glories that should follow them (1 Pet. i. 11). They were enabled to behold afar off the coming of an age when all evil should be overthrown, and all good be for ever triumphant. Again, therefore, it was natural that the great apocalyptic book of the New Testament should adopt their forms of thought and their very words. The Church of Christ is essentially one with that of the earlier covenant. Though in another and higher stage of progress, she has the same God for her guide, the same Redeemer for her life, the same Spirit to give her light and strength and comfort. She has the same pilgrimage to pursue, the same enemies to contend with, the same promises for her support, the same inheritance for her ultimate reward. With all, therefore, that is Divine in her the same, and all that is human the same in its fundamental principles, we need not wonder that language addressed to the Church at one period of her development should also, though with a wider meaning, be found suitable to her at another.

Yet, even admitting this, such considerations alone would very imperfectly prepare us for the singular dependence of the Apocalypse upon Old Testament

history and prophecy. The book is absolutely steeped in the memories, the incidents, the thoughts, and the language of the Church's past. To such an extent is this the case that it may be doubted whether it contains a single figure not drawn from the Old Testament, or a single complete sentence not more or less built up of materials brought from the same source. Nothing can convey a full and adequate impression upon the point except the careful study of the book itself in this particular aspect of its contents. But it may be well to give one or two illustrations of what has been said.

Let us look at its references to persons. Is a particular heresy predominant in Pergamum? It is not merely that of the Nicolaitans but of Balaam;<sup>1</sup> or is Thyatira tolerant of evil? the angel of the Church is charged with "suffering" his wife Jezebel instead of putting her down with a strong hand.<sup>2</sup> Have the two witnesses, amidst all their trials, a might greater than that of their enemies? the description takes us back to Moses and Elijah, and is rendered all the more graphic because we read of deeds similar to theirs without any mention of their names.<sup>3</sup> When a leader of the angels of heaven against the dragon is introduced to us, it is that Michael whose prowess more than one passage of Daniel records;<sup>4</sup> and, when the king of the frightful locusts of the abyss is spoken of, it is by a name familiar to the reader in the original of the books of Job and Psalms and Proverbs.<sup>5</sup> If from persons we turn to

<sup>1</sup> Chap. ii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. ii. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xi. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Chap. xii. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Chap. ix. 11.

places the same rule is observable. Jerusalem and Mount Zion and Babylon and the Euphrates and Sodom and Egypt, all familiar to us in the history of Israel, play their part in order to denote the holiness and happiness of the saints, or the coming in of judgment, or the transgressors from whom the righteous must separate themselves.<sup>1</sup> The battle of Har-Magedon has undoubted reference to one or other, if not to both, of the two great slaughters connected in the Old Testament with the plain of Megiddo, the one celebrated in the song of Deborah and Barak in the book of Judges (chap. v. 19), and again alluded to in the Psalms (Psalm lxxxiii. 9); the other that in which, as related in the second book of Kings (chap. xxiii. 29), King Josiah fell.<sup>2</sup> While nothing can explain the last attack upon the saints as a gathering of Gog and Magog from the four corners of the earth but the fact that these names had already been consecrated to a similar purpose in the prophecies of Ezekiel (chaps. xxxviii., xxxix.)<sup>3</sup>

Again, how many are the objects of Old Testament history mentioned in this book in order to bring out the New Testament ideas which it breathes. The promises to the seven churches, instead of being clothed in purely Christian language, are given under the form of "the tree of life which is in the paradise of God," of "the hidden manna," of "the white (or glistering) stone, and upon the stone a new name written which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it," of

<sup>1</sup> Chaps. xxi. 2; xiv. 1; xvi. 19; ix. 14; xi. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. xvi. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xx. 8.

“the sceptre of iron” breaking the nations to pieces like “the vessels of the potter,” of “the morning star,” of “names that shall not be blotted out of the book of life,” of “the pillar in the temple of my God,” of the feast to which Jesus will come in, “supping” with the believer, and the believer with Him.<sup>1</sup> Heaven itself is described under the image of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, with its outer court and its inner sanctuary, its altar of burnt offering, its golden altar of incense, its ark, and its cherubim in the midst of the throne and round about the throne;<sup>2</sup> while the great Being who sits upon the throne shines like the precious stones mentioned by Ezekiel, is encompassed by the rainbow of the Covenant, and has perpetually sung to Him the holy *Trisagion* of Isaiah.<sup>3</sup> The preservation of the people of God from the attacks of their enemies is represented under the figure of the crossing of the Red Sea and of the river Jordan, mixed up with the fate of Korah and his companions in rebellion.<sup>4</sup> The song of the redeemed, who have gotten the victory over the beast, and his image, and his name, and the number of his name, is the song of Moses the servant of God as well as of the Lamb;<sup>5</sup> while the redeemed themselves are marked out as high priests consecrated to God by having their Father’s name written on their foreheads.<sup>6</sup> The plagues of Egypt are continually appealed to—water changed into blood, hail and fire and thunder and

<sup>1</sup> Chaps. ii. 7, 17, 27, 28; iii. 5, 12, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Chaps. xi. 1, 19; vi. 9; viii. 3; xi. 19; iv. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. iv. 3, 4, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Chap. xii. 15, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Chap. xv. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Chap. xiv. 1.

lightning and darkness and locusts.<sup>1</sup> The terrible horses of the sixth trumpet-plague have their features gathered from different passages of the Old Testament ;<sup>2</sup> and the fall of Babylon is moulded upon the fall of Jericho and of Tyre.<sup>3</sup> The great earthquake of chap. vi. is taken from Haggai ; the sun becoming black as sackcloth of hair and the moon becoming blood, of the same chapter, from Joel ; the stars of heaven falling, the fig tree casting her untimely figs, the heavens departing as a scroll, in the same chapter, from Isaiah ; the scorpions of chap. ix. from Ezekiel ; the gathering of the vine of the earth in chap. xiv. from Joel ; and the treading of the winepress in the same chapter from Isaiah. The wings of the eagle upon which the woman is borne for protection to the wilderness are those of Deuteronomy and Isaiah, and the whole description of the New Jerusalem in chap. xxi. is moulded upon Ezekiel.

If we look at several of the larger visions we shall have the same lesson brought home to us—that of the throne in heaven in chap. iv. having its prototype in Isaiah and Ezekiel ; that of the roll in chap. v. in Ezekiel ; that of the opening of the seals in chap. vi. in Zechariah ; that of the beast from the sea in chap. xiii. in Daniel ; that of the olive trees in chap. xi. in Zechariah, that of the measuring of the temple in chap. xi. in Ezekiel and Zechariah ; that of the little book in chap. x. in Ezekiel.

Or, once more, if we take any single vision and

<sup>1</sup> Chap. viii.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. ix. 17 etc.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xviii.

it is impossible to separate the author from the other circumstances of his time, so it is equally impossible to separate him from its apocalyptic literature. That literature had begun in the book of Daniel, and it found expression, although it is difficult to determine the precise dates, from the Maccabean period to the second century of the Christian era, in the works that have been mentioned, and in others resembling them. But it does not follow that the Apocalypse of St. John is to be placed upon the same footing, and to be regarded in the same light as these. There were many apocryphal gospels in the first century of the Christian era; but our canonical gospels, though belonging to the same general class, were able to vindicate for themselves an entirely different position; and, under the Divine guidance which she enjoyed, the Church, with the approval of all subsequent generations, separated them from the mass of which they might have seemed to form a part. There were spurious epistles also in circulation at the same date, but again their existence did not prevent the Church from pronouncing a firm and consistent verdict both against them and in favour of our canonical epistles. Nor is it of any moment to determine whether the true or the apocryphal came first. We know that before St. Luke wrote his Gospel there were "many" others in circulation, and some of these at least the Church put unhesitatingly aside. Mere priority of date did not persuade her to accept them. The same may have been the case with the Epistles, for epistolary writing was in these days both understood and practised.

Apocalyptic literature, it is true, is more strange to *us* than that which is historical or epistolary ; and we are, therefore, under a greater temptation to throw all writings of that kind into a common heap, and to suppose that they must have had the same origin. But if apocalyptic writing was *then* as common as either historical or epistolary, such a conclusion is obviously illegitimate. The fact that so many then wrote apocalypses forbids our placing them in a separate group in which no distinction may be drawn between one Apocalyptist and another. They come under the operation of the same general principles of judgment as the writers of histories and epistles. We must apply the same tests and judge by the same rules in order to distinguish between the spurious and the true.

When, accordingly, we do so, it will be found that the Apocalypse of St. John differs so widely from these other works, and exhibits a spirit so entirely different from theirs, that we can only ratify that judgment of the Church by which it was at the very first, and more even at the first than afterwards, treated as standing by itself. That it possesses much in common with them is undoubted, but what is common ground is ground common to humanity at large.<sup>1</sup> The perplexing problem of

<sup>1</sup> "From the beginning of its history," says Godet (*B. S.*, p. 297), "humanity has lived in a state of expectation, of disquieting fears, and of glorious hopes. This expectation concentrated and purified itself in the heart of the people of Israel. . . . Through Jesus this

Divine aspiration became that of the Church ; and the book of the Apocalypse is the precious vessel in which this treasure of Christian hope has been deposited for all ages of the Church, but especially for the Church *under the Cross.*"

the existence of sin in the world, the weariness of the struggle with it, the longing to be free from it, the belief in a righteous Governor of the earth who will ultimately vindicate His ways, the expectation that good and evil will yet be recompensed according to their deserts,—these and such like truths have always had a strong hold of the human heart, and their existence in the Apocalypse is no more a proof that that book is merely human, than the longing for redemption before Jesus came is a proof that He was nothing more than the creation of natural desires and hopes. We may allow without hesitation, therefore, that in a general sense the Apocalypse was moulded by the spirit of its age; but that is only to allow that it proceeded from a genuine teacher, true alike to the Divine fountain of his inspiration, to himself, and to those whom he would instruct.<sup>1</sup>

It is not necessary to say more. We have considered the main influences by which, under the guiding hand of God, the Apocalypse was moulded into the shape which it assumed. The considerations that have been adduced rest upon the facts of the case as they are presented by the book itself, and ought always to be present to our minds when we endeavour to interpret it.

<sup>1</sup> On this point it may be well to remember the words of Lücke, who says of the author of the Apocalypse, that “the later apocryphal, even the apocalyptic, literature *steht ihm, wie es scheint, fern*” (*Versuch*, p. 378).