

Apocalyptic Interpretation.

Paper 16 of 20 'Plain Papers on Prophetic and Other Subjects'.

W. Trotter.

That which could only be made known to us by revelation from God, can only, when revealed, be understood by us through the teaching of the Holy Ghost. This is true of all that Scripture contains — emphatically so of its prophetic parts. But if so, it follows of necessity that our study of prophecy must be regulated by what Scripture declares as to the office and work of the Holy Ghost. "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private (or self, *idias*) interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter 1: 20, 21.) Here we have a divine canon for the interpretation of prophecy. As the will of man had no part in its communication at the first, so it has no part in the correct apprehension or use of it now. *Then*, holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost — *now*, believers in Christ learn as they are taught by the Holy Ghost. But if He be the teacher, no prophecy can be of any self-interpretation — it cannot be understood apart from the entire scope of that which it is the office of the Holy Ghost to reveal and to teach. What the scope and design of His communications are, we are expressly told by Christ Himself. "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. *He shall glorify me*; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." (John 16: 13, 14.) To glorify Christ, then, is the great office of the Spirit. He was to show us "things to come;" but whether past, present, or future things constitute the matter of His communications, they are the *things of Christ*: "he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." And as they are the things of Christ which He reveals, so also is the glory of Christ the end for which He makes them known: "he shall glorify me." The mention by our Lord of "things to come," which the Holy Ghost had still to reveal, is the more important to our present subject, inasmuch as it can only be to the Apocalypse, and the prophetic portions of the epistles, that these words can refer. We have thus the authority of Christ Himself, that they are *His things* with which the Holy Ghost is occupied in these later prophetic scriptures, and that it is *for His glory* that they are revealed. What a key to unlock the treasures these scriptures contain!

To glorify Himself in Christ is the great end of all God's dispensations. To glorify Christ in the revelation of that which is His, we have just seen to be the office of the Holy Ghost — an office He does not fail to fulfil in the communication of prophetic truth, as well as of every other branch of truth. "Hence," as another has remarked, "though Jerusalem, or Israel, or even the Church, may be that in connection with which Christ may be glorified, it is only as connected with Him that they acquire this importance. If Jerusalem is connected with Christ, with His affections and glory, Jerusalem becomes important, and we have in its connection with Christ, so far as we understand His glory, the key to interpret all that is said of it. Neither the Church, nor Jerusalem, nor the Gentiles, are in themselves the objects of prophecy, still less Babylon, Antichrist, or the like, but Christ. Christ is the centre in which all things in heaven and earth are to be united; various subjects become the sphere of His glory, as connected with Him; and it is by this connection that we obtain the means of understanding what Scripture contains on these

subjects. The importance of this principle cannot well be overrated. It is not merely that it unfolds to us the only way of understanding prophecy aright, but it renders the study of prophecy sanctifying instead of speculative. What is learned becomes with the soul a part of Christ's glory, the contemplation of which by the believer is the true secret of his practical sanctification."*

*The Prospect, vol. ii., page 97.

Two most important results flow from the facts and principles just considered. First, the value of prophetic truth does not depend upon its application to ourselves. All Scripture is God's gracious gift to the Church, for its instruction and profit; but the Church is not the subject of which all Scripture treats. Abraham was instructed as to what was about to befall Sodom and Gomorrah; but did he prize this instruction the less because he himself and his own affairs were not the subject of it? All Scripture is given to the Church — to the believer; but if we find in it the history of God's dealings in the past, and predictions of His dealings in the future, with others as well as with ourselves, are we on this account to value these communications the less? God forbid! Christ, not oneself, is the great object throughout: and shall we not prize that which displays His glory, even though it may not be in immediate connection with our poor worthless selves? Secondly, if the glory of Christ be the object, the things of Christ be the subject, and the Holy Ghost Himself the communicator of prophetic instruction, the Christian cannot be dependent for the possession of it on human learning. A man might possess vast stores of erudition, and be able with ease to quote every page of this world's dark history, and not be in the least better prepared for the study of God's prophetic word.* The humble Christian; unable to read the Scriptures in any language but his own, and entirely unacquainted with the details of profane history, may, nevertheless, prayerfully study the prophetic scriptures. Equally with the most learned, he may count on his Father's faithful love to enable him, by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, to understand and receive what these Scriptures unfold of the diverse glories of Christ, the Son, whether in His relations to the Church, which is His body, or to Israel, the world, and creation, over the whole of which His rule is yet to extend. It is in the establishment of this blessed universal sway, and in the dealings of God — whether in judgment or in grace — by which it is immediately preceded, that we have the great subjects of prophecy, and especially of the Apocalypse - not in those vicissitudes of political and ecclesiastical affairs throughout the last eighteen centuries, with which the pages of historians are filled.

*"History was not written in heaven; and the attempt to interpret prophecy by history has been most injurious to the ascertaining of its real meaning. When we have ascertained, by the aid of the Spirit of Christ, the mind of God, we have, as far as it be history, God's estimate of events and their explanation. But history gives man's estimate of events, and he has no right to assume that the events he deems important have a place in prophecy at all; and it is clear that he must understand prophecy before he can apply it to any. When he understands it, he has what God meant to give him, without going farther. Of course, where any prophecy does apply to facts, it is a true history of those facts; but it is much more. It is the connection of those facts with the purposes of God in Christ; and whenever any isolated fact, however important in the eyes of man, is taken as the fulfilment of a prophecy, that prophecy is made of private interpretation." — Notes on the Book of Revelation.

Ere furnishing the grounds of this conviction as to the Book of Revelation itself, we would suggest some considerations which bear on the scope of prophecy as a whole.

With the exception of certain solemn judgments on the wicked, and the establishment for a time of His throne in Israel, God's government of the world has, since the entrance of sin, been of a secret, providential character. All things are, indeed, ordered or controlled by divine power; human wickedness is thus checked, and the violence of man's passions restrained; all things are caused to work together for good to God's people; and generally speaking, iniquity becomes, in the long run, its own punishment: but all this is by a mysterious combination and superintendence of events of which natural men know nothing. Faith recognizes it, discerning the hand of God in many things, and confessing it in all; but the world at large neither discern nor own anything but the actual course of events, and the human agencies to which these are attributed. Such is Providence.

One characteristic of this secret providence which God at present exercises is, that it does not interrupt, but, on the contrary, regulates the ordinary course of events. Any marked deviation from this excites attention; and while there doubtless have been many such, sufficiently striking to appear miraculous, or even in fact to be so, the exceptional character of these interruptions does but confirm the distinction on which we insist. Another feature of God's providential government is, that human wickedness, though often checked, always restrained, and sometimes allowed visibly to work out its own punishment, is, nevertheless, permitted to continue, and very often, for a season, to triumph. God's people, on the other hand, have to suffer. Inwardly sustained by divine grace, they have to manifest its power by "patient continuance in well doing" amid continual temptations to evil, and in the face of difficulties and opposition on every side. Such is the present state of things.

Prophecy treats of a widely different state. Abundant proof has been presented in previous parts of this work, that the great subjects of unfulfilled prophecy are, First, that mighty intervention of God's power in judgment at the coming of Christ, which, instead of regulating the ordinary course of events, will bring that course to a close: Secondly, the features of man's ripened iniquity which will call down this intervention of God's wrath; and, Thirdly, the reign of Christ which is to ensue. As to the judgments which either attend or immediately precede "the day of the Lord," when this great intervention of God's power is to take place, they are the very opposite of the present state of things. Instead of wickedness being suffered to remain, while the faith of God's people is secretly sustained, the power of evil, having first come to maturity, will be completely broken and set aside: and the means by which this is effected will be such as to make manifest, not only to the faith of God's people, but to the senses and the minds of all men, what God's judgment is. "So that a man shall say, verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth." (Psalm 58: 11.) In the reign of Christ which follows upon this intervention of God's power, instead of faith being secretly sustained against the pressure of surrounding and momentarily triumphant evil, evil itself will be broken down and purged away, and righteousness will be at rest, free from conflict and oppression, and secured in this position by the power of Christ. "The day of the Lord" or "the world to come," along with the judgments which introduce it, stand thus in entire contrast with the present course of things, in which everything is arranged or controlled by God's secret providence; and it is with the former subjects, not with the latter, that in general prophecy occupies itself.

We are far from affirming that prophecy never touches on other topics. It always makes sufficient reference to the moral state of those to whom it is actually addressed, or among whom it is proclaimed, to link that state in their consciences with the predictions of final judgment and of ensuing blessing. Old Testament prophecy largely foretells, moreover, the sufferings of Christ; but of these it treats in connection with those final triumphs which we have seen to be the great subjects of yet unfulfilled prophecy; while it passes over in silence the lapse of ages which have intervened. It may further be safely admitted that certain remarkable judicial interventions of God are called, in a subordinate sense, "the day of the Lord" on such or such a place. This is evidently done because of their analogy to "the day of the Lord" in its full sense — the time of which it is said, "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." But these interventions are in contrast with the settled course of providential government, and do but confirm, therefore, the principle we are considering, that it is not to the ordinary course of providence that prophecy applies, but mainly to that greatest of all interventions which is yet to take place, and of which these lesser ones are the foreshadowings and premonitions.

"It may be alleged that certain prophecies apply to the settled ordinary course of affairs throughout a long period, and that such prophecies do, in fact, give beforehand the history of the periods to which they refer. Daniel 2 and 7 may perhaps be adduced as instances, and certainly if they will not serve as such, there are no others that will. Let us for a moment examine them. What do we find in Daniel's account of the image seen by the Chaldean monarch in his dream? A minute detail of providential circumstances? Very far from it indeed. The image is all there at once; the application of it to the four Gentile empires is given; the character of that which is the closing object of judgment — the feet and toes — is the most minutely described; and then the execution of the judgment on the whole image is foretold. The providential course of events, by which one empire subverts and succeeds another, is not entered into at all. Take the seventh chapter. What is the providential history of 'the ten horns,' as usually applied by those who explain the prophecies historically? They are explained to be scourges, which continued from first to last, some one hundred and fifty years, working the overthrow of the Roman empire, as previously settled, and establishing themselves as conquerors in all its western territory. What have we in the chapter itself? A beast rises out of the sea with ten horns, all full grown, after which a little horn comes up, and beast, horns and all, are the subject of God's judgment, not its executors. This is prophecy — that was providence. In the chapter we have what characterizes the object of the prophecy, and its judgment, and the reason of its being executed. All the providential part is left out. These are the prophecies which would at first sight seem to give most sanction to the principle of detailed historical application, and of which so many have in this way made the most; and with what result? Such, that if taken as a literal accomplishment, a child can see the discrepancy. What analogy is there between one hundred and fifty years' war to destroy an empire, and ten kings or kingdoms, all in full energy and growth, rising out of that empire, and forming part of it, as the symbol of its force?"*

*The Prospect, vol. ii., page 98.

If we have glanced thus far at the scope and bearing of prophecy generally, it is not in forgetfulness that our special subject is the interpretation of the Apocalypse. Our belief is, that in regard to the points we have been considering, the book of Revelation will not be found to differ in character from the prophecies of Scripture generally.

To us it appears, that our Lord Himself, in stating the contents of the book, authoritatively reveals to us its structure and plan, and affords the most satisfactory clue to its correct interpretation. "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." (Rev. 1: 19.) The words* in the original (*meta tauta*) here rendered "hereafter," do not bear the sense of our indefinite word hereafter, which may mean any time yet future, but signify "after these things." The Lord Himself divides the book of Revelation into the record of the things which John had seen, (Rev. 1,) the things which are, (Rev. 2 and 3,) and the things which shall be after these things, (Rev. 4 to the end.) The proof that the second division ends with Rev. 3 is, that at the beginning of Rev. 4 the apostle is called up to heaven by a voice, as of a trumpet talking with him, and saying, "Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be after these things," using the same term as in Rev. 1: 19. It is with chapter 4 that the third division of the book begins.

*That this may be plain to the most unlettered reader, we would explain that *meta* is the Greek word for *after*; *tauta* is the Greek word for *these*; and, being in the neuter gender, signifies not *these persons*, but *these things*; the two words thus denote "*after these things*."

Now nothing can be more obvious than that "the things which are," and "the things which must be after these things," cannot be contemporaneous. The one must terminate ere the other begins. So that if in chapters 2 and 3 we can discover proof of their continued application to the end of the present period; or if in the subsequent chapters we can find proof of their application to a state of things not yet existing, and essentially contrasted with the existing state of things, we should, in either case, have satisfactory evidence that the Apocalypse, chapters 4 - 19, is not to be interpreted by any supposed fulfilment of its predictions in the details of history, but yet awaits its accomplishment in a brief crisis of judgment which is to ensue on the close of the present dispensation. Such we believe to be the scope and character of the chapters in question.

The reader will remark that the two branches of evidence now adverted to are quite distinct from each other. If, on inquiry, he should find that chapters 2 and 3 of the Apocalypse cannot be restricted in their application to the seven churches of Asia, but must be regarded as exhibiting the successive states of the entire professing body on earth, till the moment of its utter excision from Christ, this consideration alone would demonstrate that chapter 4 and onwards, being the declaration of "things which must be after these," begin to have their application when this excision has taken place. In like manner, if chapter 4 and onwards should be found to differ essentially and in principle not only from the seven churches of Asia, but from the present dispensation as a whole, this of itself would prove that the "things after these" do not begin to be fulfilled till the present dispensation comes to a close. Either proof might exist and be complete apart from the other; but should both be found in the chapters under consideration, the case is rendered clear beyond all reasonable doubt.

For proof of the prophetic application of chapters 2 and 3 to the successive states of that which bears Christ's name, we refer our readers to "Ecclesiastical Corruption and Apostacy". The number seven is used throughout the Apocalypse in a symbolic sense, and is admitted to be expressive of completeness or perfection. Why should "the seven churches" be an exception to the rule? The "seven lamps of fire" in chapter 4 are there explained to mean "the seven Spirits of God." Every Christian knows that the Spirit of God is one — that "there is one Spirit" — and the

expression "seven Spirits of God" is universally understood as expressive of the seven-fold or perfect energy of the one Spirit of God. That is, the word seven is used in a mystic, and not a literal, sense. When we read, then, in chapter 1, of "seven golden candlesticks" in the midst of which walks "one like unto the Son of man," and of "seven stars" which are in His right hand; and when it is explained to us by His own lips that this is a mystery, and that "the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches," while "the seven candlesticks are the seven churches" themselves; how are we to understand His words? Surely as in the instance just cited from chapter 4. Were the seven local churches, the names of which are given, the only light-bearers or candlesticks? Or did the light entirely cease to shine when these Asiatic churches ceased to exist? Let these seven churches, or candlesticks, be regarded as a seven-fold or perfect presentation of the one Church, in its responsibility to Christ as His light-bearer or witness before the world, and we have an interpretation, at once consistent with the entire character of the book, and sufficient to account for the selection of seven local churches, the diverse states of which furnish what was needed for this seven-fold or perfect view of the successive states of the whole professing body. How could such a designation as "the things which are" be applicable to these seven local churches in any but this symbolic sense? Were they the only existing things — the only things existing as a light-bearer or witness for Christ — at the time when the Apocalypse was written? And do not the things which *then* existed in this character *still* exist? Has Christ no witness, no candlestick, no light-bearer on earth at present? Or has the candlestick been changed? Has the one Church, existing as Christ's witness on earth, been set aside, and some other body taken its place? Alas, it is but too near this awful consummation! To be spued out of Christ's mouth is to be its end; and its indifference to Christ's glory, while deeming itself rich and increased in goods and having need of nothing, does but too surely indicate how rapidly it ripens for this judgment! But it has not yet been executed. Divine patience still bears with us, notwithstanding our manifold and increasing corruptions. Christendom is not yet "cut off." That which was ordained and endowed to be the self-hiding witness of Christ's fulness of grace and glory has not yet reached the height of self-glorification at which she ceases entirely to be a witness for Christ, and renders inevitable the immediate execution of the fearful threatening which is even now suspended over her. Until this does take place, "the things which are" evidently include all that now exists as a perpetuation of that which was the light-bearer or witness in John's day, and of which these seven Asiatic churches were the selected symbols or representatives.

It is of importance to note, that while it is to the whole professing body that these seven letters to the churches apply, it is not that they all apply to the whole body at one and the same time. It is impossible that at one and the same time the state of the whole Church or that which bears its name and responsibility, can be expressed by such opposite descriptions as in the addresses to Philadelphia and Laodicea. There is no censure of the Philadelphian church, while for Laodicea there is no hope. It is to be spued out of Christ's mouth. We are shut up to the conclusion, therefore, that as these addresses cannot be restricted to the seven Asiatic churches of John's day, and as they cannot, because of their diversity, apply to the whole professing body at one and the same time, their application is really to the entire continuance of that body on earth, furnishing a successional picture of its condition as responsible to God. *It is in its responsibility* that the Church is thus presented, not in its vital oneness with Christ as His body. True believers are, of course, saved everlastingly, and nothing can affect the security of the Church as the heavenly body of Christ, its glorified Head. It is to the Church, as on earth, the responsible

witness for Christ, that these prophetic addresses apply; and the responsibility of the Church, thus considered, is shared by all that assumes and bears the name.

We are now in more favourable circumstances to judge of this application of chapters 2 and 3 to the successional states of the professing body on earth, than if we had lived in apostolic times. Let the reader suppose himself suddenly placed before a most accurate, striking portrait of one with whose countenance he is perfectly familiar: he would need no arguments to convince him that the one was designed as a representation of the other. Let any Christian, familiar with the outline of what has occurred in the progress of the present dispensation, glance at the contents of these chapters, and see if there be not such a correspondence as needs no arguments to prove it a designed representation.

The weightiest argument urged by those who maintain the exclusive historic application of chapters 4 - 19 is, that to interpret them of the future, leaves an interval between the days in which they were written, and the commencement of their application, longer than we can suppose would have been left without any information as to the events by which it should be marked. The whole force of this argument rests on the assumption that it is in chapters 4 - 19 alone that such information is to be sought for or expected. *We have the information in chapters 2 and 3.* The argument is, therefore, without value and without force. Nay more, it suggests an argument of real weight in favour of the futurity of chapters 4 - 19. Seeing that we have in chapters 2 and 3 that which applies to the whole period from the apostles' days to the excision of the professing body, why should we have it repeated in the succeeding chapters? Further, chapter 4 begins the declaration of "things which must be after these;" and as "the things which are," exhibited in chapters 2 and 3 are still in existence, it is clearly not in the present or past — not in a period contemporaneous with "the things which are" — that we must look for "the things which must be after these."

In one sense, indeed, we could cheerfully admit that there may have been a designed application of chapters 6 - 19 to events most of which are now past. "No doubt the churches existed in Asia as a matter of fact, and clearly the seven epistles were directly addressed to them, and had a real bearing upon them in the days of the apostle." This was not, as we have just seen, their only, nor even their principal, design; still, that they had such a bearing on the then existing Asiatic churches there can be no question. Now some who strongly maintain the accomplishment of chapters 6 - 19 to be in a yet future crisis, do nevertheless believe that they were also intended to have a subordinate application throughout the present period. Regarding chapters 2 and 3 in the sense just adverted to, as applying in the first instance to the literal churches of Asia, they look upon the succeeding chapters "as sketching the dealings of God with the western and eastern empire: first, in its hostile pagan state; next, in its outwardly christian profession; and, lastly, in its open revolt against God, opposing Christ in His priesthood, as it will eventually do to the last extremity, when it is a question of His rights as King." Without expressing adherence to this double interpretation of the chapters in question, we feel no hesitation in saying that we see no such objection to it as to that which confines "the things which are" to the seven literal Asiatic churches, and restricts us to an historic fulfilment of the later chapters. It is quite consonant with God's sovereign goodness, and with Christ's tender care of His people, to suppose that, as age after age of trial, apostacy, and persecution passed away, true Christians should find in the Apocalypse such symbols of that revolt against God and oppression of His

people which are the ultimate objects of His judgments, as would, in their apprehension, correspond with the then existing character of misrule. This supposes nothing on their part but acquaintance with their own circumstances; while it supposes in the Apocalypse such a designed adaptation of its symbols and predictions, as to correspond with these circumstances, in such a sense and to such an extent, as to minister to these tried ones the guidance, the consolation, and the strength which their circumstances required. There is nothing in such a view to preclude the actual accomplishment of all these chapters (Rev. 6 - 19) in a brief and yet future crisis, What we cannot but deem most objectionable is the attempt by minute, historic details to interpret these chapters as though they had found in these details their final accomplishment. This is to deprive the Church of the light these chapters are designed to shed on the scenes which succeed the present period; and it is to make the Church dependent for the understanding of God's word on an amount of human learning and information altogether beyond the reach of Christians generally. The partial and subordinate application of apocalyptic symbols to the great outline of what has transpired during the last eighteen centuries, is not open to this objection. The use of such an application does not consist in our being able to give all the details of it now, but in the application, by the Spirit of God, of one part or another of these symbols to the comfort and guidance of true saints in each successive age, as bearing, in a subordinate sense, on the circumstances with which they found themselves actually surrounded. Human learning was not requisite for this. It called for nothing but the prayerful and diligent perusal of Scripture itself, and the teaching of the Holy Ghost, by which alone even this is of any avail.

But whatever amount of credit may be due to this principle of double interpretation, we cannot but regard with regret those systems which tie down the apocalyptic visions to a supposed fulfilment in historic details. It would be easy from the contrariety of these systems to one another to show that they are mutually destructive of each other's claims definitely to explain the particulars of what they all allege to be fulfilled prophecy. But though this forms no part of our object, it may be well, in adverting to this topic, to point out to the reader a distinction of no small importance. Twenty students of the Apocalypse, agreeing in this, that from chapter 4 it is as yet unfulfilled, may have different interpretations of this unfulfilled prophecy to suggest. Such differences do but prove that the prophecy is as yet far from being understood. The partial or total ignorance of the expositors accounts for such differences. But suppose twenty expositors should agree with each other in maintaining that these chapters, or most of them, are absolutely and finally fulfilled, and yet have twenty conflicting theories of interpreting them — what do such differences prove? Not only that the expositors are mistaken in their theories, but also that the basis on which they all proceed is a mistake. What claim can a prophecy have to be a fulfilled one, when twenty can suppose it to have been fulfilled in twenty different events? To suppose it fulfilled in such a case is to reflect, however unintentionally, on the wisdom and power of God Himself, as though His word contained predictions so uncertain and indefinite, that twenty persons might rightly deem them fulfilled in twenty widely different events or classes of events! Many, we are sure, who adhere exclusively to the historic principle of interpretation, would utterly shrink from such a conclusion. Let them consider, however, whether the principle on which they proceed, and the results hitherto deduced by its application, are not fairly open to it. Scripture does contain fulfilled prophecies, but no such obscurity hangs over them. There are not twenty ways in which godly people suppose the prophecies of our Lord's birth, earthly parentage, miracles, betrayal, and crucifixion, to have been fulfilled. And had the apocalyptic seals,

trumpets, and vials been actually accomplished, there would not have been among expositors so many conflicting methods of explaining them.

We return to our Lord's arrangement of the book — "the things which thou hast seen," (chap. 1,) "the things which are," (chaps. 2, 3,) and "the things which must be after these." This last division begins at chapter 4 John; having on earth received the instruction of chapters 2 and 3 as to the professing body, its successive states, and its final doom, along with the most varied and ample encouragements for the faithful, including the assurance to all such that they shall be removed ere "the hour of temptation" arrives "which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth," is called up to heaven to see "the things which must be after these." What he sees and hears in heaven itself forms the subject of Rev. 4 and 5 God, and the Lamb, and the throne of God, and the living creatures, and the enthroned elders, and the angels, are all seen in these chapters in their relations to each other *in heaven*. The action of the following chapters is the result towards the earth, and upon it, of what the apostle thus witnesses in heaven.

What, then, are the characteristic features of the scene thus opened in heaven to the apostle? and what light is shed thereby on the remainder of the book? One striking feature can scarcely be supposed to have escaped the attention of any serious reader. It is as to the names by which God Himself speaks, or is spoken of. All those names by which He had been known in previous dispensations, and in covenant relations with His earthly people, as "Lord or Jehovah," "God," "the Almighty," are here found; but the name "Father," by which in the New Testament He is made known, and in which the Church, by the Spirit of adoption, so delights to address Him, is omitted. The word never occurs, save where our Lord speaks of Him as His Father, or where He is so spoken of by others. It is not as *our Father*. This is the more remarkable seeing that John, the penman of the book, was the one to whom had been entrusted the happy service of more fully unfolding the Father's name and character, and the filial relation of believers, than is done by any of the sacred writers besides. In his gospel and epistles this is his special theme. How evident, that in this other lengthened communication by the same pen, the range and scope of the subjects brought forward must be entirely different, when the word Father, as applied to God, (save in the exceptional way above noted) never occurs!

And if *the name* of God in the Apocalypse be thus different from that under which the rest of the New Testament specially reveals Him, the difference is not less striking between *the throne* of God as seen here by the apostle, and as elsewhere described to us. Paul, having referred to our great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, says, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." But the throne, as beheld by John, is one out of which proceed "lightnings and thunders and voices." It is the throne of judgment instead of the throne of grace. It reminds us of Sinai — "the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire," accompanied by "blackness, darkness, tempest, the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words." The succeeding chapters are in perfect harmony with the character of the throne as here portrayed. The book of Revelation is essentially a book of judgment. It sets forth the power of God's judicial throne, exercised in vindication of the rights of Christ, until He Himself comes forth to "tread the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God." "The wrath of God," and "the wrath of the Lamb,"* are the most prominent subjects of the book. How, then, can we possibly confound the Apocalyptic period with the present, as the principle of historic fulfilment does? Is

the present period characterized by "the wrath of God" or "the wrath of the Lamb?" "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation;" but in Rev. 4, at the very commencement of the third division of the book, the throne of God is seen to be a throne of judgment; and no longer, as at present, a throne of grace. But though invested with these attributes of judgment and of terror, the throne as beheld by John is encircled with a rainbow. The sign of God's covenant with the earth is associated with this throne of judgment; affording thus the pledge that whatever may for the time be the destructive effects of the judgments indicated by the thunderings, lightnings, and voices, mercy and blessing to the earth are in the end to succeed.

*It is worthy of remark that the very word rendered Lamb in the Apocalypse is different from that employed in John's gospel. In the gospel, as well as in Acts and 1 Peter, It is *amnos* — throughout the Revelation it is *arnion*.

But the apostle sees other thrones. "And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: (literally, thrones:) and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold." These personages are evidently symbolic, and from their language, when in the next chapter we hear their song, it is equally evident that they symbolize the redeemed. "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation: and hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we* shall reign on the earth." Surely we have here what is of the deepest significance. John does not see the redeemed, as at present, on earth, expecting to be caught up to heaven at the descent of Jesus into the air; he sees them crowned and enthroned in heaven, and anticipating their reign with Christ upon, or over, the earth. These chapters thus evidently unfold to us a *transitional* state of things, alike distinguished from the present and the millennial state. It is not the Millennium, for the redeemed are anticipating it as future; besides which, the very event that calls forth their songs, is the Lamb's taking the book, the opening of each seal of which ushers in an act of judgment preparatory to the Millennium. Equally remote is it, in character and principle, from the present period. The throne of grace has become, as we have seen, a throne of judgment; and the saints, instead of being on earth awaiting their translation to heaven, are in heaven, symbolized by the crowned elders awaiting their reign with Christ upon the earth.

*There is some question among scholars as to the reading here, whether it ought not to be "they." The only difference made in the sense by this would be, that the redeemed on high are heard by the apostle anticipating the reign of thou who are yet at that time, as shown in our last, suffering on earth.

The translation of the Church to heaven, at the descent of the Lord Jesus into the air, is an act of pure, perfect grace: the crowning act of that grace in which the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has abounded toward us. No wonder that in this book of judgment it should not be historically narrated. Even the relation of Christ to the seven churches in the Apocalypse is judicial in its character; and the end of that which these churches represent, is to be spued out of Christ's mouth. Clearly this cannot take place while the true Church is yet upon earth. The removal of the true Church may be immediately followed by this judgment on the false one. And though the translation of the Church is not historically mentioned, there is this promise to the faithful at Philadelphia, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee

from (literally "out of," not *in* or *through*, but *out of*) the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." To us it is evident, that this promise will have been fulfilled in the translation of the Church, ere "the things which must be after these" begin to take place. John is taken up to heaven to be instructed as to these things. Why should he, except that the Church will be there when the things themselves transpire? All he sees there, as well as all the action described in the ensuing chapters, is in harmony with this view; while on any other ground the chapters before us are inexplicable.

At the very commencement of this work it was our endeavour to show, that the descent of Jesus into the air, to raise His sleeping saints, and transform those that are alive, translating both into His own presence in glory, is the one, true, scriptural hope of the Church. Our object in certain subsequent parts has been to show, that the fulfilment of this hope is not dependent on earthly events: that while "the day of the Lord" cannot come till the man of sin is revealed, "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him,"* may be at any moment; that it only awaits the Father's good pleasure, and the completion of the Church, which is Christ's body — His Bride. Such is the uniform doctrine of the epistles. What further light does the Apocalypse shed on the subject? This — that while it makes no historic mention of the fact, it shows, from the beginning of chapter 4, that the fact has taken place ere the scenes it portrays begin to open. *The only place in which the Church is seen from Rev. 4: 1 to Rev. 19: 14, is in heaven.* There, as symbolized along with Old Testament saints by the four and twenty crowned elders, it is seen throughout these chapters — and it is seen nowhere else. In chapter 19, the marriage of the Lamb having been solemnized in heaven, He, as the rider upon the white horse, comes forth to tread the winepress of the wrath of God; and then we are told, "the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean." The action of the intermediate chapters consists of successive judgments upon the earth's wicked inhabitants. The Church is not amid the sphere on which these judgments fall. On the contrary, it is seen to occupy the heavens whence these judgments proceed. In chapter 4 the symbols of the Church, the crowned elders, are first seen peacefully seated on the thrones which surround the central throne, and then prostrating themselves before that throne, worshipping Him that sits thereon and owning His title as Creator. In chapter 5 one of these elders instructs and comforts the apostle, weeping because no one can as yet be found worthy to open the seven-sealed book in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne. When the Lamb takes the book, the whole company of these crowned elders fall down and worship, in the song at which we have already glanced. In chapter 7 they are seen, as always, in closer proximity to the throne than the angels themselves; and one of them again becomes the instructor of the apostle, as to the white-robed multitude to whom his attention is directed. The sounding of the seventh trumpet in chapter "re-awakens their praises. "And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come." They are again seen in chapter 14, and in chapter 19: 4, but still in heaven. After that, these symbolic personages are seen no more. The reason is obvious. They represent the redeemed in their unincorporated form, as translated to heaven, already both crowned and enthroned, but awaiting the moment of their descent with Christ to the earth. — Hence, when the marriage of the Lamb has taken place, the Church ceases to be represented by the crowned elders, because now corporately acknowledged as "the Bride, the Lamb's wife." The one symbol merges in the other; and from this point, it is in her bridal character that the Church is seen. Along with the Old Testament saints, she follows her Lord out of heaven: "the armies

which were in heaven followed him." Along with these, and the martyrs of the crisis, she reigns with Christ a thousand years. But her own bridal glory, as the companion and sharer of her Lord's joy, and the minister of His beneficence to the earth, over which she reigns with Him, is set forth to us in the vision of "that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God."

*See "Waiting for Christ..."

One point must not be overlooked. There are saints on earth during the period embraced by chapters 6 - 19 of the Apocalypse. It is this which has led so many to suppose that the Church remains on earth throughout that period. But it has been already shown from the Old Testament, that amid the sorrows of the closing crisis there will be Jewish saints, broken hearted on account of sin, zealous for God's glory, and desiring the advent of the Messiah, whose calling, experience, and hopes, differ most widely from those of the Church — from those of Christians under the present dispensation. It has been shown, moreover, that many of these will suffer death at the hands of the last proud adversaries of God. Now it is our firm conviction that a patient and unbiassed consideration of the Apocalypse is calculated to satisfy the Christian, that what is there said of saints on earth is more in harmony with the known standing, experiences, prayers, and hopes, of these Jewish saints, than with his own, or with those of the Church of God. Not that we are to suppose there will be no saints of the approaching crisis but such as are Jews. We believe that one thing in which the Apocalypse supplies instruction omitted in the Old Testament is, that there will in that period be Gentile as well as Jewish saints. In Rev. 6 some who have been slain are heard imploring vengeance on those who have shed their blood. In Rev. 7 one hundred and forty and four thousand out of the tribes of Israel are sealed with the seal of God in their foreheads; while an innumerable company out of all kindreds and nations are seen to have come out of the great tribulation, and to have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. In Rev. 8 an angel presents with much incense at the golden altar, the prayers of saints — prayers, the answer to which is, that the angel takes the censer, and fills it with fire, and casts it into the earth; on which "voices" immediately ensue, with "thunderings and lightnings and an earthquake." The sackcloth testimony, the martyr-death, and the triumphant, visible ascension to heaven of the two witnesses in Rev. 11 we considered in our last. We add nothing now to the considerations then presented, to show that this is not only what has not been fulfilled as yet, but so contrasted, in spirit and principle, with the character of the present dispensation, as to preclude the thought of its having been accomplished. Rev. 12 exhibits to us Israel's glory according to divine counsels: Israel — the mother, as all know, of the manchild who is to rule all nations. The man-child is caught away from the dragon's rage to God and His throne; but when, besides this, the dragon shall be cast out of heaven, and come down to earth, having great wrath, because he knows that he hath but a short time, against whom will his wrath be directed? Against the woman, and "the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus, Christ." That is, against Israel, and especially the remnant, whose destinies, whether spared or martyred, we have been recently considering. Saints on earth are again mentioned in Rev. 13 as victims of the beast's enmity against God, and against all who own His name; but this only serves to identify such saints with the evidently Jewish martyrs of Dan. 7 under "the little horn." So of Rev. 14: 12, and Rev. 15, 16; while Rev. 20: 4, shows us, as explained in our last, that these martyrs of the crisis, being precluded by their death from the earthly hopes of blessing

under Christ's millennial reign, are advanced to the far higher dignity of sharing, with Old Testament saints and with the Church, the privilege of reigning with Christ a thousand years.

"The things which thou hast seen" — Christ's glory as walking amid the golden candlesticks — John has recorded in chapter 1 "The things which are" — the successive states of the professing body, with Christ's judgment, thereof, ending in its being spued out of His mouth — form the subject of chapters 2 and 3 "The things which must be after these" begin to be unfolded in chapter 4 but, that he may understand and communicate them, the apostle is caught up to heaven. There he witnesses a scene unlike the present, and equally unlike the millennial state of things. It belongs to neither the millennial period nor the present, but is a transitional period between the two, in which "the things which must be after these" have their fulfilment. During this period, the true Church is in heaven. It sits there, is crowned there, worships there; and deeply interested in the action which takes place on earth, it manifests its interest from time to time. Seals are opened — trumpets blown — vials of wrath poured out. All these are judgments from God upon the earth. They increase in intensity to the last. The objects of these judgments, Babylon and the Beast, are described. When Babylon's overthrow has taken place, the marriage of the Lamb is celebrated in heaven, and judgment is executed by His own hand on the Beast and on his armies. The armies which were in heaven attend Him when he thus comes forth to conquer and make war. All enemies are overthrown. Satan is bound. Christ and the saints, including those of the crisis, as well as the Church and Old Testament saints, reign over the earth a thousand years. For a little season at the close, Satan is loosed, and a rebellion takes place, which is crushed by instant judgment, and the winding up of all things follows. The heavens and the earth pass away, and give place to new heavens and a new earth — to the everlasting state — in which God is all in all.

Such seems to us to be the outline of this wondrous book. We commend it to the prayerful consideration of our readers.