

## CHAPTER XVII

### ISRAEL'S FUTURE

THE prophecies which we have been briefly considering in the last two chapters take us from the age of Abraham--some 2,000 years B.C.--to the time when the Lord Jesus came to earth. His birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension, together with the outpouring of the Spirit, are the fulfilment of a long series of Old Testament predictions. The evidence is cumulative. We are not dealing with a few isolated vaticinations, but with a long series, definite in expression and preparatory for the greatest event in human history. We naturally ask ourselves, as we take a further survey of the Books, Is all that has been predicted now accomplished? or is there a *residuum* of unfulfilled prophecy standing over for accomplishment in the future? It is clear in the first place, when we examine our materials, that there remain certain unfulfilled sections in the Old Testament; and that portions of the prophetic teaching of the Lord Himself and of the Apostles have to do with the time of the end, to which we are drawing nearer century by century. Secondly, as to the events predicted which were still future during the lifetime of Christ, there were announced the fall of Jerusalem and the consequent dispersion of Israel, the evangelisation of the world, the development of false teaching and persecution, the restoration of Israel, the final break-up of the world-empires, the first resurrection, the manifestation of Christ in his glorious kingdom, the judgment of quick and dead, and the establishment of new heavens and a new earth.

The mere enumeration of these subjects is impressive; they are grand in themselves, and they present ideas which are of the deepest interest to the race and to the individual. In dealing with them it seems best to secure some outline analogous with that contained in the Song of Israel (Deut. 32),<sup>1</sup> if such a one is to be found. An outline of a very comprehensive and far-reaching character has been preserved to us in the first three Gospels as it fell from the lips of our Lord Himself; and all other New Testament utterances arrange themselves more or less clearly in connexion with it.

When we compare the 24th of St. Matthew with the 13th of St. Mark and the 21st of St. Luke, we find presented to us three accounts of one discourse relating to a series of events, some of which were in the immediate future. The best commentary on the greater part of the discourse is furnished unwittingly by Josephus in his *Book of the Wars*. The Temple furnishes the text. In spite of its beauty and magnificence, the Lord told His followers that it was to be thrown down. Struck by this amazing announcement the four fishermen afterwards made private enquiries concerning the details. They wanted to know three things: (i.) When the overthrow should take place? (ii.) What should be the sign of Christ's coming?<sup>2</sup> and (iii.) What should be the sign of the final consummation? Evidently there is a great deal involved in these questions. Perhaps the second sprang out of the first, whilst the third arose out of our Lord's teaching by parables, especially those recorded in Matt. 13. If we could picture up what was in the mind of the enquirers at this stage, perhaps we should conclude that the Lord's coming was for the purpose of destroying the Temple and for the ushering in of the new and

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1 See *supra*, chap. II.§4.

2 It is remarkable that the word for "coming" (παρουσια) which is used by St. Matthew never occurs again till the Epistles.

glorious Dispensation which would be inaugurated at the completion of the old one, when the Kingdom would be restored to Israel (Acts 1.6).

Our Lord's answer contains various parts. They may be shortly exhibited thus:--

i. Do not be led astray by pretended Messiahs.

ii. Do not be disturbed by rumours of wars.

iii. Prepare to be hated and persecuted.

iv. Exercise endurance amid the temptation to apostatise.

v. The Gospel shall be preached through the (Roman?) world before the end (see note at end of chapter).

vi. At last the time will come. The first symptom will be the sight of "the Abomination of Desolation standing in the holy place" (Matthew); "where it ought not" (Mark); or as it is paraphrased in St. Luke, "Jerusalem compassed with armies." The desolation would then be at hand.

vii. Take flight at once. "For these are the days of retribution, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke).

viii. The distress that follows will be intense, but it will be shortened for the sake of the Chosen People (Matthew and Mark).

ix. Many of the people shall be slain; others led captive to all nations; Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Luke).

x. Beware during this period, as during the earlier one, of being led astray by false Christs, for the real *Parousia*, or coming of the Son of Man, will be very different from any local rising.

xi. At length, when all the tribulation and down-treading is measured out and the times of the Gentiles are thus fulfilled, there will be signs in heaven and catastrophes on earth. The sign of the Son of Man shall be seen in heaven and the Tribes shall mourn, and men shall see Him coming in (or *on*) the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

xii. Then the redemption of the people draws nigh; and God will gather together His chosen ones from all places where they have been scattered.

The main body of the prophetic discourse is now complete; and one cannot fail to be struck with the calmness and clearness of the announcement and with the dignity of Him who thus deliberately draws aside the veil from the future. The prediction naturally falls into certain groups or portions, thus:--§§ i.-v. are preliminary; §§ vi.-ix. describe the fall of Jerusalem; §§ x.-xii. describe what is to follow when the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled,--so that it is only these last that can refer to what is still future. The short parable of the fig-tree that follows encourages the Lord's followers to look out for certain symptoms probably at each stage. The fulfilment of the first group would guarantee the fulfilment of the second, and that (which is now far in the past) encourages us to

believe in the fulfilment of the third. The first and second groups were fulfilled in the lifetime of men of that generation. Even the preaching to the Roman world was regarded as an accomplished fact in St. Paul's time. See Rom. 10.18; Col. 1.6,23. The third group shall also be fulfilled in its time, though many generations of men have passed away since our Lord's utterance. The exact date of this, *i.e.* the *Parousia* and the Restitution of Israel, was not revealed even to the Lord Jesus Himself,--and it is to be noticed that this was the only event which the Son was not in a position to reveal. All the rest lay before Him like an open record; but this point of time the Father had kept under His own control (see Acts 1.7): It will be sudden, however, and the Lord will come like a thief in the night, and will finally separate those who have been employed together in the ordinary avocations of life, some being taken<sup>3</sup> and others left behind.

The discourse closes with an exhortation to watch and to be faithful in service. It is followed in St. Matthew by the series of parabolic discourses contained in the 25th chapter, which are intended to illustrate the destiny of the various groups of persons who will find themselves brought into contact with the Lord at the time of the end.

The outline presented in this discourse appears to be mainly Israelite in its bearing; and this would be as much as the Apostles could receive at that time. The "elect" all through appear to be the chosen people, the remnant of the House of Jacob, not the Christian Church. The tribes who lament appear to be the Israelite tribes. The gathering of the people from all regions seems to be the Restitution so often predicted in the Old Testament, and it ushers in the time when the true Messiah shall reign over Israel. Thus the framework of the prophecy appears to be Israelite. Much, however, is left to be filled up, especially with regard to the times of the Gentiles; and this can be done in a measure in the light of the Lord's parables and of the Apostles' teaching, a careful study of which makes it clear that there is another side to the *Parousia* to be read along with this Messianic and Israelite side.

That Israel has a great future is clear from Scripture as a whole. There is a large unfulfilled element in the Old Testament which demands it, unless we spiritualise it away or relinquish it as Oriental hyperbole. This scattered nation of ten million people has yet its part to play in the history of the world. There is to be a re-betrothal, a reunion, a liberation, a conversion, a restoration, which shall be like a resurrection, or life from the dead. There will be a time of prosperity, an entrance into the New Covenant, with new responsibilities and enlarged influence. All this may be preceded by worse troubles than any which have befallen Israel hitherto; but the texts which are supposed to imply this may have been already fulfilled since they were uttered.

The great condition of Restitution (according to St. Peter's preaching) is that Israel, as a people, should repent and turn to the Lord. Then will come the times of refreshing (Acts 3.19-21). Similarly, St. Paul says that a veil is on Israel's mind, but that when the people shall turn to the Lord the veil shall be taken away (2 Cor. 3.16). In the Epistle to the Romans (chaps. 9-11) he goes fully into the matter, and shows that the children of the Kingdom are cast out through unbelief. They are rejected because they have rejected God. This hardness of Israel's heart and lot has been permitted, and, in that sense, ordered, first, so

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<sup>3</sup> Compare John 14.3, "I will take you to Myself," where the same Greek word is used.

that they might carry out the predetermined crucifixion of Christ, and secondly, that the Gentiles might have the predestined opportunity of receiving the Truth. When, however, "the fulness of the Gentiles has come in" (or, to use our Lord's words, when "the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled") then Israel, as a people, will be "saved," and will enter into the New Covenant. See especially Rom. 11.25,26. They are still God's chosen people, and His gifts and calling are "without repentance," *i.e.* are irreversible. As long as the world goes on Israel will be a people. Now they reject Christ; hereafter they will accept Him; a great future is then before them, and they are yet to be a blessing to the nations.

It is difficult to believe that there will be no local centre for the restored people. They will not be a kingdom in the sense in which they were in old times, but they will be a vast community, with organisation and worship and ministrations which the Old Testament naturally expressed in terms borrowed from the past. They will not be "Zionists" in the modern sense, but Zion may be yet their true centre.

So far the Nationalist view of our Lord's prophecy concerning His *Parousia* has been touched upon; but the Epistles graft upon it a Christian view, and to this we must now address ourselves.

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#### Note on Matthew 24.14.

"This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be proclaimed in all the world for a witness to all nations; and then shall come the end." St. Mark puts it shortly, "The Gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations." The word translated "world" (*οικουμένη*) is sometimes equivalent to the Roman Empire (see Luke 2.1 and Acts 11.28), but is not rigidly confined to this sense. In Matt. 26.13, where we have another reference to the Gospel being preached in all the world, the wider word (*Kosmos*) is used. The preaching to "all nations" seems to be unrestricted in chap. 28.19 and Mark 16.15. No wider words could be used. Shall we take the text before us in the restricted or in the unrestricted sense? Alford's note on it runs thus:--"The Gospel was preached throughout the whole 'orbis terrarum,' and every nation received its testimony before the destruction of Jerusalem; see Col. 1.6,23; 2 Tim. 4.17. This was necessary not only as regarded the Gentiles, but to give to God's people, the few who were scattered among all these nations, the opportunity of receiving or rejecting the preaching of Christ. But in the wider sense the words imply that the Gospel shall be preached in all the world, literally taken, before the great and final end come. The apostasy of the latter days and the universal dispersion of missions are the two great signs of the end drawing near." Thus, behind the Jewish foreground there is a world-wide background in this remarkable discourse.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE PAROUSIA AND THE MILLENNIUM.

WE gather from our Lord's great prophetic discourse that the day of his appearing or coming is to follow more or less speedily after the completion of "the times of the Gentiles." This *Parousia* naturally assumed great prominence in the minds of the Apostles and of their immediate followers. When we study their writings carefully we are surprised to see how little they say about death and much about the *Parousia* of Christ. The fact of it, rather than the time, is usually dealt with, but it is always regarded as within the possibilities of the near future. In his earliest epistles St. Paul points out that it is to be preceded by the Apostacy, and followed by the Judgment. At times it seemed very near, but obstacles arose, and have arisen again and again, partly spiritual, partly secular or political, partly of the nature of persecutions, which have checked the progress of events, whilst the delay has practically tended to enlarge the boundaries of Christ's Kingdom. The fall of Jerusalem was within ten years of the time of St. Paul's imprisonment, though no one knew it. Probably some expected it (according to the original terms of the decree of Dan. 9) within three years and a half of our Lord's Crucifixion (see *supra*, chap. IV.). Many may have expected the "times of the Gentiles," which began in Apostolic days, to come to an end before the close of the last century, but they are still running on, and no one on earth can tell the day or hour, or even the year, when the signal will be given for the close of the present dispensation and the restitution of Israel.

One thing is clearly elicited from the Epistles: the *Parousia* of the Lord is the hope not only of Israel, but of the Christian Community. It is not only a time of refreshing to Israel, but also a time of the revealing of secrets and of giving rewards and penalties to the Church (1 Cor. 3.13-15); a time when ministers and converts will stand face to face before each other and before Christ (1 Thess. 2.19); a time of rest for the troubled (2 Thess. 1.7); and a time of manifestation of the sons of God (Rom. 8.19). But most of all it will be a time of the resurrection of the true saints (1 Cor. 15.22), when they shall be metamorphosed and made like their Master, and shall share His glory (Phil. 3.20,21; Col. 3.4; 2 Tim. 2.11,12; 4.1,8; 1 Pet. 4.5; 1 John 3.2). It is this blessed time, and not the hour of departure, which is looked for throughout the Epistles.

The *Parousia* of Christ is thus invested with tremendous significance. If it means restitution for repentant Israel it means resurrection for "those that are Christ's." Earthly and heavenly glory are thus strangely linked, and the Kingdom of Christ as then manifested will embrace two vast departments of the human race, one of which will have gone through the process of resurrection, and the other will still be in their mortal bodies, the latter being centred in Jerusalem which is below, the former in Jerusalem which is (at present) above.

The human mind, as now constructed, seems incapable of interpreting the passages which will then be fulfilled, or of picturing up the thrilling scenes which are still curtailed off from us by futurity, and only seen "through a glass darkly." But putting aside physical speculations, there is one question which may fairly be considered; it has to do with the continuance of what we may describe as the two-fold kingdom, the Israelite and the saintly. Is the *Parousia* an event, or an epoch? With regard to Israel the promise was that the Son of David was to reign over it "for ever" (comp. Isai. 9.7 with Luke 1.33), and this word "for ever"

signifies that as long as the nation existed to be ruled over, so long the Messiah should rule over them.<sup>4</sup> The resurrection of the saints, on the other hand, points to an event rather than an epoch. It will take place "in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump"; though the judgment or assignment of positions to those who belong to Christ suggests the possibility of an extended period.

It is our business now to consider one of the most notable passages in the New Testament. It may safely be said that if we had not the 20th chapter of Revelation we should know nothing of the *Millennium*. We might indeed read of Jewish ideas of a somewhat similar character, though their date is very uncertain, and we might have guessed from some words of St. Paul and of the Lord Himself that there was a first resurrection from the dead as well as a final resurrection of the dead; and we might have anticipated that the Restitution of Israel would be followed by a time of great blessing on earth, but it is this chapter which gives definiteness to all such anticipations.

The early Church seems to have been much attracted by the prospect of the Millennium. Perhaps it took too prominent a position in their minds, so that after the fifth century it was discredited and almost lost sight of until the Reformation. Even if we regard it as altogether figurative, still it prefigures something, for the Seer is very definite in his language and details of what will happen at its close. We naturally associate it with the Restitution which follows upon the *Parousia*, though other interpretations have been suggested. But if this view be correct we must conclude that while the Restitution ushers in a long period of happiness and blessing on earth to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile, there will be a concurrent reign of certain saints and martyrs with Christ in glory. This latter reign may be supposed to be a time of influence for good (whether upon earth or in the spirit-world) analogous with that now exercised by angels. It will be a true Kingdom of Heaven, in which the meek, the pure, and the persecuted for righteousness sake, will have a share, the way being made more easy through the compulsory withdrawal of the Evil One. There is nothing said about the reign being visible. It is probably spiritual, though none the less real; but the saints thus reigning may be commissioned to appear on earth in some such way as angels appeared in former dispensations. The outbreak which follows the Millennium is couched in language borrowed from certain passages in the Old Testament (see especially Ezek. 38) and will furnish their true and final fulfilment. But this outbreak is set forth as if it were the last permitted effort of Satan, and the ultimate destruction of the powers of evil is revealed at its close.

If the view of the Millennium here given satisfies the requirements of the passage, we must still ask whether we are right in adjusting it to the period of the Restitution of Israel. It has often been noticed that the *Parousia* itself is not mentioned in the vision (Rev. 20) or in those which immediately precede it. But on turning to the early chapters of the Revelation we find that, though the word itself is not used, *Parousia* passages abound (see 1.7; 2.25; 3.11,21; 11.15). There are indeed some students, whose names and learning demand respect, who believe that we are in the Millennium now, that Satan is now bound, and that the vision of the reigning of the saints refers to the spread of Christian principles.<sup>5</sup> But our Lord seems to teach very definitely that the *Parousia* succeeds the "times of the Gentiles" and is not contemporary with them; and the "times of the

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4 See *Old Testament Synonyms*, chap. 30, on the Hebrew and Greek words which mark duration.

5 On Augustine's view, see *infra*, p. 84.

Gentiles," which are certainly running on now, can hardly be described as Millennial.

On the whole the view most consistent with the New Testament, taken together, is that there are yet to be revealed, on and after the *Parousia*, two concurrent epochs which are ushered in by the Restitution of Israel upon earth and the First Resurrection. Those who have part in the First Resurrection share in Christ's spiritual dominion for a thousand years, *i.e.* for a very long period, and this is their training for the eternal Kingdom of God which will begin when Christ hands over the two-fold kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15.28).

Students have often been struck with the contrast between the glowing descriptions of future earthly blessedness in the Old Testament, and the uphill path of antagonism against evil, and fortitude under persecution, which is the burden of the New Testament. But the bright prospect hinted at by Christ and His Apostles, and portrayed in Rev. 20, solves the apparent inconsistency. We must wait till the *Parousia*, and then the older predictions will be fulfilled--perhaps not literally and yet really and completely. When Christ comes again He will appear "unto salvation" (Heb. 9.28). Then "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11.26). Then the Lord will be, in a sense we cannot realise, not only a light to lighten the Gentiles, but the glory of His people Israel (Luke 2.32). Then the tabernacle of David, which Amos and St. James spoke of, will be resuscitated (Amos 9.11,12; Acts 15.16,17), and David's throne will be established for ever, *i.e.* as long as the dispensation lasts (Luke 1.33). Then Paradise will be regained; and the narrow way will become broad, for Satanic power will be restricted.

This will be the time which the Lord calls "the Regeneration," when the Apostles shall judge Israel under their Lord, and when the saints shall judge the world (Matt. 19.28; 1 Cor. 6.2; comp. Dan. 7.22).

As we meditate on the prospect many questions press for a solution:--

(a.) Is it quite certain the Lord's return is pre-millennial according to the Scriptures? The Scotch school of prophetic students and some others have strongly opposed this view. They believe that the Millennium is arrived at by slow degrees through the gradual evangelisation of the world, and that it means the triumph of Christian principles, and that when things are at their very best Christ will return. This view, however, hardly seems to adjust itself to the requirements of the Scripture or to the revelation of the painful outbreak at the close of the Millennium. In fact, it is difficult to read the view into Rev. 20 at all. Augustine's view, which is expressed very frankly and with great moderation, deserves respectful mention. Repelled by the extreme material ideas of earlier millennarians, he reverts to the idea set forth in our Lord's own teaching. The first resurrection is the spiritual change which is experienced by the believer who is passed from death into life (John 5.24). The binding of Satan is the binding of "the strong man" (Matt. 12.29). The thousand years is the period between Christ's first coming and His second coming to judge the world. In Augustine's day (circ. 400 A.D.) there was an idea abroad that the Christian Church would only last 365 years; but he showed that the period in question, dating from the Day of Pentecost, was already past, and that men were seeing before their eyes the growth and triumph of Christianity. He considered the thousand years to be a round number, being the cube of ten, and not to be restricted exactly or literally. With regard to the subsequent outbreak, he held it would be the rise of antichrist, who should be a violent opponent of Christianity for three years and a half, and who should be

destroyed by the Lord in His *Parousia*.

This view was held with some modifications by the late Bishop Wordsworth, of Lincoln, and it is to be distinguished from the view of Dr. David Brown and other Scotch interpreters, and from that of the leading Wesleyan writers, who look forward to the day when all the world shall be brought under Christian influence, and shall welcome the Lord on His return.<sup>6</sup>

(b.) Is there a physical catastrophe affecting the surface of the earth, somewhat analogous to the formation of a new geological stratum, at the ushering in of the Millennium? Some passages incline one to the affirmative, but there are considerations which make anything like a world-wide physical catastrophe improbable, if not impossible. There will doubtless be great changes, material as well as spiritual, at the time of the revelation of Christ in glory. But there will not be any such terrestrial convulsions as would block the continuity of the human race. These are reserved for a later stage.

(c.) Granting that the Millennium is to come, and that Israel is to be a restored people, and that certain saints will at the same time attain to the First Resurrection, will earthly affairs be carried on as now? Will there be masters and servants, coal-miners and scavengers, railways and trams? Will the elect saints rule over (*i.e.* exert a spiritual influence over) the non-elect people who happen to be still living in different parts of the world, certain cities (or, shall we say *parishes*?) being allotted to each? Will the Jewish sacrificial system be restored? Will the risen Patriarchs be visibly introduced into their promised inheritance? And how will it be with all these people at the final Judgment? These are not a hundredth part of the questions which occur to us as we contemplate the prospect. But our absolute ignorance need not shake our convictions. Whatever God ordains will speedily seem natural.<sup>7</sup>

(d.) Taking the Millennium to be "the Day of the Lord," and assenting to the view that He comes at the beginning of the day, then we understand that He hands over the kingdom at the end of the day (1 Cor. 15); but how will this adjust itself to the outbreak which follows the Millennium? One is inclined to answer with the hymn, "God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain." However we explain away the Millennium still this difficulty faces us. It is not the last chapter of human history, though it is the last but one, and it confirms us in the conviction that this earth, which has been the scene of so much sin and suffering, is to witness greater things than we can conceive, and that Christ shall be acknowledged as the true King of Nations.

The earliest Christians seem to have held a very simple view of the Millennium. Justin Martyr, in his dialogue with Trypho, says (§81): "There was a certain man with us whose name was John, one of the Apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell in Jerusalem for a thousand years, and that afterwards the general and eternal resurrection and judgment of all men should take place." Papias says that "There will be a thousand years after the resurrection from the dead,<sup>8</sup> when the reign of Christ will be established bodily on this earth." Irenæus

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6 See, *e.g.* the late William Arthur's *Tongue of Fire*.

7 See W. D. Heath's *Future Kingdom of Christ*.

8 See Eusebius, *Ch. Hist.* iii.30. It is noteworthy that Eusebius here attributes to Papias the expression "*from the dead*" as distinguished from the ordinary

held the view, which seems to have been originally Jewish, that after 6,000 years of human history a change shall be brought about (*Against Heresies*, v. 28); then shall come what he calls "the hallowed seventh day," "the times of the kingdom," when the promised inheritance shall be restored to Abraham (chap. xxx.). This, he says, is the resurrection of the just, and of the kingdom which is the commencement of incorruption, by means of which kingdom those who are worthy are gradually to comprehend (or partake of) the Divine nature, receiving the promise of the inheritance which God promised to the fathers and to reign in it. Thus, in the very creation in which they toiled or were afflicted they will receive the reward of their suffering. He cites Papias, whom he calls "a hearer of John and a companion of Polycarp," in favour of this view, as also certain "elders who saw John the disciple of the Lord" (chap. xxxiii.), and quotes the words of John, who says the very same in the Revelation: "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the First Resurrection" (chap. xxxiv; comp. also the close of chap. xxxvi.).

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doctrine of the resurrection of the dead.

## CHAPTER XIX

### CHRIST AND ANTICHRIST.

THE gift of choice or will which has been bestowed on man and on some other beings not only throws great responsibility on them, but also makes it possible that they should set themselves against the will of Him by whose permission they live. The results of such rebellion must have been foreseen and provided against from the beginning. Meanwhile, the historical fact has to be faced that all through the human period, so far as it is covered by the Old Testament, we read of opposition to God's will. There were human adversaries--rebellious subjects--on earth, and there was the Adversary, or Satan (שָׁטָן), in the spirit-world. This opposition was partly directed against the law of righteousness, partly against the true Israelites, in whom that law of righteousness was in a measure embodied, and partly against the supremacy of the God of Israel Himself. We know very little about the forces of evil, and nothing about the origin of evil in the spirit-world as distinguished from the results of temptation recorded in history and realised in experience. Physical science does not help us here. We have nothing to go by but Scripture, and the contemplation of the workings of evil in our own nature.

There are a few passages in the Old Testament which point to the rising up of some special opponents in certain periods of history, who should seek to draw to themselves the allegiance due to God, and should fight against His people simply because they were His people (see Isai. 14; Ezek. 38,39; Dan. 7,8,11). But these may be passed over here, and we will proceed to the New Testament.

Our Lord, early in His teaching, bade His followers to beware of false prophets; He also prepared them for persecution, hatred, and death for His Name's sake. In the Acts we get plenty of illustrations of the spirit of persecution, and some indications are given of the rise of false teachers (see Acts 20.29,30). On turning to the Epistles we are struck with the fact that many of them bear the marks of having been written in the times of persecution and strong opposition to the truth. Satan himself is regarded as the chief opponent. This early antagonism to Christianity was partly Jewish, partly heathen, partly philosophic, partly sensual. Germs of strange heresies were in the air. Already, says St. John, there were many antichrists, *i.e.* many who denied the truth of God and of Christ. But beyond these false teachers there was to be one in particular (1 John 2.18; 4.3) who would lead the people astray in matters of life and doctrine. St. John's prophetic utterance might point to secularism, to infidelity, or to some form of Gnosticism,<sup>9</sup> and to its attendant iniquities. St. Peter and St. Jude also tell of heretical false teachers who would combine covetousness with erroneous doctrine (2 Pet. 2.1-3; comp. St. Jude's Epistle, *passim*). Both these writers describe the opponents as scoffers or mockers who should walk after their ungodly lusts in the latter days.

St. Paul is more full and explicit on the subject. Besides his frequent references to the need of watchfulness against error, secularism, and sensuality, there were special instructions contained in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. In the 2nd chapter we are told that there was to be the Apostasy or falling away from Christ; then in connexion with it there would come to the front a leader of evil, who is called the man of sin, *i.e.* the sinful man, one who embodied

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<sup>9</sup> On this subject see Mansel's *Lectures on the Gnostic Heresies*.

sin in himself to an exceptional degree; he is also called the son of perdition--destructive and to be destroyed--the adversary of God, lifting himself up in opposition to all true worship, practically superseding God and acting as if he himself were a god (2 Thess. 2.3,4). Further, he is called the lawless one, who would be manifested and come to the front when certain hindrances or difficulties were removed, and who would be brought to nought by the Lord at His *Parousia*. The work of this strange being is described as Satanic, as accompanied with false signs, miracles, and mighty works, his *Parousia* being thus a sort of counterpart or caricature of Christ's and his powers being exercised for the propagation of unrighteousness and lies. Many will be caught by this deceit and will believe his lies, partly through ignorance and partly because his system will pander to their fleshly lusts (vv. 8-11).

It is noteworthy that these things which Paul wrote he had already spoken about orally during his first brief visit to Thessalonica (v. 5). Probably he unfolded the same prospect in other places also. There can be very little doubt, in fact, that this subject formed part of his regular teaching, and that St. John's words, "Ye have heard that the antichrist shall come," is a brief embodiment of a special line of teaching which was set forth by all the Apostles.

To what, then, does St. Paul refer? His language is evidently taken in part from Dan. 11.37. This notable chapter of Daniel gives a sketch of the future, from the time of the Persian Empire till the time of the end. Large periods of time are omitted when unnecessary for the purpose, e.g. 150 years are passed over between the 2nd and 3rd verse, according to the ordinary interpretation of the chapter. The days of Antiochus Epiphanes, who comes to the front in the 21st verse, are blended with the period of the downfall of Jerusalem and the Temple in v. 31; and "the time of the end" is foreseen in v. 35. Then we are introduced to the king who exalts himself against God and honours the god of fortresses (R.V.). He thus appears to be both despotic and antitheistic. The Apostles believed that this personage was yet to come, and that as all true theism is gathered up in Christ, so all antitheism is embodied in antichrist--this name signifying either a substitute for Christ or an opponent to Him.

How do we stand towards this prophecy now? Before answering, the first thing to be decided is whether it is a system which is predicted, or whether it is a person. The language of St. Paul is strongly in favour of its being a person; and we know by experience that all "new departures," whether for good or evil, owe their success to personal influence. Accordingly we look through the centuries in order to find out any traces of fulfilment, whether elementary or complete.

The early Churches were distracted by heresies which ranked themselves more or less under the name Gnostic; but no one notable person came to the front in those days who at all answered to Daniel's description of the wilful king, or to St. Paul's description of the man of sin. In the 7th century Mohammedanism rose in the East and Romanism in the West. Each involves serious departure from the truth of Christ. Each is to some extent antichristian. Mohammed claimed to be the promised Comforter and the Prophet who was to represent Christ; and the Bishop of Rome claimed also to be the vicar of Christ upon earth. One view was propagated by the sword for a thousand years and still possesses millions of bigoted adherents; the other, as it grew in power and pride, sought to stifle opposition against itself by every possible means, including war and diplomacy, torture and the stake.

These rival systems have been a blight on vital Christianity, and have stood

in the way of the evangelisation of the world for many centuries. It is no wonder that commentators have referred to one or the other of them as fulfilling the predictions of St. Paul; and they do undoubtedly point in that direction. But it is observable that hitherto neither of these systems have answered all the requirements of the passage. Both have had checks, and have had to advance in new directions, while both minister to false teaching, and are practically antichristian, yet they are at the opposite poles of error. Hereafter, according to St. Paul, there will be a culmination of falsehood under one head, who will emerge at the time of the end, and after doing his subtle, mischievous, and cruel work, will be destroyed by the Lord at His *Parousia*. Such seems the natural interpretation of the Scripture; but the solution of this, together with many other problems, has to be left open at present.

We naturally turn to the Book of the Revelation at this point to see if it throws any light on the question. Can we find in it the vision of some power which should counterfeit Christianity, should be really both despotic and atheistic whilst keeping under cover of religion, and which should come to a head towards the time of the end? First, we see mischief brewing, in the letters to the seven Churches. Then we see all earthly things drawing to a close during the breaking of the seven Seals and the sounding of the seven Trumpets. This takes us to the end of the 11th chapter. Then two remarkable appearances are recorded. There is the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head (comp. Gen. 37.9); and over against her is the dragon with seven heads and ten crowned horns. The first of these we naturally take to be Israel, and the child she brings forth is Christ.<sup>10</sup> The second is explained in the context as Satan. Failing in destroying Christ he persecutes both Israel and the Lord's followers. So far all is fulfilled.

In the 13th chapter the characteristics of the Dragon are found embodied in the Beast, who is generally supposed to represent some great world-power, e.g. Rome. His seventh head is wounded to death, but recovers. This seventh head thus strangely restored assumes despotic power over the nations and blasphemes God. Then a lamb-like, two-horned beast is seen, in alliance with the Beast, deceiving people by false miracles. The numerical value of the letters which compose his name is 666, which is "the number of a man." This lamb-like counterfeit of the true Lamb is subsequently called the "false prophet." Yet another vision is recorded, in the 17th chapter; it is a woman; she is called a whore, because she has broken her covenant with God. She is rich, vile, and drunk with the blood of martyrs of Jesus.

Putting these visions together, we have Satan the great mischief maker; the imperialism of Rome carrying out the Satanic policy of persecution; the false prophet doing the same in a more subtle way; the woman, *i.e.* the unfaithful Church(?), utilising imperial power to destroy the true followers of Christ. It can hardly be doubted that we have here developed in vision what St. Paul taught in veiled and sober prose. The subsequent history of the Church of Rome gives us a painful commentary on the text, though it is still doubtful whether an individual leader is not portrayed as destined to appear as the embodiment of many-sided evil. That "woman," on whom so much attention is concentrated, is mystically called "Babylon" (Rev. 17.18), partly because of the strong secular element in her nature, imperialism and false religion being combined in her, and partly because her downfall is as great and terrible as that of the ancient empire of the East. Her

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<sup>10</sup>Of course there are other interpretations of this and of every other vision.

end is destruction, for the ten horns (*i.e.* the subdivision of the empire) bring her to desolation (chap. 17.15, etc.).

At length the child, whose birth had been narrated in chap. 12.5, and who was destined to rule the nations with the rod of iron, comes forth from heaven to judge and make war; and secular imperialism, which had already, according to the vision, cast off the sway of false religion, perishes (chap. 19.15-21).

This tremendous catastrophe is associated with the *Parousia* of Christ by St. Paul in 2 Thess. 2, and it therefore naturally prepares the way for the Millennium in Rev. 20, when the Dragon himself, the ultimate cause of all earth's trouble, is dealt with, first being bound, and then (1,000 years afterwards) being cast into the lake of fire, the final embers of antagonism to Christ being thus stamped out.

Putting these and other passages together, and deducting as much as seems reasonable from the visionary language of the Apocalypse, we cannot but see a pictorial prophecy of the great conflict between truth and error, the one embodied in Christ, the other in an amalgamated system of secularism, false teaching, sensuality, and persecution, probably developed in their extreme form under one head. The final triumph of truth and righteousness over all evil is also clearly revealed.

The revelation of antichrist was a matter of intense interest to the early Church. Most of the teachers in the 3rd and 4th centuries seem to have put together the passages from Daniel, St. Paul, and the Revelation, to which reference has just been made. They usually considered that his ascendancy was to be permitted for the mystical three and a half years, the half week of Daniel. Some, *e.g.* Irenæus, associated him with the period before the Millennium; others identified his rise with the outbreak which is to occur after the Millennium.

There is a work by the celebrated Hippolytus, Bishop of Portus, on *Christ and Antichrist*, in which he urges the necessity of carefully studying what is said on the subject in the Holy Scriptures. The Roman Empire, he says, constitutes the Fourth Beast of Daniel; the toes of the feet are "emblems" of the kingdoms that are yet to rise; and the "little horn" is antichrist, whom he expected (in common with many others) to spring out of the Tribe of Dan. He proceeds to quote John "the apostle and disciple of the Lord," citing long passages from the 17th and 18th of the Revelation, together with some of the earlier chapters, and takes Antiochus Epiphanes as a sort of type of the antichristian, two-horned lamb who heals the wounded head of the Beast. Following Irenæus he is inclined to identify the number 666 with the word *Lateinos*, as the Latins were then holding the imperial power (§50), and he introduced St. Paul's utterance as to be fulfilled in the rise and fall of this Satanic and antichristian personage.

The infidel Celsus seems to have mocked at the thought of antichrist; but Origen answers him without hesitation, and shows from Scripture that there is to be a personal head of evil in the same sense as Christ is the impersonation of righteousness, and that he will deceive the human race but subsequently perish.

Lactantius (*Inst.* vii. 17, etc.) describes antichrist as an infidel king who shall falsely call himself Christ, and shall fight against the truth, but shall pay the penalty of his crimes; after which shall come the Millennium, the 6,000 years of human history having been completed, and the city of Rome having fallen. Tertullian also puts antichristian oppression before the Millennium in his treatise

against Marcion (iii. 24; v. 12).

Augustine's views of the Millennium naturally lead him to put the period of antichrist at the close of all, and he therefore identifies it with the final outbreak before the last judgment. He calls it "the last persecution," but he refuses to be tied to the theory then already prevailing that there would be only a fixed number of persecutions answering to the ten persecuting Emperors--Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Antoninus, Severus, Maximin, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, and Diocletian with Maximian (*City of God*, xviii. 52). He refers with approval to Jerome's commentary on Daniel in connexion with the fourth (or Roman) Beast; and he thinks that the ten kings stand for the total number of kings who precede antichrist.

We possess a commentary on the Revelation by Victorinus, Bishop of Petau, dating from about A.D. 300. It is simple and to the point. In dealing with Rev. 7 and 11 he introduces Elias as yet to come before antichrist, and for three and a half years he, and perhaps Moses, will witness, and then be slain by antichrist, whose kingdom will last over a similar period. The Beast stands for Rome, from whom antichrist springs. His view of the Millennium is the same as was adopted a hundred years later by Augustine, and he holds that the antichristian spirit will be revealed in a personal opponent to the Church during the three and a half years which precede the final Judgment.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE FINAL JUDGMENT AND THAT WHICH IS BEYOND.

WE have attempted to show from Scripture that the *Parousia* of Christ is connected (a) with the ushering in of the Israelite kingdom in its final stage, (b) with the reign of the saints, (c) with the downfall of error and opposition. These great movements seem to be connected both morally and chronologically. They are seen together, as the sufferings and reign of Christ were seen together in the Old Testament, but considerable periods of time may be covered in the course of carrying out the Divine programme.

It only remains for us cautiously to lift the veil a little further, and to express in outline or in rudimentary language what Prophecy has to say concerning the destiny of the individual and the world at large after the human period as we now know it has run out.

1. Scripture teaches us that death, which meets us at every turn in our present existence, was not originally intended to close man's career. Other creatures below us in type live their little life and pass away. They have served their purpose; but the Divine intention concerning man was far different. It is no idle boast that the world was made for man; a large portion of its products, e.g. coal, would otherwise be useless; but the real question to be answered is, What was man made for? He is placed at the border-land of two worlds, the physical and the spiritual. His footsteps are planted at birth a long way up the ladder or scale of existence, and he might ascend still higher. But the Adversary beguiled our first parents, and when they fell we all fell, by the law of heredity. We Christians believe, on reasons that will bear the fullest investigation, that Christ, the Son of God, was manifested that He might undo the mischief thus done to the Race; and it is the main province of the Bible to affirm and illustrate the Divine method of regenerating the children of men through the truth of Christ. But death still invades us Christians, even though it has lost its sting. Those, however, who truly believe in Christ, whilst bidding farewell to all else when they depart, do not bid farewell to Christ. Asleep so far as the world is concerned, they are awake to Him. Being disembodied they may fairly be supposed to be inactive, and the conditions of time and space which are essential to us may barely exist to them. At length the congregation of the dead will be aroused, the number made up, and those who are asleep in Christ will be awakened. A new and thrilling consciousness will stir within them, and in the twinkling of an eye they will find themselves in organised, though spiritual, bodies thronging the spiritual palace of their Lord and in attendance on His movements. The judgment or adjustment of positions which follows will be overwhelming in solemnity; but those to whom the unveiled sight of the King is most precious here will then be most happy, and will find themselves able to feel, to think, to act, and to express themselves, to an extent and in ways which are utterly inconceivable to us at present.

2. The reign of glory called the Millennium appears to follow; but what is beyond that? There is a more universal judgment which the Bible as a whole prepares us for, and which the moral sense or conscience of man approves and demands. The messages of Scripture concerning this judgment are brief but impressive. Only a few points may be touched upon here. Let us shortly enumerate the most noteworthy:--

- i. First, although God is the Judge of all the earth by universal

acknowledgment, yet the final destiny of the individual members of the human race depends upon the decision of the Lord Jesus, to whom all judicial authority is delegated by the Father.

ii. While nations as such have their judgment in this world, individuals are to be dealt with in a day or period yet to come, at the last stage of the last day, when the present phase of earthly existence comes to an end.

iii. The principles on which men's destinies will be decided are laid down clearly in Scripture. Foremost among these there is the principle of *Retribution*, embodied in the formula "according to their works"; and by "works" we are to understand the products of man's free-will. These are what form our character. As Christians we are justified by faith; but we are judged according to works, which are the fruit and test of our real faith. Some similar test will be applied to all the world.

iv. There is also the principle of *Equity*. God takes everything into account; our heredity, our environment, our knowledge, our opportunities, and the way in which we have used, neglected, or resisted His grace. No two cases are really alike. He knows not only what we have done, but what we should have done under other circumstances. Comp. Matt. 10.15; 11.22,24; 12.41,42. He who does not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax may safely be trusted to do what is right.

v. There is another principle, founded on the fact that the Lamb of God bore the sins of the world. Whatever is forgivable will be forgiven. Whatever can be cleansed will be cleansed. Whatever is indelible will remain. What use have we made of the grace of God so far as it has been revealed to us? This seems to be the question of questions; and it will be applicable in some sense to the world at large.

vi. There will be the utmost *variety* in the lot of those who are judged. We gather that in the case of Christians, those who run with patience the race set before them will receive from the Righteous Judge a crown. It will be a crown of life (Jas. 1.12), a crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4.8), and a crown of glory (1 Pet. 5.4). These crowns or rewards will not be like the old garlands which so speedily faded away, but will be permanent marks of Christ's approbation of His faithful soldiers and servants. And as one star differeth from another in glory so it will be with regard to the reward. Men will reap according as they have sown. Thus, we are taught that the reward for purity is spiritual vision; the reward for faithfulness in little things will be an opportunity of exercising stewardship on a larger scale; the reward for unselfishness will be an increased power and scope for exercising the spirit of love.

As there will be varieties in position so there will be in degree. Paul sought to present every man perfect in Christ (Col. 1.28), but he probably failed to do so. There are many degrees of spiritual temperature in Christian souls. So far as this is owing to congenital physical lethargy it will drop off at death, but so far as it is owing to culpable negligence we shall recognise the fact and the result at the Great Day, and so with all other phases of life and character.

It may seem to us and to our limited understanding impossible to deal separately and variously with the million million of people, old and young, who have lived upon earth; but there will be no difficulty with God.

vii. So far as can be ascertained from Scripture, the life that we live upon earth, and not anything which befalls us in the intermediate state, forms the basis and supplies the materials for judgment. The things done through the agency of the body (2 Cor. 5.10) are what will be taken into consideration. Probation is over after death; seed-sowing is ended; the account of our stewardship is made up. The disembodied condition of man does not seem to offer any sphere for the development of character. Certainly Scripture gives us no hint of Purgatory, but rather goes the other way. And so far as we can see, the principle which applies to those who rise in the First Resurrection will apply to the second also. All will reap what they have sown in this life. The searchlight of the Judge will be turned on every soul, and each will instinctively, perhaps automatically, give in his account, and it will then be seen whether he is among the saved or the lost, among those who are within or those that are without.

viii. The physical condition of those who stand before the great White Throne as distinguished from those who share the First Resurrection is not described in Scripture. The true Christian who lives for his Master here will share his Master's condition hereafter; but of the rest there is no clear announcement. St. Paul says (2 Tim. 2.20) that "in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth, and some to honour and some to dishonour." So doubtless there will be gradations of physical and mental structure, and perhaps of permanence also, in the case of the non-Christian members of the human race. What is described as "eternal destruction" (2 Thess. 1.9) is for the enemies of Christ, and what is called "eternal punishment" (Matt. 25.46) is for those who have not a grain of love in their composition. The first half of the 2nd chapter of the Romans is the most full and important Apostolic message on this subject, and it applies primarily to the self-righteous Jew.

After all, dismissal from Christ's presence is the most serious of penalties which can befall the children of men. Various expressions are used which indicate the sad position of those who are thus dismissed. They endure the fire of Divine wrath, which none can quench, and which must inevitably do the work which God intends. They are in Gehenna or Hell. This position or condition expresses a Jewish thought that takes its name from the valley of Hinnom, which was the scene both of the people's sin and of their punishment (Jer. 7.31-33), so that it embodies the idea of retribution. They are outside the heavenly city and the Divine light of Christ and the possibilities of healthy activity, and endure the bitterness of remorse. In a word, their condition so far as it is revealed at present is both hopeless, permanent, inevitable. Beyond that we can see nothing.

There are no indications in Scripture as to their number or as to their proportion to the saved; but the unpardonable rejectors of grace may prove to be very few indeed. In any case the severity of God's dealing with them is owing to the fact that they have taken their fate into their own hands, and have judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life. It may be that they will be an object-lesson to other races and to other worlds.<sup>11</sup>

4. There is one more glimpse of the final condition of things, and it is mainly physical. It has to do with the dwelling-place of redeemed man and his

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<sup>11</sup>The contents of this section are mainly taken from a work written many years ago and now rarely obtainable, viz. *Dies Irae a discussion of the principles of Divine Judgment.*

ultimate surroundings.

Our experience of the present state of things leads us to the conviction that hereafter, as here, there must be a divinely-arranged adaptation of the saints' abode to their own structure, and *vice versa*. Man's body now is of the dust of the earth; the materials of which it is composed are the same as those of which all nature is composed, though in varying proportions. But if man was prepared for earth, earth itself had already been prepared for man. When our Lord was about to leave the world, He said, "In My Father's house are many mansions . . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . . . I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am there ye may be also" (John 14.2,3). The preparation of the world for man took many ages: How long does the preparation of this new place in God's mansions take? As we are taught that all things came into being originally through the agency of the *Logos*, so we learn from our Lord's lips it will be hereafter; and if there was a relationship between the materials of which earth is composed, and those of which man's body is composed, so it must surely be hereafter.

Pursuing this thought, we look to the Scriptures to see what they tell us concerning the resurrection body of the saint. In 1 Cor. 15.35, etc., we have some important instruction on the matter. Two questions are supposed to be asked: first, How or by what process are the dead to be raised? secondly, With what sort of body are they to come? The first question is answered by the analogy of germination, which involves previous death or disintegration--an analogy already referred to by our Lord (John 12.24). The second question is answered categorically:--

- i. God decides what sort of body each kind of seed shall produce.
- ii. There are distinctions between the texture of the flesh of different kinds of creatures.
- iii. As there are bodies adapted for dwellers on earth, so there are bodies adapted for dwellers in heaven; and the glory or brightness of each is different.
- iv. Similarly, there are distinctions in brilliancy between sun and moon and stars, these last being of varied magnitude (*i.e.* brilliancy).
- v. In the same way there is a vast distinction, amounting to a contrast, between the body which the saint lays down at death and the body he assumes at resurrection. The one is liable to decay, dishonour, weakness; the other is undecaying, glorious, endued with power. The one is *psychical*, being animated by a living soul, in conformity with the original structure of the first Adam; the other is *pneumatical*, being inspired by a life-giving spirit, after the type of the last Adam. The first man, the type of the present bodily life, is of the dust of the earth; the second man, the type of the future bodily life, is the Lord from heaven.

This is indeed a most instructive and stirring revelation. It points to a body which is not liable to decay. Such a body would be relieved of a great deal of burden and distress; it would need no blood, which is the great carrier of reinforcements through the system, and which conveys to the lungs for combustion all decaying and used-up material. A body, largely relieved of the digestive system, together with lungs, and heart, and arteries, and veins, is thus suggested. What is there left as the Temple of the Spirit? The head, which is the recipient and giver forth of impressions and actions, and the limbs, which are the servants

of the head. These are to be powerful and *pneumatical*. The senses--or whatever answers to them--will be endued with vastly increased capacity, as will the mind, which is at the back of them. Perhaps the barriers between the senses will be broken down, when all that belongs to the soul will be dominated by the spirit.<sup>12</sup> The same may be true of the other departments of the resurrection body.

In dealing with the same subject, our Lord reveals two important additional truths. One is that there will be no sexual distinctions in heaven; the other is that in this and other respects, the risen saints are as the angels or equal to the angels. The body of the saint will thus be like the body of the angel. It will be celestial, but capable of manifestation upon earth. Illustrations of angelic appearances run through the whole Bible, and are consistent throughout. They could appear as men, they could even eat and drink as men, but earth was not their home--this was in heaven or the spirit-world.

Our Lord's resurrection condition is manifestly the type to which the bodies of the risen saints are to be conformed (Phil. 3.21), and as His was glorious, so will theirs be. It was necessary, for evidential purposes, that He should be identified by His disciples after His resurrection, and therefore His body assumed for the time a condition as near the earthly body as could be. And yet it was not an earthly body. It had been changed. Students of the Gospel narrative do not seem always to have noticed two remarkable facts. First, although many saw the Lord after His resurrection, yet no one saw Him rise. Why not? Because resurrection really means the change of a body from the psychical to the pneumatical condition. In the Lord's case all the materials which formed the psychical body went through the marvellous transformation which caused it to become a spiritual body like that of the angels. He became, so far, a human angel, though He was more. Secondly, the spiritualisation of the psychical body of Christ is attested by the fact that the wrappings in which He had been enveloped before being laid in the grave had not been disturbed at His resurrection. It is needless to point out that they could not well be unrolled within the narrow compass of the sepulchre, especially when we remember the amount of myrrh and aloes which was included (John 19.39). The body would, under ordinary circumstances, be taken out to be unrolled. But this had not happened. The wrappings still lay within the tomb, and the coil for His head was still coiled up. It was the sight of this that made Peter and John believe that the Lord was risen.

Spiritualisation seems akin to etherealisation. This thought has been developed in two remarkable books. One was by the celebrated lay theologian and essayist, Isaac Taylor, the elder. It is entitled *The Physical Theory of Another Life*, and though highly speculative, is exceedingly suggestive. It was published so far back as 1836. The other is entitled *The Unseen Universe*, and follows on very much the same lines, though written without reference to the older book. It is the work of two of the most eminent men of the modern school, Professors Tait and Balfour Stewart. These authorities do not contend that ether is spirit or spirit ether, but that the ethereal condition is the type and perhaps the embodiment of the spiritual, which in its turn is akin to the very essence of the Divine Being.

5. The question now before us is, How far this world in which we live, or any other world, can be prepared as the dwelling-place of incorruptible ethereal beings? Certainly, as it is now, the earth hardly seems adapted to be the home of

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12 On the distinction between soul and spirit see *Old Testament Synonyms*, chap. iv.

the angels. But we are familiarised all through Scripture with the fact that the present state of things is transient. It exists for a purpose. It is the training-ground of the children of Adam. It supplies the material scaffolding for a spiritual edifice.

The world that is to be must be in harmony with the resurrection body of the saints. Consequently, it must not be subject to decay. Now this is exactly the prospect held out in Scripture with respect to the new state of things. We read in Rom. 8.21 that creation is to be delivered from the bondage of decay, and to be brought into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. And St. Peter describes the inheritance of the saints as incorruptible, unpolluted, and unfading (1 Pet. 1.4). He adds that it is kept in heaven for us, as we are kept on earth for it. The stirring description given in Rev. 21 and 22 adjusts itself to these more simple and elementary passages.

It must be frankly admitted that the mind of man cannot conceive the future state of things. In a measure, it is possible to picture up the risen condition of the saints because of the indications given above. We may also get an idea of the endless variety and interests of eternity when we meditate on the revelation given us in the starry heavens; for perhaps the millions of millions of stars may each be in its time a home for created sentient beings, each coming into existence when needed, and passing out when its work is done.

We can also conceive that this earth and the rest of the solar family may be done away with. Science, indeed, tells us that it must be so. But when we try to disentangle ourselves from figurative and poetic language, and to emerge beyond the twilight of negatives into the full light of positive description, we fail. But we have all we want, for we have Christ,--and He as said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My word shall not pass away."

## CHAPTER XXI

### CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS.

IN closing the present discussion it may be permitted to review the steps which have been taken, and the results which have been attained.

i. All the way through, the Bible has been taken as a book of authority, written in many ages and contributed to by many minds, but all under the inspiring direction of one Master, Who has adopted Prophecy as His method of revealing His will and purposes. It has not been thought necessary to go into details touching the composition, age, and authorship of the Books. They are taken as giving us an ancient and trustworthy record. On any view of them which reasonable men will accept, the least that can be said is that while the Old Testament testifies to Christ, He in His turn testifies to it, and History testifies to both.

ii. Certain fundamental ideas concerning God are taken for granted, *e.g.* that He is the living, personal, eternal Author of the universe, and the Father of the human race, and that the inspiration of the Prophets to see, to speak, and to write, came from Him, and is in accordance with His essential nature.

iii. The leading facts and phenomena presented by Biblical prediction have been surveyed and enumerated.

iv. Prophetic terminology has been systematically discussed, its grammar traced out as far as practicable, and its chief characteristic expressions and ideas examined.

v. The scientific method of interpreting the language of Biblical prediction, whether fulfilled or unfulfilled, has been set forth.

vi. The most notable subjects of prophecy, *e.g.* those which have to do with Israel and with the Messiah, have been selected for more detailed examination, though in bare outline only.

vii. The yet unfulfilled elements in Scriptural prophecy have been reserved till the last, and while certain conclusions have been counted as sure, other matters have been left open.

While dealing with these important subjects, the conviction, entertained for many years, has been deepening in the writer's mind, that prediction is an essential element in Revelation, and that we lose a great blessing if we disregard it. As St. Peter says, "We do well to take heed to it" (2 Pet. 1.19), for it is like "a light shining in a dark place." And so says St. John (Rev. 1.3), "Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein."

There are, it is true, many perplexities, arising from various circumstances, which beset the student, but there is much to encourage us in our study. The nature of the things which the prophets set forth may be obscure, and even the order uncertain, but there is a grandeur and an impressiveness in what is revealed which we should be slow to neglect. We may not have a fixed programme of the future to announce to our friends,--certainly the present writer has no such

programme; he has been discussing method rather than proclaiming events--but we get our reward. The providential rule of God, His moral government, His eternal supremacy over beings whom He has permitted to exist, despite their passive resistance and active antagonism to His will, His varied dealings with nations and individuals, lifting them up and casting them down, His preparation of earth for the abode of the blessed and for a more glorious manifestation of Himself in Christ than we can conceive--these are the principles stamped upon our minds with increasing clearness as we pursue our studies. Sometimes we are confounded by the slowness of the Divine processes as realised in History; at other times we are struck by their sureness. Our thoughts are often paralysed by their own limitations; they seem so different to God's thoughts; and at best we seem to see only the reflections of things and the enigmatical side of them (1 Cor. 13.12). But we need not despair. God's Word is written on a very large scale, and though it is so compactly in our hands it covers a great deal of historical and prophetic ground. There is no book like it in this respect. The fulfilment of prophecies in the past, whether national or individual, whether external or spiritual, justifies us in expecting a similar fulfilment in the future. History is the best commentary on prophecy. Elliott used Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* all the way through his work on the Apocalypse, and whilst we are by no means bound to follow him in all his conclusions, we cannot fail to respect and admire this part of his method. We proceed from the known to the unknown, from the way in which old prophecies have been fulfilled to the way in which the others which yet stand over are likely to receive their fulfilment. If the one class of prophecy was fulfilled literally, we expect that the other will be also. Even where we cannot trace the fulfilment of the past it will usually be found that this is owing to some imperfection or lack in existing historical record, or because certain conditions affecting the prophecy were altered.

The personal expectation of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, which St. Paul and the other Apostles felt and taught, is a wonderful tonic for our spiritual life. It discourages laxity in life and teaching; it stirs us up to exercise self-discipline and diligence; it calls us to be pure, peaceable, and unworldly; it upholds us when we are cast down by the prevalence of secularism and unbelief, or when we are suffering at the hand of the persecutor.

Is it really true that the Saviour is coming again? Is it true that we Christians must all be presented before Him? Is it true that He must decide on the destinies of each one of us, and that we must individually render to Him an account of our stewardship? And must the Jew, the Mohammedan, and the heathen do the same? Are there certain fixed principles according to which our future position is to be allotted? Will any one escape notice or evade judgment or be overlooked? Will the omniscience, the tender pity, the righteousness, the redeeming love of the heart-searcher be brought to bear on each case? Will the Son of Man, to whom all judgment is delegated, be equal to the tremendous task thus laid upon His shoulders? and will God be justified on that great day?

To these serious questions Scripture gives an unhesitating reply, and the answer has stamped itself on the creeds of Christendom. These are the things to make sure of, and it is vain to discuss other things till we have got these central truths concerning the future stamped upon our hearts and made operative in our lives.

When we get beyond them we find ourselves in a mist. This is partly due to the difficulty created by the nature of figurative language; partly to

chronological uncertainties; partly to the Millennial question, which cannot lightly be put aside, and which apparently parts the Resurrection and Judgment of a certain class from that of the rest by a period of a thousand years. We naturally shrink, except on clearest evidence, from interjecting this long period between two events which are frequently thrown together in one verse. We have, however, to remember that the case of the two advents of our Lord is somewhat similar. They seemed one in Old Testament days, but they have proved to be separated by some two thousand years. To go further back, the promises made to Abraham might naturally be expected to be fulfilled in a short time, but again a period of some two thousand years intervened before Peter could stand up and claim the fulfilment of God's promise in Christ. The question of the Millennium thus becomes a matter of authority and of interpretation. Its acceptance will probably be found to solve far more difficulties than it creates.

The most sober and profound of thinkers, Bishop Butler, in his chapter on the Moral Government of God (*Analogy*, i.3), adumbrates the millennial condition and the restoration of the Jews as a leading nation, in words not easily to be improved upon. After pointing out the difficulties in the way of a virtuous and united social constitution now, he shows that there must be room for such a state of things within the compass of the material world (*i.e.* universe), and proceeds thus:--

"But let us return to the earth, our habitation, and suppose a kingdom or society of men upon it perfectly virtuous for a succession of many ages, to which, if you please, may be given a situation advantageous for universal monarchy. In such a state there would be no such thing as faction, but men of the greatest capacity would of course all along have the chief direction of affairs willingly yielded to them, and they would share it among themselves without envy. Each of these would have the part assigned to him to which his genius was peculiarly adapted; and others who had not any distinguished genius would be safe, and think themselves very happy by being under the protection and guidance of those who had. . . . Some would in a higher way contribute, but all would in some way contribute to the public prosperity; and in it each would enjoy the fruits of his own virtue. And as injustice, whether by fraud or force, would be unknown among themselves, so they would be sufficiently secured from it in their neighbours. For cunning and false self-interest, confederacies in injustice . . . would be found mere childish folly and weakness when set in opposition against wisdom, public spirit, union inviolable, and fidelity--allowing both a sufficient length of years to try their force. Add the general influence which such a kingdom would have over the face of the earth, by way of example particularly, and the reverence which would be paid it. It would plainly be superior to all others, and the world must gradually come under its empire . . . . The head of it would be a universal monarch, in another sense than any mortal has yet been, and the Eastern style would be literally applicable to him, that 'all people, nations, and languages should serve him.' And though indeed our knowledge of human nature, and the whole history of mankind, show the impossibility without some miraculous interposition that a number of men should unite here on earth in one society or government, in the fear of God and universal practice of virtue, and that such a government should continue so united for a succession of ages, yet admitting or supposing this, the effect would be as now drawn out. And thus, for instance, the wonderful power and prosperity promised to the Jewish nation in the Scripture would be in great measure the consequence of what is predicted of them, that 'the people should be all righteous, and inherit the land for ever' (Isai. 60.21)."

Other questions relating, e.g. to Antichrist, seem hardly ready for solution, in spite of all the light thrown on them by past and present history. We have to keep our minds in suspense, but also on the alert. If there were many antichrists in St. John's time, how many must there be now! and how many "men of sin!" Yet this need not hinder us from a strong expectation that a wicked one has yet to be revealed who will become an embodiment of many kinds of iniquity, superstition, and oppression.

It is curious to notice how deeply some traditional impression concerning the future roots itself in the convictions of those who have not the means or will not take the trouble to search out the evidence on the subject. Thus, in the early Church, the period of the outbreak after the Millennium was generally fixed at three and a half years. So now many have jumped to the conclusion that "the times of the Gentiles" are 2,520 years, *i.e.* 360 x 7, or seven prophetic years.<sup>13</sup> This theory has no real foundation in Scripture. It cannot be gathered from the "seven-times" of Lev. 26.18, which speaks of a sevenfold punishment threatened to sinful Israel. Still less can it be gathered from the "seven times" of Nebuchadnezzar's punishment (Dan. 4.32), which cannot be made to prefigure either good times for the Gentiles, or oppressive times for Israel. Shall we then take refuge in the fact that 2,520 is the least common multiple of the first ten numerals? or that this number yields a period of seventy-five years' difference between the amount of solar and lunar years? These can hardly be called sober and reasonable interpretations. We have full conviction that there is a timing of events in the heavens with great and vital transactions on earth, but we must not let our love of figures run away with principles of sound interpretation. But this idea of 2,520 having once got into the mind, is not easily got rid of. It becomes a measure for the sacred calendar of prophecy, and beguiles students into fixing a starting point, a mid-way era, and a closing crisis for the times of the Gentiles. These "times" are accordingly made to rise with the era of Nabonassar (B.C. 747), which was about coeval with the earliest attacks on Israel by the Assyrian kings. They close in the days of Louis XVI., when the French Revolution was approaching; or they may be made to begin seventy-five years later, in B.C. 598, when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, and to close in about A.D. 1848. In the one case the bisecting line takes us to the overthrow of the Western Roman Empire (circ. 476), in the other to A.D. 663.<sup>14</sup> This method of dealing with figures may sometimes bring out interesting results, but it is to be received with considerable hesitation. The caution of some of the ante-Nicene expositors, and of such later students as Pusey and Birks, is by all means to be imitated.

No better words can be found to close the present volume than those uttered in 1879 by that veteran student of prophecy, Dr. Horatius Bonar, and published in the *Missing Link Magazine* for May in that year. He says:--

"I speak my own experience in this matter, and I compromise no one in saying what I do except myself--I say I am getting, after fifty years' study, greatly more certain, and I am getting greatly more uncertain, about many things in the prophetic word; allow me as briefly as possible to tell you both my certainties and my uncertainties, and you will see how strictly they bear upon what I have to say concerning the Master's testimony.

"I feel greatly more certain as to the *second coming* of the Lord being the

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13 See Elliott's *Horaæ Apoc.* ., vi.5.1.

14 See Guinness's Appendix to his *Approaching End of the Age.*

Church's hope. That is the first thing. I feel greatly more certain, as the years roll on, regarding the *pre-millennial advent*. I feel greatly more certain concerning the first resurrection and the millennial reign. I feel greatly more certain concerning the times of the restitution of all things spoken of by all the holy prophets since the world began. I feel greatly more certain concerning the new heaven and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. I feel greatly more certain in reference to *Israel's* prospects of glory in the latter day, after their scattering of 1800 years. I feel greatly more certain in reference to the *doom of antichrist*, whatever that name may include, and doubtless it includes many things. So regarding these things that I have thus briefly enumerated, and on which I should have liked to dwell, I would say I feel the power of a demonstration now. They form part of what appears to be a demonstrative creed.

"But then, on the other hand, there are things regarding which I am more uncertain than I used to be, for I thought some forty or fifty years ago that I had settled a great many of the prophetic questions which have now come to be unsettled. I feel uncertain, very uncertain, as to the prophetic *dates*--I confess that, and I confess also that I have given up many of those dates that I once thought I could have reckoned on. I feel more uncertain in reference to the *Apocalypse*--I confess that. I do not adhere, I may say, to any of the different schools. I profess to be a learner still in regard to the *Apocalypse*, and I am waiting for light; and I believe the Holy Spirit will give it, and that we shall ere long, it may be, understand that marvellous book which the Church has been, age after age, trying to comprehend, but which, I believe, it has hitherto failed in a great measure to unravel. I feel also uncertain as to the details of events and the relations of events, especially regarding *Israel's* latter-day history. It is not that I do not believe every word that is written concerning Israel in the latter day, but I feel at a loss how to arrange the various things which at first sight seem to conflict the one with the other. And I feel, I confess, very uncertain as to the personalities, or to the personages, and positions and relations of the following names or *nationalities* which figure in the prophetic word--*Babylon*, Assyria, Edom, Elam, Egypt, Moab, Ammon, Gog, and Magog. God has something in the future of all these, but I confess I stop there, I am not able to say more or to arrange the future of these, but there I leave them, and I am quite sure that ere long we shall get light upon them, and that the event will prove that in regard to every one of these the Holy Spirit had a special meaning in what He has written concerning them in the prophetic word.

"There is just one thing in connexion with this matter that I should like to add, and it is with regard to the certainties, for it applies to the whole, and I should like to avow it solemnly in these days. *I feel a vastly greater certainty in reference to the Divine authority and verbal inspiration of the Word of God.* If ever a doubt passed through my mind during the last fifty years in reference to these, that doubt has disappeared. And then, in connexion with this, I feel a greater certainty as to the literal interpretation of that whole Word of God--historical, doctrinal, prophetic. 'Literal, if possible,' is, I believe, the only maxim that will carry you right through the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation."

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