

THE

LESSONS OF THE AGES

BY

F. W. GRANT



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# THE LESSONS OF THE AGES

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## INTRODUCTORY.

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**I**T has become a fact more familiar to many, through certain recent discussions of momentous importance, that Scripture is full of a doctrine of the "ages." The phrase is, in our common version, more often obscured than not by being translated "world," or "worlds," or hidden under the stereotyped form, "forever," or "forever and ever." This last expression is always, in the New Testament, if literally rendered, "for the ages of ages." It never implies less than full eternity, as it is the measure of God's own life: "He that liveth for the ages of ages" is His title (Rev. iv. 9). Christ, too, presents Himself as "alive for the ages of ages" (chap. i. 18); and there are ascribed "blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for the ages of ages" (chap. v. 13). These same "ages of ages" measure also the duration of the punishment—which is no less, then, than eternal—whether of the devil and his angels in the lake of fire (chap. xx. 10) or of the beast-worshippers who drink of the wine of the wrath of God (chap. xiv. 11). There is no hope of finding an escape from eternity under an admitted phraseology of this kind in Scripture.

The term "forever" is, again, sometimes "for the ages," while much more often the singular of this word is used, which some would render, in a way very equivocal to our habits of thought, "for the age," but where "age"

must refer to the "age of ages" (the expression used in Eph. iii. 21), inasmuch as it also stands for true eternity, for which it is the common word; while (save in three passages) the adjective derived from it is rendered "everlasting," or "eternal," everywhere in the New Testament; and rightly and necessarily so.

There may be thus *an* "age" (a period rounded off from the rest of time, and having distinctive characters of its own) as well as; in Scripture-language, "*the* age," sum of 'all ages, which knows no limit and no end. In the adjective also may be found these different significations; for while in its ordinary use, as I have already said, it means eternal, there are just three passages, with which we have now more to do, in which it refers to an age, or ages, rather than *the* age.

The Revised Version, even in Romans xvi. 25, 2 Timothy i. 9, and Titus i. 2, keeps to the word "eternal;" but it is hard to realize what "eternal times" can be. The Authorized Version has "before [or "since"] the world began;" but this is again a paraphrase rather than a translation. The true force is, "in [or "before"] the *age-times*"—times marked out as "ages," distinctive, rounded off periods. In Timothy and Titus it is God's grace, or the promise of eternal life, which is said to have been given us (in the divine counsels) before these age-times were: in Romans it is that *in* certain ages God had kept secret a mystery, now in Christianity revealed.

Thus there are ages past as well as ages to come—ages which lose themselves to our sight in that eternity which stretches in measureless infinity before us. The ages that are past, moreover, are distinguished from those to come as a series which, in a certain sense at least, has come to an end, and which is characterized as a series of steps toward the fulfillment of a purpose now accomplished, and from the accomplishment of which important

results accrue to us. So, speaking of the things that are recorded as happening of old to Israel, the apostle says (1 Cor. x. 11), "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples [or, as in the margin, "types"]; and are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the *ages* [not "world"] are come." Since these ages have ended, then, the types of a past dispensation have begun to speak as never before; which corresponds to what, in another place, the apostle says (Cor. iii.)—that the veil which was over the Old Testament is now "done away in Christ."

Again, in Hebrews ix. 26, we are told precisely that it was "at the end of the ages" (as we should read it) Christ "appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." This sacrifice closed, then, if not in every sense, the ages; and thus the New Testament, written on this side of the dividing line, gives the true key to the Old. In Christ come, all that the past pointed to was fulfilled; the substance was reached of all its shadows; the heart of God was opened out to man, and in free and unrestrained speech declared itself.

But why not before? it is natural to ask. If, as now seen, this grace was in Him from the beginning, why was it so long before He openly manifested it? Was it necessary that through so many centuries of deferred hope, or of darkness without true hope, the coming of the Deliverer and the gospel of deliverance should be delayed? The New Testament affirms this absolutely when it speaks of a "due time" in which Christ died (Rom. v. 7). How, then, was this "due time" marked? First, "when we were *yet without strength*, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." And again, "when in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe." (1 Cor. i. 21.)

The wisdom of the world had thus to be proved at fault, and the world itself helpless and hopeless in its moral ruin, before the due time of man's deliverance could come. He must get the blessing on true ground,—as grace, not something that man's hand had wrought at. "When we were *yet* without strength"—"yet," after repeated trial. Again, "when *in the wisdom of God* the world by wisdom knew not God;" it must be granted time and opportunity to prove this, therefore. The delay in the coming of the Deliverer was the result of time required to certify the need of the deliverance: the ages previous to Christ's death were ages of a special trial of man, which the cross ended; for indeed there was his heart fully proved to be at "enmity to God," while, as to true and divine wisdom, it was what "none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." (1 Cor. ii. 8.)

But if, then, it was so necessary that these probationary ages should have their course,—if the coming of Christ on this very account waited four thousand years, how important must it be for us to get hold of the meaning of these age-times! As the world is but the multiple of the individual man, so it will be found that we pass in general, in order to find our blessing in Christ's death, through the stages of these different dispensations. Certainly it is when yet ungodly and without strength we find what that death has wrought. And what law is, though God never put the Gentile under it, we know as putting *ourselves* under it, as indeed the Gentile Christians have done in a body.

Scripture, too, will be cleared for us as we consider these ages past; our own portion in it will be freed from admixture, and appraised more truly; God's ways will speak more distinctly their perfect character, and many a precious lesson as to these shall we learn, or be con-

firmed in; the history of the world itself will have a new significance, if perchance it thus may fill fewer pages;—in short, every way we may find most real profit, if only the blessed Spirit of God lead us Himself down the track of a past, gone indeed, but not yet done with,—a past which is the seed of the present and the future, and of which the judgment-seat at last will give us, for eternity, the full moral. For now “we know in part, and we prophesy in part;” and yet this partial knowledge may be most helpful.

Let us glance at the course over which, if the Lord will, we hope to travel. We have—

1. The trial of innocent man in Eden; brief indeed—the history of a day rather than an age,—yet all-important in its results for every step of the journey afterward.

2. The trial of natural conscience simply, in the time before the flood.

3. The trial of human government (the political trial, as we may call it) from Noah’s time, virtually over at Babel, although, of course, as a divine institution, this remains to the present time.

4. After an important interval, which has its own significance with reference to these-age-times, and in which Abraham and his seed appear upon the scene, we have next the great trial of man under the law. This has two parts of very unequal duration.

The trial of pure law lasted at the most forty days, ending, under the mount itself, with the breaking of the tables of the covenant, and judgment executed on the people for the breach of it, in the worship of the golden calf. Then followed, for nine hundred years, a system of mingled law and mercy, the tables of law being now written by the hand of the mediator; and here man was as much convicted of his impotence for self-recovery as he was of his ungodliness before. This ended when Hosea’s



"Lo-Ammi" was recorded against the people, and the kingdom of Judah came to an end by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.

5. From this time onward the question was not, Could they keep the law? but, Would they submit to the sentence, and receive the Deliverer? The remnant, returned from the Babylonish captivity, with their temple empty, and under the heel of the Gentile, were witnesses of a ruin which John's baptism of repentance called to (and should have sealed) their confession of. Thus, and thus only, could they have been prepared for the Saviour, and found remission. Here, alas! Satan's wit combined with human pride to build up Pharisaism, and the cross proved not merely that man could not keep the law, but that the mind of the flesh was "enmity against God." This was the "end of the ages" of Hebrews ix. 26.

Yet, in fact, the ages go on after this,—nay, the *Jewish* "age" does. We learn this from Daniel, whose seventieth prophetic "week" is detached from the sixty-nine at the end of which Messiah the Prince comes and is cut off, by an interval of desolation for the city and the sanctuary, whose final blessing he announces. From the New Testament alone we learn what fills this interval, and that the "harvest" of judgment upon *Christian* profession coincides with the "end" of this *Jewish* "age."\*

The gap is thus a very large one, of more than eighteen hundred years, and in this Christianity comes in, not properly as an age, but as a break in the ages, in which a wholly different thing is presented from such probationary trial as the "ages" present. God's revelation of Himself is what characterizes Christianity. Man remains

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\* See Matthew xiii. 39, 49, where "world" should be "age," and where the second parable shows the end of christendom, as the last does what immediately follows it.

the same as ever, indeed, and shows himself as incompetent to hold the blessings of the gospel as he was to stand the probation of law; still these are essentially different; and Christianity is but an interruption of the course of the world-ages, the end of which (for us) is come, and which yet go on after Christianity, to their full consummation in Messiah's kingdom—the “age to come.”

Christianity past, the true saints, living or dead, being taken up to heaven, the “end of the age” is marked on the one hand by a new work of grace in a remnant of Israel and of the Gentiles, and on the other hand by the apostasy of professing christendom and the mass of the Jews, who, having rejected Christ, receive Antichrist. The full ripe result of iniquity is reached and judged by the Lord at His personal appearing.

6. Then follows the “world to come”—a day in which, Satan being bound, and evil kept down with a strong hand, man is brought face to face with eternal realities. It is a dispensation of sight rather than of faith, under which, alas! man, as ever, shows what he is, in once more (Satan being again let loose) rising up against God in open insurrection. The judgment of the dead follows; the wicked being cast into hell; the earth and heavens fleeing away before the face of Him who sits upon the great white throne.

7. All enemies are now subdued; the kingdom of the rod of iron is given up; new heavens and new earth succeed the old; God is all in all; and the ages of ages (probationary ages no more) commence their eternal course.

The Lord give us ability to gather up in some measure the lessons of these wondrous ages—lessons not for time alone, but for all eternity.

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## THE TIME OF INNOCENCE

**A** TIME so different from anything we ourselves have known as is the primitive time of innocence in Eden, there is necessarily difficulty in realizing or interpreting aright. Innocence we have lost, and can never regain. Nor is there anything really like it to be found in such a state as that of childhood, which, speaking comparatively only, we call the age of innocence. Much of what we deem this, is in fact but *immaturity*; and Adam was not immature, but a man with all the faculties of manhood fresh and vigorous in him, as come, in a perfection nowhere to be seen, out of the hand of his Creator.

Indeed, theologians, realizing this, have imagined a moral or spiritual perfection in him for which Scripture gives no warrant. It is the "*new man*, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." On the other hand, it is said that "God made man *upright*," which is in contrast with the craft implied in the "many inventions" they have since "sought out."

Let us look briefly at the whole Scripture-account (confined as it is to little more than one chapter of the book of Genesis) of man's creation, and of the condition in which he was placed in Eden, the "garden of delight."

The first words are,—

"And God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.'

"So God created man"—and here the words fall into a rhythmic measure, the first poetry of Scripture, as if God were rejoicing over the creature He had made—"So

God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him: male and female created He them."

The second and briefer, yet more detailed, account is in chapter ii.

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul."

We must not expect to have man's inner nature, however, fully revealed in this initial revelation as to him. The language is pictorial and figurative largely, according to the usual character of the Old Testament. More is hidden than is openly declared. Plainly "of the earth, earthy," as the first man is, "the dust of the earth" is not all he is. Formed, as to his bodily frame, of this, God "breathes into his nostrils," communicating thus something from Himself, by virtue of which he becomes a living soul. Not even does this expression, "a living soul," give the full reality of what he is. The beast also is, and has, a living soul,—"everything wherein there is a living soul" is the description, in chapter i. 30, of every beast of the earth, and every fowl of the air, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. "Likeness" to God cannot be affirmed of such an one as this, for God is not "soul," but "spirit," and the "Father of spirits." Man is thus alone in relationship to God, as possessing not only soul, but also spirit; that "spirit of man" which "knoweth the things of a man," and is his real distinction from the beasts that, as having no link with God or God's eternity, are "beasts that perish."

"Spirit," thus, in man, is linked with "soul." An intelligent and moral nature, which is implied in this, furnishes the affections of the heart (or soul) with objects suited to its own proper character, and lifts it thus, as it were, into its own sphere of being. Man is not a more developed beast, although he has an animal nature which

resembles the beast's. He belongs to another and higher order of life; and to this the language of chapter i. will be found to correspond in a manner all the more significant that it is not interpreted to us there, but left for the general voice of Scripture to interpret.

It has been made a question of late, whether the word used for "creation" necessarily means that. Yet in the first verse of the chapter, where we are told that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," the bringing out of nothing must be certainly intended. After this, (with the exceptions to be just now noticed,) the word "created" is exchanged for "made;" and the whole six days' work is characteristically a "making," as in the words of the fourth commandment; a making which is of such importance in the sight of God that it is said, in chapter ii. 3, that He "created to make" it. Thus it stands, rightly, in the margin of our Bibles and in the Latin Vulgate, although few ancient or modern interpreters seem to have understood it; "creation," or the bringing out of nothing, being thus distinguished from the "making" of existing materials. We find that there are but two distinct acts of creation in the six days' work; the first, where the "living creature," or "soul," is introduced; the second, where man is. Thus soul and spirit are distinguished from all modifications of previous existences. They are "creations"—the calling into being of that which before had none: creations successively of higher character until in man at last we find "the offspring of God."

But in man, spirit has its links with lower and preceding forms. He is a living soul, as the beast is; and this soul is the seat, not only of those affections in which it corresponds to what we call ordinarily the "heart," but also of the instincts, senses, and appetites. The *adjective* of soul (for which in English we have no corresponding

term) is, in the New Testament, in our Authorized Version, translated twice "sensual." The same word also, both in Hebrew and Greek, stands for "soul" and "life," thus marking the soul, in distinction from the spirit, as the source of this to the body. In man thus, as a "living soul," spirit, or mind, is made dependent upon the soul, or senses, for its proper furnishing; and thus the body also becomes, in this present condition of things, a necessity to the spirit, and, if it be not in a fit state, a drag upon it—at the best, a limit beyond which it cannot pass. Men "out of the body" are called "spirits," and not souls; and the body in resurrection is a *spiritual* body, henceforth imposing no limit.

But this link with the body is a matter of great interest in another connection. Before man was in being, a class of spiritual existences had been created—purely such; and of these, many had already fallen away from God. Hence the tender care and wisdom of God are seen in this hedging about the new spiritual creature with restrictions which manifestly tend to "hide pride from man" in this his probationary state. Probation seems to be the rule, and so (as we may infer) the necessity, for moral beings; but the goodness of God is shown in thus fencing man round, as far as possible, with witnesses to him of creature-imperfection, perpetual preachers of humility and self-distrust.

The necessities of this mysteriously compounded nature were another argument in the same direction. In Eden, man had his wants, as out of it. Hunger was his, and thirst, although no distress could result from these, but rather new sources of enjoyment—all the trees of the garden ministering to his need. Sleep he needed for the recruiting of a frame which would otherwise have been exhausted by the putting forth of its own energies—nay, the immortal life, which was his conditionally, another

tree was made to minister. He was not taught that it was his by the mere fact of what he was. He had it not as what was essential to his being, but rather the opposite—a thing foreign to him naturally, communicated by the virtues of that wondrous tree which was perpetually to sustain the wasting bodily frame.

All this was thus to him constant witness of his creature-condition; on the other hand, the constant witness of divine goodness which met all this need with superabundant resources, so that appetite should be but the occasion of enjoyment, and no want be for a moment known. This was Eden, man's garden of delight—for us, type of a greater—where all was “good,” as God Himself pronounced, and no evil at all existed, nor could exist, save as man introduced it; no hand but his own could mar this beautiful picture. To all but himself it was a citadel impregably guarded from assault.

But this leads us on to consider what was the prohibition, and what the nature of the temptation to which man yielded.

One thing alone was prohibited to man, lord of all else,—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As to this, the commandment was precise, and the penalty assured: “In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” One prohibition thus served, or should have served, to keep in the mind of one who, as the image of God, was otherwise uncontrolled master of this fair domain, that he too had a Master. “Duty,” as it is the thought of which man alone, and not the beast, is capable, must be necessary to his proper development as man. The moral faculties must have a field provided for their exercise, for man assuredly was from the first a moral being—that is, a being *capable* of discerning good and evil. I say *capable*; for the actual discernment plainly came afterward, when, and when alone, evil was there to be discerned.

As yet, there was none, and therefore, while good was present everywhere, and its enjoyment not denied, the knowledge of even good was not as yet discriminative—was not *discernment*—when as yet that from which it had to be discerned was not within the field of vision. We are not to suppose a moral incapacity in innocent man which would have put him outside the pale of morality, and render a fall impossible, by leaving nothing from which to fall; neither must we suppose a mind into which the thought of evil had ever yet entered. When solicited by the fruit in the hand of his already fallen companion, “Adam was *not* deceived; but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression.” He, at least, with his eyes open thus far—although not yet having eaten of the tree of that fatal “knowledge”—became a transgressor. In whatever sense the eating of the forbidden fruit opened the eyes of both of them, it created no moral capacity which was not there before, implied in the very nature of a spiritual being, such as was Adam by the gift of his Creator.

Righteousness and holiness are another matter. Scripture does not affirm these of the first man. These, in the creature, represent a character which could only be the outcome of spontaneous rejection of the evil when in sight. This character was not and could not yet be found in Adam, when evil there was none in that garden of delight, planted by the hand of God Himself, for the object of His care and goodness. And herein the meaning of all that we call “probation” lies. Probation was permitted—nay, necessitated, not alone by the tree forbidden, or the tempter’s assault, but by the very constitution of a moral being—a being who apprehends, and deliberates, and wills.

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## THE TRIAL OF INNOCENCE

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**A**MONG all creation beside, there was found no helpmeet for Adam. God makes all the creatures pass before him that he may see this for himself,—a fact which we shall see has its significance for the after-history. Adam gives names to all, as their superior, and in the full intelligence of what they are; but for Adam himself there is found no helpmeet.

Yet that "it is not good for man to be alone" is the word of his Creator as to Him. Looking at the circumstances of the fall, he who has learned to suspect God everywhere may suspect Him here. He provides in the woman one whom Scripture itself pronounces inferior naturally in wisdom to the man, but on the other hand supplementing him otherwise. The rib out of which she is made is taken from the breast; and if man be the head of humanity, woman is its heart. Even spite of the fall, this still is clear and unmistakable; and man's heart is correspondingly drawn out and developed by her. The awful perversion of this now shows but the fact the more; and the perversion of the best thing commonly produces the worst. For Adam, where all was yet right, here was not only a spiritual being with whom was possible that interchange of thought and feeling which our whole being craves, but also an object for the heart. Pledge of his Creator's love was this fair gift, in whom love sensibly ministered to him and drew out his own, redeeming him from self-occupation as from isolation: surely it was not,—"*is* not good for the man to be alone," and the help provided was a "help meet for him."

If unbelief still object that by the woman sin came in, and that inferiority of wisdom exposed her to the enemy: she was "beguiled," and ate; Adam too ate, though he was *not* beguiled. The woman's strength did not, and does not, lie in wisdom, but in *heart*: and the instincts of the true heart are as divine a safeguard as the highest wisdom. It was here—as it is easy to see by the record itself—the woman failed, not where she was weakest, but where she was strongest. And with her, as still and ever, the failing heart deceived the head. There is an immense assumption, growing more and more every day, of the power of the mind to keep and even to set right the man morally. It is a mistake most easy of exposure; for are the keenest intellects necessarily the most upright and trustworthy of men? or is there any ascertained proportion between the development of mind and heart? The skepticism that scoffs at divine things revealed to babes is but the pride of intellect, not knowledge. It is itself the fruit and evidence of the fall.

Enough of this for the present, then. Along with all other provision for his blessing we must rank this—too little thought of—that Adam was to be taught *mastery* also, even in a scene where moral evil was not. He was to "replenish the earth and *subdue* it;" to "dress and keep" even the "garden of delight." The dominion over the lower creatures he was also evidently to maintain, making them to recognize habitually the place of lordship over them which was his. All this implies much in the way of moral education for one in whose perfect manhood the moral and mental faculties acted in harmony yet, with no breach or dislocation.

Surely we can see in all this a kindly and fruitful training of Adam himself, as in a scene where evil threatened, though it had not come. The full and harmonious play of every spiritual and bodily faculty was provided for,

that the man himself, to use language antiquated now, might "play the man;" language truer in its application to him than to any of his natural issue since the fall.

But to that fall itself we must now go on. Its brief but imperishable record is full of the deepest instruction for us, for every day of our life here;—nay, who shall forbid to say, for our life hereafter also? The lessons of time, we may be assured, will be the possession of eternity; of all that we gather here, no fragment will be lost forever. In this history we shall find, too, I doubt not, what we have been considering as to Adam abundantly confirmed.

First, then, as to the instrument in the temptation, Scripture leaves us in no possible doubt that the one who used in this case the actual serpent was the one whom we too familiarly recognize as the leader in a previous irremediable fall—the fall of the angels. Thus he is called "a liar from the beginning," and "a murderer;" "that old serpent, which is the devil and Satan."

The use of the serpent here is noteworthy in another way from that in which it is generally taken. No doubt in the fact that it was "more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made" lay the secret of his selection of it. But why appear under such a form at all? For myself, I cannot but connect it with the fact that Adam had before named every creature, and found no helpmeet for him among them all. If evil, then, would approach, it was not permitted to do so save only under the form of one of these essentially inferior creatures, refused already as having help for man. It was a divine limit to the temptation itself. Man listening to the voice of a creature over whom he was to have dominion, and in whom there was recognized to be no help for him, was in fact man resigning his place of supremacy to the beast

itself. In all this, not merely the coming of the enemy, but the mercy of God also, may be surely seen.

Again, as to the form of the temptation itself. It was a question simply—apparently an innocent one—which, entertained in the woman's mind, wrought all the ruin. Here again, surely the mercy of God was limiting the needful trial. Evil was here also not permitted to show itself openly. The tempter is allowed to use neither force nor allurements, nor to put positive evil before the woman at all until she has first encouraged it. "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"

Here was affected surprise—a suggestion of strangeness, no doubt, but no positive charge of wrong. Such an insinuation, if it were even that, a heart true to God need scarcely find much difficulty in repelling. This was in *paradise*, where all the wealth of blessing which the munificent hand of God had spread around her filled every sense with testimony of His love. Was reason demanded? or did intellect need to find the way through any difficult problem here? Assuredly not. A heart filled with divine goodness would be armor of proof in such a conflict as this. The effort of the enemy was just to make a question for the reason what ought to have been one of those clear perceptions not to be reasoned about, because the basis of all true reason. As a question for the mind the woman entertained it, and thus admitted a suspicion of the divine goodness which has been the key-note of man's condition ever since.

She thus, in fact, entered upon that forbidden path of discriminating between good and evil, which has resulted in a conscience of evil within, in the very heart of the fallen creature. Around was naught but goodness—goodness which they were not forbidden but welcomed to enjoy. Everything here had but to be accepted; no question raised, no suspicion to be entertained. To raise

the question was to fall. And this was the meaning of the forbidden tree, as it was the point to which Satan's question led. In the midst of a scene where was naught but goodness, there could be no question entertained where there was no suspicion. By entertaining the question, the woman showed that she had allowed the suspicion. Thus she fell.

How differently now we are situated is most plain. In a mingled scene where indeed divine goodness is not lacking, but where also the fruit of the fall, and Satan's work, is everywhere, suspicion becomes continually a duty, and conscience a divine preservative. The knowledge of good and evil is no longer forbidden, but we have our "senses exercised to discern" these. Innocence is gone; but, thank God, who is supreme to make all things serve His holy purposes, righteousness and holiness are things possible, and, in the new creature, things attained.

If we look at the woman's answer to the serpent, we shall easily find these workings of her soul. "And the woman said unto the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden;' but of the fruit of the tree which is *in the midst* of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, *neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.*"

Here is the wavering unsteadiness of a soul that has lost its balance, and flounders more in its endeavors to regain it. What tree had God put into "the midst" of the garden? According to the inspired account, it was the tree of *life*. Prohibition—was that at the very heart of paradise? Did everything there radiate, so to speak, from the threatening of death? Alas! slight as the matter may seem, it tells where the woman's soul is. The first words we hear from her are words very intelligible to us, far gone as we are from innocency. For how easily with us does one prohibited thing blot out of our view a

thousand blessings! Alas! we understand her but too well.

And her next words are even plainer. When had God said, "Neither shall ye touch it"? The prohibition has got possession of her mind, and to justify herself as to her conception of it, she adds words of her own to God's words. A mere "touch," she represents to the devil, might be fatal to them. They might perchance be the innocent victims of misfortune, as it would seem, according to her. Who can doubt how dark a shadow is now veiling God from her soul? All the more that her next words make doubtful the penalty, and as if it were the mere result of natural laws, as men now speak, rather than direct divine infliction,—"*lest ye die.*"

God's love is here suspected; God's truth is tampered with; God's authority is out of sight: so far on the swift road to ruin the woman has descended. The devil can be bolder now. Not "ye shall not surely die" is what he says, but "certainly ye shall not die;" and closes with one of those sayings of his in which a half truth becomes a total lie,—"*for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, [or perhaps, "as God,"] knowing good and evil.*"

And there is no more tarrying as to the woman: her ear and her heart are gained completely. She sees with the devil's eyes, and is in full accord and fellowship with him, and the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, come in at once. "*And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat.*"

Thus was the fall consummated. Conscience at once awoke when the sin of the heart had been perfected in act. "*And the eyes of them both were opened, and they*

knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons." But we are now in another scene from that with which we started, and a new age now begins, even before Genesis iii. is closed. We shall therefore look at this in its place separately when we consider, if the Lord will, the dealings of God with man under the next economy.

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## THE TRIAL OF CONSCIENCE IN THE AGE BEFORE THE FLOOD

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**W**ITH Adam fallen—even from the first moment of his fall—we enter upon a new period. Sin and death, now come into the world, necessitate new dealings of God with man, if, indeed, judgment do not bring all to a sudden close. And this was not in His mind, who from the first had foreseen and provided for the rebellion of the creature. Judgment does indeed follow, such as God had previously announced; but that was no final one, but (as we shall easily see) one anticipative of the mercy to be shown, and which could be made to take itself the character of mercy. It is in confounding the provisional “death,” threatened to and inflicted on Adam and his posterity, as the result of the primal sin, with the “second” and final “death” of the lake of fire, that much error and heresy of the present day finds apparent countenance, Scripture being strained to establish what is a mere foregone conclusion in the minds of its interpreters, and what none can in fact deduce from its straightforward simplicity of statement.

“In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” is defined so clearly, in the Lord’s words to fallen Adam, as to put its meaning, one would think, beyond serious question. “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou *return unto the ground*; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and *unto dust shalt thou return.*”



To read into this eternal judgment is to misread it thoroughly. The death announced, and which we know to be everywhere in the world, through the first man's sin, is in reality a thing which, in its very nature, necessitates the *suspension* of eternal judgment until it is taken out of the way. Not till the dead are raised will the white throne be set, and the dead—the wicked dead—be judged, every man according to his works." And thus the resurrection of the unsaved dead is as much a "resurrection of *judgment*" (that is, what it implies and necessitates,) as the resurrection of the saved is similarly a "resurrection of *life*." The final judgment is thus in no wise the result of Adam's sin; it is that in which emphatically each suffers for his own. The second death and the first are in no wise to be confounded—they are incompatible and contrary things.\*

Nor can spiritual death, or "death in trespasses and sins," be possibly what God speaks of in His threatening to Adam. This is indeed the spiritual state which is the result of the fall; but the moral state of a criminal is a very different thing from the judgment upon the criminal. Man's depravity is what he is condemned *for*, not what he is sentenced *to*; and these things cannot be synonymous. "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" is thus the only possible, as it is the divinely given, interpretation of the announcement, "In the day† thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

\* "Dying, thou shalt die" (Gen. ii. 17, *margin*) is often appealed to as if inferring a second death. Any one who will look at the marginal reading of only the verse before will find that it is but a Hebrew idiom of emphasis. "Thou shalt freely eat" is literally, "Eating, thou shalt eat."

† Some contend that this makes impossible the thought of returning to the dust, because Adam did not actually die on the day that he ate of the tree; and some have more strangely answered that

Yet it is quite true, and to be pressed, that this death, coming not only upon the first sinners, but upon all their posterity,—and surely by no mere arbitrary decree on God's part,—marks the changed relation to Him of the now fallen creature. Everywhere does Scripture recognize this, and in God's ordinances for his chosen people of old it comes fully out. Death is associated ever with uncleanness and defilement. If a man die in a tent, all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, are unclean seven days. Every one touching a dead body, a bone, or a grave, is similarly defiled. Nor must we look at this as merely symbolic teaching. The psalm of the wilderness is plain enough in its doctrine here: "For all our days are passed away in Thy wrath; we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knoweth the power of Thine anger? even according to Thy fear, so is Thy wrath." (Ps. xc. 9-11.)

Yes, if God had thus to turn to destruction the being over whom, as first created, He had rejoiced with unfeigned delight, surely the state of the creature it was that was thus marked out, not a causeless change in God. Death was the stamp upon the creature fallen away from God, and every sign of its approach a standing admonition to him as a being thus under sentence—not final indeed, or there would be no use in the admonition, but still a sentence of condemnation, which cut him off from all pretension to righteousness, or natural claim to favor,

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Adam *did* die on that "day," for a day with the Lord is a thousand years! The truth is, that not only did Adam indeed begin to die from that day, as cut off from the tree of life, but also that "in the day" does not require so rigid a construction, as see Ezekiel xxxiii. 12, etc.

and left him but the subject of mercy, and of mercy alone.

True, he may (alas! he does) resist and strive against the sentence graven upon his brow. He may condemn God, that he may himself be righteous. This changes nothing—no, not a hair of his head from white to black. He may complain of himself as the victim of circumstances, impossible to be “clean” as “born of a woman.” He may plead that he did not give himself the evil nature that he carries with him, but conscience will not be satisfied with this. It will not excuse actual transgressions by any plea as to a fallen nature. We feel and know, every one of us, that we ought nevertheless to be masters of ourselves and of our nature, and that our responsibility has been in no wise destroyed or lessened by the fall. So in the day of judgment also God will render to every man, not according to his *nature*, but his *deeds*, and upon this ground is the whole world brought in “guilty before God.”

Death thus, while introduced by one man's sin, “passes upon all men, for that *all* have sinned.” Were there one man, in the full sense, righteous before God, he might successfully plead exemption from the common doom; but “there is none righteous—no, not one;” and death remains universally a sentence gone forth against man as man, the constant witness against self-righteousness on his part, the constant witness of his need of mercy—absolute, sovereign mercy.

The sorrow of all this is thus God's appeal to man; the trouble to which he is born, as sparks fly upward, becomes the discipline of holy but merciful government. It is of this that God speaks to the man and the woman when He first appears to them in the garden; to the woman, of the sorrow of conception, and subjection to the rule of her husband; to the man, of the cursed

ground, and of its thorns and thistles, with the toil of labor, till he return to the dust. With them, let us notice, He makes no new terms—no other covenant is proposed to them. As helpless and hopeless otherwise, they are made simply to listen to what God announces He will do—to the message of a deliverance He will raise up to them in the woman's Seed. It is to faith in One to come they are invited, in the midst of the ruin they have brought upon themselves. No new trial is proposed. They are left under the salutary government of God, to realize what and where they are before Him, and to embrace the mercy wrapped up for them in the bud of that first promise.

For promise indeed it is, while it comes in the shape of threatening to the serpent; a promise whose broken echoes the traditions of the nations have prolonged, even to our own day. Scripture, which cannot be broken, has alone given us the very words, in their original simplicity and grandeur—the “let there be light” of a new creative period, exceeding the former as antitype its typic “shadow.” The words are for us to-day, to vindicate their imperishable nature, fresh for our souls as the day when they were uttered: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel.”

It is the character of the new period we are occupied with, and for this have only to do with certain features of this promise. It is plain enough that Another is here given as the Conqueror of the serpent, the enemy of man, but whose “seed” nevertheless (as the near future would painfully reveal) would be found among men. This Conqueror is also the woman's seed, and not the man's. It is no restoration of Adam's forfeited headship, but a new and mysterious beginning, wherein divine power takes up the frailty and mutability of the creature, which has its fullest expression in the woman, to demonstrate

divine grace, while not without cost is the victory over the enemy achieved: in bruising the serpent's head, the Conqueror has His own heel bruised.

Thus does the divine purpose begin to be disclosed, asking no aid from, and making no condition with, the fallen creature. From the first, it is seen that all help is laid upon Another—One in whom, though born of a woman, power from God is found; who suffers, and in suffering overcomes; and manifestly in behalf of those of whom He is the Kinsman.

Although, then, the Lord's address to the woman afterwards speaks of nothing but pain and humiliation, and to the man himself of toil and suffering and death, yet we read immediately upon this that "Adam called his wife's name 'Eve' [or 'Life'], because she was the mother of all living." Life he apprehends, according to the divine announcement, to be in the woman connected by grace with her victorious Seed; weakness and evil in her thus met and triumphed over, while the headship of the first man is set aside. Adam bows, then, to this sentence, while in faith he receives the mercy; and it is upon this that we find God significantly replacing the inadequate apron of fig-leaves, the first human manufacture, with the coats of skins, the fruit of death itself, now made to minister to their need, and by divine gift, not by human acquisition. We may thus very clearly see how God accepts the faith of Adam, and in this clothing, how the shame of our moral nakedness is put away forever, clothed, in divine mercy, with Christ Himself, as the fruit of His death for us.

How much of this Adam and his wife might apprehend is another question, and it is one impossible perhaps for us to answer. Instead of unsafe speculation, therefore, it will be better to pass on to that in which, according to Scripture itself, the faith of one of their children is ex-

pressed,—for “by faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, and by it he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts.” The use of sacrifice thus demands our attention, no single examples merely of which we have in the case of a few early patriarchs, but a thing which we find, in whatever perverted forms, pervading all religious creeds from the beginning. That—unnatural as it is—it could have rooted itself thus deeply in the minds of men, shows its manifest divine institution, as well as the depth and universality of a common conviction to which it appealed.

Nature could never have dictated it. Cain's way was nature's dictation, not Abel's. How could it be supposed that, admitting man's sinfulness and its desert, the death of an innocent victim could atone for the guilty, or that the blood of bulls and goats could put away sin? Looked at as the product of reason merely, such reasoning were utter folly. Connected with the bruised heel of the Seed of the woman, and perhaps with the skins which clothed the first transgressors, a voluntary Sufferer might be seen, whose suffering and death should indeed have efficacy on man's behalf. And thus we gain the assurance of a real view which faith had, and which was offered to faith, of vicarious atonement, as linking itself with the suffering Conqueror of the first prophecy, even as we are assured of Abel that his “gifts” had in some way a value in them which God could accept on his behalf, pronouncing him righteous on their account. With Cain also it would seem as if we must read God's expostulation, “And if thou doest not well, a sin-offering coucheth at the door;” thus prescribing a way in which faith, on the part of a poor sinner, might approach Him with confidence. The way of sacrifice was thus openly proclaimed as the way of acceptance; repentance and faith as what, on man's part, this implied, if really apprehended; no legal condi-

tions, no covenant of works, were in any wise imposed; God starts with that which He has now, and once for all, returned to: His first thought is His last—His own thought, in fact, all through, though man's necessity might require, as we shall see, apparent departure from it. Man's necessity is indeed his perversity, and nothing else, which, refusing in self-confidence God's simple way of grace, compelled Him to allow them the experiment of their own way. But for sixteen centuries at least, God abides by what He has said at the beginning. Having made known to man His way of acceptance and approach to Him, He waits to see how man's conscience will respond to the sentence upon him—his heart to the grace which has provided for his need. Alas! His next word has to be a threat of near and approaching judgment. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh; but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years."

We see that, after the fall, God purposed no new trial to man whatever. He revealed the coming of that Seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head. He instituted sacrifice, and thus not obscurely intimated the way of blessing and acceptance for man. He declared actually his acceptance of believing Abel, and to Cain the ground of his rejection and the remedy that still remained. But He gave no law; He urged man to no fatal use of his own efforts to work out righteousness. Conscience was to be the teacher of that need which they had as those outside of Eden, whose closed gate was a perpetual witness, as were also the sorrow and death which sin had introduced into the world; while repentance—the truthful acknowledgment of their condition—would be as ever the way out of it, by faith in that which on God's part met it all.

The only test for man was this necessary one, whether

conscience would have force to bring him thus to himself and to God. Alas! as to this, we know the result. The figure prominent in the antediluvian world is one in whose person the world, at every period, finds its awful representative. "The way of Cain," as Jude may assure us, has survived the flood, and been followed by the mass through the many generations thence to the present time. It is, of course, the exact opposite of God's way; as its first originator stands before us as the first of that seed of the serpent ever in enmity to the woman's Seed. He is thus the incarnation of satanic opposition to the counsel of God. Abel approaches God by sacrifice, the appointed foreshadowing of Him in whom the conflict between good and evil would find its decisive issue; Cain, rejecting sacrifice, brings as an offering the fruit of his own labor. Here begins, with him, the self-assertion which required so many ages of trial to beat down,—a "ministration of death" and "condemnation." It is man himself who raises the question of his ability to meet God and merit acceptance at His hands; and the question being raised must be fully and with long patience entertained, and conclusively settled. •

Toward Cain himself, who at once shows how murder can lurk under the specious form of righteousness, this patience is exercised. He abuses it to build a city in defiance of his doom of vagabondage—a city which his sons adorn with arts and appliances, which, like man's first invention, are made to cover from themselves the shame of their nakedness. Adam wove his girdle out of fig-leaves; Cain's sons weave all nature into a web for the awful purpose of self-deception, forcing it into unwilling revolt against God, and idolatrous usurping of its Maker's place. As with their first father, so with these imitators of his apostasy and not his faith, conscience but drives them to hide from the insupportable presence of God,



under the cover of His own handiwork. They are pioneers of progress, which, with all its mighty results in the ages since, has never sufficed to lift off the curse from the earth, or take the sting from death, or satisfy the craving heart of man, or deliver from the corruption that is in the world through lust. It has built up luxury, has added burdens to the already burdened, has kindled wars, which come of the "lusts which war in the members." The last of Cain's family is but Tubal-Cain—"Cain's issue." Its Lamech, "the strong man," with his two wives (first of polygamists) and his argument for impunity because of the long-suffering patience of which Cain had been the subject—shows us clearly and conclusively the moral result.

But Cain and his seed do not fill the whole scene here. The forefront they do; and history at the beginning, like all history since, has little to tell of outside their doings. Yet there is a remnant, beginning with one who, by divine appointment, takes the place of the martyred Abel. His son's name, Enos (in a day when names still had meaning), tells us of the acceptance of the humbling reality of man's condition—Enos, "frail man." And "then," we read, "men began to call on the name of Jehovah." God gets his place when man takes his. And so it ever is.

Here, then, a new beginning, as it were, is found; and the divine record, leaving out Cain and his apostate race, gives us now a fresh genealogy, in which we are once more told how "in the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him; male and female created He them; and blessed them, and called their name 'Adam,' in the day when they were created. And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image, and called his name Seth." Of the men of this generation it is but noted that they lived and died, although now first we find—what is want-

ing as to Cain's race—every year of their unobtrusive lives noted before God. Divine interest is shown in what for man has none, and contributes nothing to the world's history.

When, indeed, we come to Enoch, seventh from Adam, God can keep silence no longer, "And Enoch walked with God . . . three hundred years . . . and Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." Precious and emphatic commendation of Enoch! Solemn and decisive judgment as to the ruin of all on earth! for the one who walks with God He takes from the earth. How plain an intimation that this pious seed is not as yet to fill the earth! Nay, surely a very clear one that that seed itself begins to fail. This Enoch-walk is as rare as it is precious. Indeed, we know that but two generations later Noah stands the solitary representative of it upon earth. Even in Noah's father, Lamech, though he speaks piously of God, we can detect deterioration. Is he not, even in his name, sadly linked with Cain's race?—another Lamech, a "strong man;" not an Enos, taking his place in self-humiliation before God. It is striking, also, that like his Cainite namesake, he too has his memorable saying. And though at first sight they may seem quite diverse, and in some sense really are, there is yet, spite of all, a striking similarity. For if the Cainite Lamech prophecies impunity to himself for his wrong-doing, from the false argument as to God's long-suffering, the Sethite no less, upon the very eve of judgment, speaks of comfort to a generation soon to be swept away by the flood. "And he called his [son's] name 'Noah,' saying, 'This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed.'"

There was truth in this. It was of Noah's day that we read, "And the Lord smelled a sweet savor; and the

Lord said in His heart, 'I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake.'" Lamech's prophecy was true, then, as to the "comfort" God had in store for man; false only as to the application to a generation the survivors of whom were cut off by the judgment that preceded the blessing.

If we go on to the next chapter, the marks of fatal declension are yet more manifest. However we may interpret the "sons of God" of the first paragraph there, it is abundantly evident that Seth's line, as a whole, are no longer exempt from the universal corruption. God declares His Spirit shall not always strive with man, and fixes the limit of present patience to a hundred and twenty years.

Yet it is just here that the world's mighty ones are found, and giants appear upon the earth—men whose fame survives their awful judgment. God on His part saw "that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that every imagination of the thought of his heart was only evil, and that continually. And it repented Jehovah that He had made man upon the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart."

When at last all flesh had corrupted His way upon the earth, and Noah alone is found walking with God, the flood closed the time of His long-suffering; and the earth, emerging from its baptism, bears upon its surface but eight living persons, as the nucleus of the new world.

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## THE TRIAL OF HUMAN GOVERNMENT

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**J**UDGMENT was executed and over, and in Noah and his family the human race began anew the history of the world. There are many features of difference from the former beginnings, whether inside paradise or without. It was now first that on the fallen earth the trial of man formally began—a trial which, as we have seen, man had forced God (if we may so speak) to make. Already He had indeed pronounced, in answer to the challenge of Cain's altar, that "every imagination of the thought of man's heart was only evil, and that continually," and after such a sentence could never for His own sake—as if *He* were in any doubt—institute a fresh trial of such a creature. So, too, when He brings out Noah upon the restored earth, He is at pains to show that He is not possessed with any fresh hopes concerning man. "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake," He says, "for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Thus He could not for His own sake institute trial. But man has need to know himself, and as he will not recognize himself in the subject of God's verdict, he must be permitted to make practical proof. Hence, once more his responsibility is solemnly proclaimed, and with the solemn lessons of the past fresh in his memory, and once more with the fresh tokens of divine mercy on every hand, he is bidden gird up his loins and begin again his course, to triumph now, if it may be, in the scene of his former disastrous failure.

Before we examine this in its details, as they are given in the divine Word, let us try to realize the meaning of one solemn change which the renewed earth presents from that old one which the flood had swept away. *Paradise is no more to be found there.* Euphrates, Hiddekel, Gihon, Pison, may be there; but the garden from which they once issued is gone forever. Where it was, and *whether* it was, men may now dispute about as they list. The flaming sword has no need to keep any more the way of the tree of life. The cherubim are also gone. The earth is discrowned and empty.

And must we not connect this displayed glory in Eden, however intimately connected with man's fall and punishment, yet also with the mercy that manifested itself toward him, as we have already seen with other tokens of his condition, in which judgment united itself with and ministered to mercy? Labor and sorrow, and death itself, thus ministered, and do minister; and this flaming sword with its cherubim, like Ezekiel's cloud and fire, speak of that presence of God which is not mere judgment only. So even for Cain there was a "face of the Lord" which he evidently identified with Eden, near to, if still outside of, paradise. "Behold, Thou hast driven me out from the face of the earth," he says, "and from Thy face shall I be hid;" and again we read that "Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden." It is the easier to realize, because after this, as we know, it pleased God to localize His presence thus in Israel, and there also with fire and cherubic emblems. It seems not doubtful that this was but in some respects a reproduction of what had been before at the gate of paradise, where sacrifice (which had so essential a part in the Mosaic economy) confessedly began.

Paradise passes away, however, with the flood, and the presence of God, as displayed there, is gone also. It is

simple in principle that while the fall itself had not done so, man's maintenance of his righteousness compels Him to more reserve. For man's sin He had resources, which in the presence of self-righteousness could not be brought out. This must be met in a way far different from the other; for "the proud He beholdeth afar off." Thus, as Cain before, so man now, (and by his road also), "goes out from the presence of the Lord."

Yet He, as consenting to man's trial, does not withdraw simply, and leave him to himself. On the contrary, He solemnly inaugurates the trial Himself, making men afresh to know His power and goodness, as by their recent deliverance from the otherwise universal destruction, so also by the new condition of blessing into which the earth enters, in covenant with Him. Still His goodness was, if it might be, to lead them to repentance. And this goodness of His it is the apostle refers to as God's perpetual witness in all times and lands.

Nevertheless, if God thus declare His purpose of loving-kindness, He is careful to ground it all upon that sacrifice rejected by Cain, but fully accepted by delivered Noah. "And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings upon the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savor, and the Lord said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground for man's sake; for the *imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth: neither will I again smite any more everything living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease.*"

So clear is it that, if God take up man now to go on with him again, it is only upon such a ground as sets him altogether aside that He can do so. Just as afterward, in the giving of the law, it is only on the ground of re-

demption—to a redeemed people—He can give this. If He allow man thus the new trial that he claims, He keeps His own ground still, even while allowing it; and proclaims still, in man's reluctant ears, sacrifice—atonement—as the only way of acceptance, and the impossibility of his standing on his own self-chosen ground.

And now, blessing them as He does so, God delivers into the hand of Noah and of his sons, with something of the old sovereignty, the lower creatures. Significantly, also, death is to be for them the food of life; while the reservation of the blood, the vehicle of life, maintains the divine claim to what God alone can give. Above all, man's life is sacred; the deed of Cain is to go no more unpunished, and man is directly affirmed to be his "brother's keeper:" he is to exact blood for blood, and that as the instrument and vicegerent of God on earth. "And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man: at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, *by man* shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man."

Here, then, human government begins, not as an expedient suggested by man, as so many think it, but as a divine institution. From the commencement of it it could be said, "The powers that be are ordained of God." Not any particular powers, as yet indeed, such as we may find afterward, but "the powers that exist," whatever their form.

There is no need to prove, what every one that has a right thought will at once admit, the blessing that there is for man in civil government. Few would doubt that, if it were removed, corruption and violence would overflow all bounds, as it did before the flood, or as in the French revolution of the eighteenth century. Better the

worst form of government the world has seen than absolute anarchy. Darkening of sun and moon, the falling of the stars, and convulsions of the earth are its symbols in Scripture; and these are signs of the near end of the dispensation.

As a moral discipline, subjection to government is of the utmost value. It is seen in the family as what has its root in the divine ordinance by which the whole human race is compacted together. The immaturity of infant years has necessarily to submit itself to the superior power and wisdom by which alone it is able to attain maturity. And this immaturity, so long lasting in the case of man as compared with the lower animals, implies a long discipline of subjection. By the ordinance of civil government the period of this is lengthened to the whole term of man's life. And this subjection is one not merely to the will of others, but in which also *self*-mastery is learned and attained. It is true that man's self-will—the very essence of sin—breaks all bonds that are possible to be devised; and the inadequacy of such means is one of the very lessons—nay, a main one, which these dispensations teach us. Yet were not the means themselves such as *should* be efficacious, their failure would not have the same significance. And amid all the failure this is still apparent.

The failure is on two sides,—that of the governed and that of the governors alike, for both are men. On the part of those in authority is found weakness, the want of *self*-government, as in Noah, which exposes it to the contempt of those who need most the display of power; or, as in Nimrod, the abuse of this, tyranny and oppression. Babel ends this scene in a general revolt against the source of all power—against God—the issue of which is to bring down judgment and stamp the whole scene, even outwardly, with the brand of “confusion.”

The failure begins with Noah, and this is the occasion



of Ham's sin and the curse upon his posterity. The break-up of government is primarily the fault of those to whom God has committed the authority, with the responsibility, of government. God would be with His own institution necessarily to maintain it, if only those to whom it was intrusted did not betray their trust. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" But then subjection to Him is the secret of subordination on the part of the governed. When man gave up his supremacy over the beast, then the beast rose up against him. He had sunk down to their level, practically, by giving up God—for the beast knows not God. "Being in honor and abiding not, he is like the beasts that perish." Thus, long after this, Nebuchadnezzar is driven to the beasts, until he should know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men. His own account is very striking: "And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar *lifted up mine eyes unto heaven*, and mine understanding returned unto me; and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored Him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. . . . At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honor and brightness returned unto me; and my counselors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me."

Noah's departure from God was not what Nebuchadnezzar's has been; but it was as real, if not so manifest. We have in him the beginning,—the root, and not the full ripe fruit. A root is not *manifest*; but it is what the other springs from. Noah's failure is easily read as the unguarded enjoyment of blessings away from the restraining presence of Him whose gifts they are. But this is the very secret of a departure the limit of which is then only

with God and not with man. The soul has lost its anchorage, and cannot choose but drift. Noah is drunk, loses his garment, and is naked. In many points it is the Eden-scene repeated. This nakedness is matter of contempt to those who are themselves wholly away from God, and who use it to their own worse shame and ruin. From this family of Ham comes, later, Nimrod, "the rebel;" and the beginning of his kingdom is Babel.

The order is instructive and important. God's thought for man is weakness, dependence, subjection, but so, blessing. To realize this, they are to be scattered abroad upon the earth. But of all things, the pride of man refuses the acknowledgment of weakness, as his will resents subjection. Power and a name he covets. "Union is strength" is his watchword. "And they said, 'Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.'"

Now God's thought for man is a city too. Faith looks for a "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Cain's city was not original with him, nor is God's thought caught from man's. It is itself the original; only that it must wait for another scene for its accomplishment. For He cannot build in a storm-vexed and shifting scene, such as the present; and the anticipation of God's time is unbelief, not faith. Man's union is thus confederacy, a compact of selfish wills, of which the cross is the outcome.—"Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us."

Meanwhile, God is digging deep, in the sense of emptiness and nothingness and guilt, to have Christ as the foundation of a city whose walls shall be salvation, and whose gates praise; where union shall be communion with the Father and the Son, and thus accord with all things that serve God. Jerusalem shall be therefore "the

foundation of peace." The outcome of man's confederacy—judgment only stamping it with its true character—is Babel, "confusion." And this is the beginning of his empire who is the type of the great final "rebel," who, crushing all lesser wills into his own, shall be at the same time the "lawless one" and the iron despot.

Thus "man's day" will come to an end, and the kingdom of Christ be seen to be the only refuge; all other kingdoms but its shadow, this the substance. The perfect Man must come—Himself the perfectly obedient One, —in whom shall be no failure; no degradation of power, and no lack of it: *whose of right the throne is.* Till then the trial of government, however this may be needful (and therefore "the powers that be are ordained of God," and "he is the minister of God to thee for good"), becomes only one of the things that manifest more and more man's hopeless ruin. He who could not maintain himself in blessing cannot recover himself; nor is there redemption for him in his brother's hand.

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## THE PREFACE TO THE TRIAL BY LAW:

### ABRAHAM AND THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

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**A**N important period comes now to be considered; not itself forming part of these probationary ages, but having nevertheless the deepest significance in relation to these. The trial by law, it is evident, was the fullest and most detailed trial that man received; as it was the trial of the only religious system that ever was the fruit of man's mind simply. We have seen it in principle already in Cain—a mere natural man, of course; but with the believer also there are thoughts of the natural mind which are no better. God, in the giving of law, does not yet reveal His own way of blessing, but adopts, for the sake of experiment, man's way; only supplying the needful conditions that the experiment may be fully made, and the issue such as may not at all be doubtful.

But in a case of this kind, special care would be needed also to guard against the mistake, so sure otherwise to happen, of confounding this adoption of man's way, for a certain purpose, with the acceptance of it by God as the true one, and His own thought. This in fact has happened, because unbelief in man can set aside the plainest testimonies that can be given; while the systems which set these aside necessarily, in proportion as they do so, deny the simple facts connected with the giving of the law, and which are indeed part of a testimony which He has thus graven upon the history itself.

Thus those who affirm the law to be in any sense God's original thought have endeavored to prove, as it was needful to prove, its universality and its existence from

the beginning in a fallen world. Its universality,—for that which was God's way of blessing for man, could not be (according to His own design) shut up from the mass; its existence from the beginning, partly for the same reason, and partly because God's thought would surely be the one first announced by Him.

To establish its universality, they have had to distinguish between a written and an unwritten law; or, as they assume to call it from Scripture, a law written on the heart. What they mean is in fact conscience, an implicit law which every one has, while the ten commandments are only its explicit form, and as such given to Israel alone. In the same way they prove equally, as they think, its existence from the beginning.

Scripture refuses this, however, utterly. The "law written upon the heart" is only used of Israel's condition when finally converted to God. "It is one of the blessings of the new covenant—"I will put My laws in their minds, and write them in their heart;" words which prove conclusively that such a condition is not every man's natural one. While in the passage in Romans often quoted, where at first sight a similar term seems to be applied to the Gentiles, it is in reality a very different one: "Which show," says the apostle, "the *work* of the law written upon their hearts"—not the law written, but its *work* written, as the original text declares without any question. The work of the law is conviction: conscience does this work in the one who has not the law, though far less completely: "By the law is the knowledge of sin;" and this knowledge conscience in measure gives to every one, and in that respect they, "having no law" (so the Revised Version correctly gives it), "are a law unto themselves." *Had* they a law, they would *not* be a law to themselves.

There is no escape from the plain statement of Scripture that the law written on the heart is conversion, and

not the natural state; and that if it were, God could not promise to write it for those who already had it written in them. Positive, too, is the statement that the Gentiles had "no law." But beside all this, the introduction of law at the beginning in a fallen world is the subversion of the whole argument of the apostle (Gal. iii. 17), that "the covenant, which was confirmed before of God in Christ [or rather "to Christ"], the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, could not disannul, that it should make the promise of no effect." For "though it be a man's covenant, if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth or addeth thereunto."

He here shows one of the meanings of this Abrahamic period preceding the dispensation of law. No less than four centuries does God require to put between the promise of grace to Abraham and his seed and the legal covenant between Himself and Israel, to prevent the one being confounded with or added to the other. And the importance of this will be seen, when we compare the real universality of the first with the restricted bearing of the second. "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed," God says to Abraham, speaking to him as the pattern man of faith, the "father of all them that believe." For "they which are of faith," says the apostle, "the same are the children of Abraham." And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would "justify the heathen (the nations) through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, 'In thee shall all nations be blessed.' So then," he adds, "they which be of faith are blessed with faithful (or rather, "believing") Abraham."

Thus God had proclaimed, centuries before the law, that the Gentiles should be blessed upon the principle of faith. Even as, long after the law was given, He had declared by Habakkuk that "the just shall live by faith." "And," adds the apostle again, "the law is not of faith;

but 'the man that *doeth* them shall live in them'"—an entirely different and conflicting principle.

Even thus far it is plain that, as God's universal way of blessing, the gospel had possession of the field before the law came in at all. But God would make it more evident; and He confirms this covenant of promise (really) to Christ, when He afterward adds, "In *thy seed* shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." This is of course the completion (and therefore confirmation) of the former promise; and its full significance is seen in connection with that offering up of Isaac, and receiving him back (in figure) from the dead, which so plainly find their antitype in Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection. The true Isaac is that One Seed, as the apostle points out, "to whom the promise was made." If "in thee" showed that the blessing was to be by faith, "in thy seed" reveals the object of faith, the Person and work through whom alone the blessing of all nations could in fact come.

Law is excluded from this covenant of promise. It has absolutely no place there. And what proves this, according to the apostle, is just the fact of its having been made and confirmed of God four hundred and thirty years before the Sinaitic. Even a man's covenant made and confirmed cannot be reopened to insert new conditions. How simply impossible, then, to add the law as a condition to the covenant of grace!

Theological systems would come in here to assure us, however, that the law was written upon man's heart from the beginning, and thus upset altogether the apostle's reasoning. Instead of grace having priority of law, as he affirms, according to these, it is the law that has the priority. Either he or they, then, must be in error.

In the epistle to the Romans also he speaks of a time before law. "For until the law," he says,—or rather, "until law"—"sin was in the world." Law did not in-

roduce it therefore, he means to say; but again they would correct him: according to them, there was no time "until"—that is, *before*—law. And some would doubtless quote the next words of the apostle in proof: "But sin is not imputed where there is no law." The mistake is in supposing "imputing" here to be the same thing as elsewhere in the epistle; it is in reality a different word: "sin is not *put in account*" (as the different items of a bill,) is the true thought. "Sin is not put in account where there is no law; nevertheless death reigned"—proving that sin *was* "imputed," *from Adam to Moses*, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression." For Adam had "transgressed;" he had overstepped a positive law under which he was. "From Adam to Moses" is just the time of the most part of the Genesis history; it is the time *until law*, when sin was already in the world, but when it had not as yet this aggravation. The supposition—for it *has* been supposed—that *infants* are in question "from Adam to Moses," is scarcely deserving a refutation.

It is not true, then, that the law given at Sinai was only the explicit announcement of what had been implicitly in existence from the beginning; but on the contrary, law, as a principle of God's dealings in a fallen world, came in then. It is what He was forced into (to speak after the manner of men), rather than desired. Abel, in the world before the flood, declared what was His way from the beginning; and this Noah's altar proclaimed again as His, when those waters had scarcely dried from off the face of the new world.

In this prefatory period of which we are now speaking, the types of the law and its significance the apostle has taught us to find in Abraham's history. How suited their place there should be surely evident. Hagar is thus the "covenant from the Mount Sina, which gendereth to



bondage," and every detail of her history is, I am assured, luminous in this way. That she is but handmaid to Sarah, the covenant of grace, every one owns, of course. Sarah's name is "Princess," for "grace reigns." Hagar is an Egyptian, child of fallen nature; and *her* name is "Fugitive," for, alas! the natural effort now is to get away from God. She is fleeing toward Egypt when the angel finds her at Lahai-roi; and when dismissed with her child in obedience to the divine command, again we find her gravitating toward Egypt. How plainly is it taught, thus, that the law is characterized by "the elements of the world," with which the apostle connects it in Galatians! *As a principle*, it is man's way, not God's; as specific commandment, holy, just, and good; and in His intent in giving it, surely worthy every way of Him. These things alter in no wise the fact that it is man's way—his experiment with himself—taken up by God, and worked out, in His own perfect manner, to a true result.

Thus it should be very plain why Hagar is first *found* by God in relation to Abram, manifestly his own shift, through little faith, to obtain the promised and desired fruit. *Finding* her thus, He appears to her at the well Lahai-roi, and sends her back to submit herself (mark) into her mistress's hands, and to allow the trial already begun to be fully wrought. But while He allows it, He does not leave the issue for a moment doubtful. The fruit of law is the natural fruit. Ishmael shall be born, but be only the "wild-ass man"—untamed, untamable flesh.

Abraham thus exhibits in his own history the lesson which afterward, for so many centuries, his posterity were set to learn. In his own person, he is the witness of sovereign, electing grace; called out of the darkness of heathenism, as Joshua reminds the men of his generation—"Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in

old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor; and they served other gods." Here, "the God of glory appeared unto" him, and called him from country, kindred, and father's house, to be the special witness of His name and way.

Before Hagar appears in the history, God gives testimony to Abram, as a man righteous through faith; and it is instructive to see how the apostle, when he brings Abram before us as the pattern man of faith, passes over all the time of his connection with her as so much loss. "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, 'So shall thy seed be.' And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. *And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.*"

In the last words, the apostle seems to ignore the facts of history; for Abram's body was not yet dead when God said to him, "So shall thy seed be," and when his faith was first counted for righteousness. It was after this—probably some time after—that Ishmael was born; and *he* was thirteen years old at the time of which the epistle to the Romans speaks. All these fifteen years or more the apostle treats as so much lost time, to bring together the period in which he is first spoken of as having the righteousness of faith, and that when he received the covenant of circumcision as the "seal" of that righteousness. Circumcision means, as the same apostle elsewhere tells us, the "putting off of the body of the flesh;" and they are the "true circumcision" who "have no confidence in the flesh." God Himself thus brings these two periods

together; and circumcision is seen to be indeed, as the Lord says, "not of Moses." In its spiritual meaning, it is the fundamental opposite of law.

How fully in all this the character and purpose of this intermediate time comes out! Even the natural seed—Israel after the flesh—will find their blessing in the end from God according to the grace of the Abrahamic covenant, and not according to the Sinaitic,—the only one according to which they have yet received the land. The Abrahamic covenant will thus be in very deed to them a "new covenant." Thus grace still as a nation holds them fast, as it ever has, for future blessing,—a blessing which, when it comes, will alone be the proper fulfillment of the "covenant of promise."

Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph give us, as types, yet further lessons. Isaac shows us the Seed through whom alone the blessing can come; Jacob, the immediate father of the twelve tribes, in both his character and history, foreshadows theirs; and Joseph, rejected by his brethren, and yet at last received perforce as their saviour and lord, shows in so plain a way their history in respect of One infinitely greater that it needs no insisting on. For our present purpose, enough has been already said to prove how, in this period prefatory to the law, the law itself is guarded from misconception, and grace is declared God's way, and only way, of blessing for man. Even for Israel, God's covenant is the covenant of circumcision. Carnality and unbelief, stopping at the outside, may misread all this from first to last. If those misread it, for whom has come the full and final revelation, "the veil is upon their hearts."

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## THE AGE OF LAW

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**I**N taking up the lessons of the dispensation of law, we must carefully distinguish two different and, in many respects, contrasted elements. As a trial of man, which, in the highest degree, it was, we have already seen it to be the working out (in a divine way, and therefore to a true result) of an experiment which was man's thought, not God's. God could not need to make an experiment. Man needed it, because he would not accept God's judgment, already pronounced before (as a fallen being) he had been tried at all, in the proper sense of trial; "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil, and that continually." God's way of acceptance for him had been, therefore, from the beginning, by sacrifice, in which the death of a substitute covered the sinner before Him, closing his whole responsibility naturally in the place in which he stood as a creature.

The "way of Cain" was man's resistance to the verdict upon himself, and so to the way of grace proclaimed. God then undertook to prove him, taking him on his own ground, and bidding him justify his own thoughts of himself by actual experiment.

But this is only the law on one side of it. It was what made it *law*, and gave its character to the whole dispensation. Yet underneath, and in spite of all this, God necessarily kept to and maintained His own way, and to the ear of faith told out, more and more, that way of His, although in "dark sayings," from which only Christianity

has really lifted off the veil. Thus, and thus alone, a sacrificial worship was incorporated with the law, and circumcision, "a seal of the righteousness of faith," remained as the entrance into the new economy.

First, then, let us look at the law as law, and afterward as a typical system.

As law, or the trial of man, we find him put in the most favorable circumstances possible for its reception. The ten commandments appeal, at the very outset, to the fact of the people having been brought out of the land of Egypt; it was He who had brought them out who bade them "have no other gods" before Him. He had made Himself known in such a way as to manifest Himself God over all gods, His power being put forth in their behalf, so as to bind them by the tie of gratitude to Himself. How could they dispute His authority, or doubt His love? His holiness, too, was declared in a variety of precepts, which, if burdensome as ceremonial, appealed even the more powerfully on that account to the very sense of the most careless-hearted. There were severest penalties for disobedience, but also rewards for obedience, of all that man's heart sinlessly could enjoy. The providence of God was made apparent in continual miracles, by which their need in the wilderness was daily met. Who could doubt, and who refuse, the blessing of obedience to a law so given and so sanctified?

A wall of separation was built up between them and the nations round; and inside this inclosure the divinely guarded people were to walk together, all evil and rebellion excluded, the course of the world here set right, all ties of relationship combining their influence for good; duty not costing aught, but finding on every side its sweet, abundant recompense. Who, one would think, could stumble? and who could stray?

Surely the circumstances here were as favorable as

possible to man's self-justification under this trial, if justify himself he could. If he failed now, how could he hope ever to succeed?

That he did fail, we all know—openly and utterly he failed, not merely by unbidden lusts, which his will refused and denied, but in conscious, deliberate disobedience, equal to his father Adam's, and that before the tables of the law had come down to him out of the mount into which Moses had gone up to receive them.

The first trial of law was over. Judgment took its course, although mercy, sovereign in its exercise, interposed to limit it. Again God took the people up, upon the intercession of Moses—type of a greater and an effectual Mediator. Man was ungodly, but was hope irrecoverably gone? Could not mercy avail for man in a mingled system from which man's works should at least not wholly be excluded?

Now this, in fact, is the great question under law: rigidly enforced, it is easily allowed that man must fail, and be condemned. He does not love his neighbor as himself, still less love God with all his soul and strength. Is there nothing short of this that God can admit, then? He can show mercy; can He not abate something of this rigor, and give man opportunity to repent, and recover himself?

And this is the thought that underlies much that is mistaken for the gospel now. A new baptism may give it a Christian name, and yet leave it unregenerate legalism after all. For this—only correcting some mistakes—is what the second giving of the law takes up. It is an old experiment, long since worked out, an anachronism in Christian times. "The law is not of faith;" these are two opposite principles, which do not modify, but destroy, one another.

A second time the tables of the law are given to Israel;

and now, along with this, God speaks of and declares the mercy which He surely has: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." It is the conjunction of these two things that creates the difficulty. We recognize the truth of both, but how shall they unite in the blessing of man? This doubt perplexes fatally all legal systems. How far will mercy extend? and where will righteousness draw the line beyond which it cannot pass? How shall we reconcile the day of grace and the day of judgment? The true answer is, that under law no reconciliation is at all possible. The experiment has been made, and the result proclaimed. It is of the law thus given the second time, and not the first, that the apostle asserts that it is the "ministration of death" and "of condemnation."

One serious mistake that has to be rectified here is, that the law can be tolerant to a certain (undefined) measure of transgression. It is not so. It is not on legal ground that God "forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin." The law says, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." If on other ground (in this case, as ever, that of sacrifice,) mercy can be extended, and even forgiveness,—if man be permitted to cancel the old leaf and turn over a new, yet the new must be kept unblotted, as the old was not. "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness," he must do "that which is *lawful* and right," to "save his soul alive." And thus the commandments, written the second time upon the tables of stone, though now by the mediator's hand, were identical with the first. Here, the law cannot give way by a jot or a tittle, and therefore man's case is hopeless. The law is the ministration of condemnation only.

That was the foreseen issue, and the divine purpose in it, and God, to make that issue plain, (that man might not, unless he would, be a moment deceived as to it) lets Moses know, as the people's representative, that His face cannot be seen. He does indeed see the glory *after it has passed*—His back parts, not His face. God is unknown: there is no way to clear the guilty, and therefore none by which man may stand before Him.

Thus the law, in any form of it, is the "ministration of condemnation" only. That it was the "ministration of death" also, implies its power, not to produce holiness, but, as the apostle calls it, "the strength of sin." His experience of it—"I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Forbidding lust, it aroused and manifested it. "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of lust"—thus "deceived me, and by it slew me."

Of this state of hopeless condemnation and evil, that *physical* death which God had annexed to disobedience at the first was the outward expression and seal. In it, man, made like the beasts that perish, passed out of the sphere of his natural responsibility and the scene for which he had been created, and passed out by the judgment of God, which cast, therefore, its awful shadow over all beyond death. The token of God's rejection of man as fallen is passed upon all men everywhere, with but one exception in the ages before Moses. Enoch had walked with God, and was not, for God took him. That made it only the plainer, if possible, what was its significance. It was actual sentence upon man for sin, and all men were under it as sentenced,—not under probation.

If God, therefore, took up man to put him under probation, as in the law He manifestly did, He must needs *conditionally* remove the sentence under which he lay. "The man who doeth these things shall live in them"



meant, not that he should die, and go to heaven, as people almost universally interpret it, but the contrary—that he should recover the place from which Adam had fallen, and stay on earth. *Faith* in Abraham, indeed, looked forward to a better country—that is, a heavenly. But the law is not of faith, nor was Abraham under it. *Faith*, owning man's hopelessness of ruin, was given in measure to prove the mystery of what, to all else, were God's dark sayings. To man as man, resisting God's sentence upon himself, the law spoke, not of death, and a world beyond, (which he might, as he listed, people with his own imaginings,) but of the lifting off of the sentence under which he lay—of the way by which he could plead his title to exemption from it.

Thus the issue of the trial could not be in the least doubtful. Every grey hair convicted him as, under law, ruined and hopeless. Every furrow on his brow was the confirmation of the old Adamic sentence upon himself personally; and the law, in this sense also, was the ministration of death, God using it to give distinct expression to what the fact itself should have graven upon men's consciences. It is this (so misunderstood as it is now) that gives the key to those expressions in the Psalms and elsewhere which materialism would pervert to its own purposes: "For in death there is no remembrance of Thee; in hades [it is not "the grave"] who shall give Thee thanks?"

God would have it so plain, that he might run that readeth it, that upon the ground of law, spite of God's mercy (which He surely has), man's case is hopeless. "By deeds of law shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

Yet, God having declared His forgiveness of iniquity, transgression, and sin, the second trial by law could go on, as it did go on, for some eight hundred years, till the

Babylonish captivity. Then the legal covenant really ended. The people were Lo-ammi, a sentence never yet recalled.

As law simply, then, the Mosaic system was the complete and formal trial of man as man; all possible assistance being given him, and every motive, whether of self-interest or of gratitude to God, being brought to bear on him; the necessity of faith almost, as it might seem, set aside by repeated manifestations of Jehovah's presence and power, such as must force conviction upon all.

The issue of the trial, as foreseen and designed of God, was to bring out the perfect hopelessness of man's condition, as ungodly, and without strength, unable to stand before Him for a moment. But then, the truth of his helplessness exposed, the mercy of God could not permit his being left there without the assurance of effectual help provided for him. In this way, another element than that of law entered into the law, and the tabernacle and temple services, taking up the principles of circumcision and of sacrifice (of older date than law) incorporated them in a ritual of most striking character, which spread before the eye opened to take it in lessons of spiritual wisdom, which in our day we turn back to read with deeper interest and delight the more we know of them.

The language of type and parable God had used from the beginning. As yet, He could not speak plainly of what filled His heart ever, as these bear abundant witness. Unbelief in man had dammed back the living stream of divine goodness, which was gathering behind the barrier all the while for its overflow. In the meanwhile, the Psalms—the very heart of the Old Testament—declare what faith could already realize of the blessedness of “the man whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.” Faith tasted and declared, as the apostle could take up such words afterward, to show, not the blessed-

ness of keeping law, but of divine forgiveness. "It shall be forgiven him" was indeed said, with perfect plainness, in connection with that shedding of blood for man, which testified at once to his utter failure, and of resource in God for his extremest need. It was not, and could not be, perfect peace or justification that could yet be preached or known, but a "forbearance," of which none could predict the limits. Still, faith had here its argument, and, in fact, found ever its fullest confidence sustained.

Very striking it is, when once this dealing of God with faith is seen, how the very burdensomeness of the rigid ceremonial changes its character, and becomes only the urgency of an appeal to the conscience, which, if entertained, would open the way to the knowledge of the blessedness of which the psalmist speaks. These continual sacrifices, if they did indeed, as the apostle urges, by their frequent repetition, proclaim their own insufficiency, nevertheless, by the very fact, became continual preachers, in the most personal way, to the men of Israel, of their ruin, and of its sole remedy. How the constant shedding of blood would keep them in mind of that divine commentary, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar, to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." (Lev. xvii. 11.)

How striking, too, that circumcision, which was clearly before the law, was expressly the only way by which even the Israelite-born could claim Jehovah as his covenant-God, or keep the memorial feast of national redemption! For, as the apostle says, it was "the seal of the righteousness of *faith*," not law-keeping, as the covenant of which it was the token was "of promise"—the promise of an "almighty God," when in Abraham, almost a hundred years old, all natural hope was dead forever. To walk before that omnipotent God in confessed impotence, trust-

ing and proving His power, was that to which he was called. As yet, there was no law to saddle that with conditions; and in memory of this, in token of its abiding significance, the Gentile "stranger" could still be circumcised, with all his males, and keep the passover as an Israelite-born.

How tender, too, the goodness which had provided that whoever of Abraham's seed should turn to the history of his forefather after the flesh, should find written there, and of this very depository of all the promises, such plain, unambiguous words of divine testimony as these: "He believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." Of no other was this in the same way written. What hand inscribed it *there*, just where it should speak most plainly, and to those most in need? Just where, on the incoming of Christianity, it should be ready with its unmistakable testimony to the central principle of Christianity itself. Such is the prophetic character of the inspired Word. The same presaging Spirit who dictated to *Peter*—in men's thoughts, the first authority in the church—those two doctrines which are the death-blow of ritualism, new birth through the word of the gospel, and the common priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. i 23-25; ii. 5-9), recorded by Moses this testimony as to Abraham. Blessed be God for His infinitely precious Word!

It was in connection with law that all the books of the Old Testament were given, and Israel, as is plain, were they to whom all was committed. It seems, therefore, here the place to speak briefly of their general character as affected by this. There are certain things, at least, that one may indicate as of special importance, in view of many things around us at the present time.

In the first place, it was not yet the time for that "plainness of speech" which, as the apostle says, belongs to Christianity. This we have already seen, but it is not

superfluous to insist on it still further. The veil between man and God necessitated a veiled speech also—not, indeed, altogether impenetrable to faith, but requiring, in the words of Solomon, “to understand proverb and strange speech,\* the words of the wise and their *dark* sayings.” Even as to man himself, while his trial was yet going on, there could not be the full discovery of his condition. We have not yet the New-Testament doctrine of “the flesh,” nor of new birth, although there was that which should have prepared an Israelitish teacher for the understanding of it when announced. Election was only yet national, not individual, and therefore to privilege only, not eternal life. Adoption, too, was national: the true children of God could not yet claim or know their place as such. No cry of “Abba, Father,” was or could be raised. The heirs differed not as yet from servants, being under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the Father. (Gal. iv.) As to all these things, there were preparatory utterances, and all the more as the ruin of man came out, therefore, in those prophetic books which fittingly closed the canon of the Old Testament.

Even the types had in them the character which the apostle ascribes to the law: “having a shadow of good things to come, but *not* the very image of the things.” The unrent veil, the repetition of the sacrifices, the successional priesthood, as he points out, had all this character. They were the necessary witnesses that the “law made nothing perfect,”—that under it “the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest.” Of these was the intermediate priesthood of Aaron’s sons, which was the provision for a people unable themselves to draw near to God; which, with all else, the Judaizing ritualism of the

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\* Not, as in the Authorized Version, “interpretation,” but “what needs interpretation.”

day copies, and maintains as Christian. The apostle's answer to it is, "By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us; for after that He had said before, . . . 'Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.' Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh, and having a High-Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith." (Heb. x. 14-22.) Sin put away, and distance from God removed, ritualism, in all its forms, becomes an impossibility.

In the second place, as the law dealt with man here and now, and did not relegate the issue of its own trial to another time and place, where its verdict could not be known by men in this life; the earth is that upon which man's attention is fixed, and that whether for judgment or reward. There are *hints* here also of the fuller truths which the New Testament unfolds; but manifestly there is no promise of heaven to the keeper of the law, nor even threat of hell—that is, of the lake of fire—to the transgressors of it. Judgment there is, and eternal judgment, but *death* is rather the stroke of it—the horror of this shadowing the eternity beyond. Job speaks of resurrection, and the prophets also, though in them it is only applied figuratively to national restoration; yet this shows they held it as admitted truth. Outside of the Old Testament we learn, from the epistle to the Hebrews, that the patriarchs expected "a better country—that is, a heavenly;" but we should not know it from Genesis. Faith penetrated, in some measure, it is clear, the "dark sayings," and found all not dark. A recognized body of truth was received by the Pharisees, which embraced, not

only resurrection for the just, but of the unjust also, and spoke, not merely of hades, but of gehenna also—the true “hell.” This only makes the more remarkable the constant style even of the prophets. The confounding of judgments upon the living, by which the earth will be rid of its destroyers and prepared for blessing, with the judgment of the dead at the “great white throne,” is one of the errors under which annihilationism shelters itself most securely.

On the other hand, this earthly blessing, still further confused by Israel being (as commonly) interpreted to mean the Church, has been by current “adventism” made to take the place of the true Christian expectation of an inheritance in heaven. And this, too, has linked itself with annihilationism in its extremest and most materialistic forms. We must keep the stand-points of the Old and New Testaments—of Israel and the Church, earthly and heavenly—clear in our minds, and there is no difficulty. “My kinsmen according to the *flesh*,” says the apostle; “to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the *promises*.” (Rom. ix. 3, 4.) All of these for them *earthly* blessings. Christians are “blessed with all spiritual blessings in *heavenly* places in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. i. 3.)

If this should seem at all to take the Old Testament away from us who belong to another dispensation, we must remember two things: first, that if it has not so directly to do with us, it has, most assuredly, with Christ no less on that account. His glories run through the whole; history, psalm, and prophecy are full of Him. But what reveals Him is ever of truest blessing for the soul. Oh to be simpler in taking in all this, in which the Father gives us communion with His own thoughts of His Son †

And then, when we look at the typical teaching, now fully for the first time disclosed, when even the things that happened to the favored nation, and are recorded in their history, "happened to them for types," we find what is in the fullest way ours—"written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come." (1 Cor. x. 11.) How wonderful this! and how sad to think, on the one hand of the disuse, on the other of the reckless abuse, of that precious teaching!

We have now to look at the history of the age of law.

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## THE HISTORY OF THE AGE OF LAW

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**W**E have seen already that at the very commencement of its history the people failed under the law; and this is the one unvarying lesson of all these ages. Under law it was only more plainly marked, as was indeed to be expected of that which was emphatically the "ministration of condemnation." Still the extent of the failure seems after all amazing. I do not even refer to the worship of the golden calf, although it might seem nothing could more show the desperate wickedness of man's heart than this. The very mount which had flamed and quaked in witness to the divine presence bore witness also to this rapid descent into the abominations of the heathen round about, who "changed the image of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to fourfooted beasts, and creeping things." Judgment being executed, God took up the people the second time; not, as we know, under the same strictly legal system, which it had been proved they could not endure, but under a mingled system of law and mercy.

. It was in this way that the tabernacle with its sacrifices and priesthood was added to the law, although God, in the display of perfect omniscience which could not be taken unawares, had instructed Moses as to it before the sin of the people (Ex. xxv.—xxxi.) And here faith found its provision, and a convicted conscience its pledged forgiveness. These at least, it would be thought, would be prized and welcomed in view of the constant failure which the vigilance of the law detected and condemned. How surpassingly strange, then, that these should have fallen into such utter disuse as God by the mouth of Amos declares they did (v. 25-27). "Have ye offered Me sacrifici-

ces and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But ye have borne the tabernacle of Moloch and Chiun, your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves." Thus even Moloch's dreadful altar was preferred to God's and the gracious provisions of *His* tabernacle dropped into a forgetfulness hard to realize. The failure of the dispensation was already fixed: "Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the Lord."

Incredible almost would this neglect indeed seem, did not the Word of God itself announce it. And there are testimonies in the history itself which show in a still more striking way the extent of it. Especially is the statement of the book of Joshua (v. 2-7) remarkable as showing the complete breach of the covenant with Jehovah on the part of the people. Nothing was more fundamental to this than the ordinance of circumcision. The uncircumcised man-child was to be cut off from his people (Gen. xvii. 14); and none such could eat of the passover at all (Ex. xii. 48.) Either these laws must have been disregarded or the passover must have been almost entirely omitted toward the close of the wilderness journey, when no one under forty could have been circumcised at all. For the express statement is, "All the people that came out of Egypt that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt. Now all the people that came out were circumcised; but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they come out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised." How the patience of the Lord with the people is manifest! but how evident that priesthood and Levitical service must almost have come to an end? If these, as all other of the things that happened to Israel, happened unto them for types (1 Cor. x. 11), what admonition would this convey to us!

Moses, even, dies in the land of Moab for his sin; and of all that came as men out of the land of Egypt, Joshua and Caleb alone remained. An entire new generation enters into the land of Canaan, and here a new order of things begins.

For, let us notice, with all the patient goodness manifested toward the people, and which God had declared when He took them up at Sinai the second time, He does not simply continue the trial of them in one form throughout. On the contrary, He varies it in many ways. This, on the one hand, makes it a more perfect trial, as is plain; on the other, it repeats again and again the admonition of a watchful holiness which never lapsed into indifference, while mercy warned of the time of long-suffering, however slowly, still surely running out. As we, upon whom the ends of the ages have come, look back upon them, it is blessed to see how, in the various forms of this trial, God presents to us in changing aspects typically His one unchanging theme,—Christ as the justification of His long-suffering patience as of His fullest grace. This, faith might even in those days in measure see, though not in the detailed glories in which we see it. For the voice of prophecy, even in the law itself, spoke of a Prophet to be raised up, a High-Priest of good things to come,—yea, a priestly King greater than Abraham, in whom Levi had once paid tithes. And we can rejoice in thinking how God thus could linger over the picture of Him to whom when at last come He would give out-spoken witness: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I have found My delight."

In the land, then, as I have said, a new order of things begins. Moses had been in the wilderness the representative of the Lord, the channel of the divine communications. In the land, Joshua stands before Eleazar the priest, and the priest it is who communicates to him the

word of the Lord. He who is confessedly the leader of the people, and standing in Moses' place, is nevertheless not in the same place of nearness with God. Departure has brought in distance, while intercession based on sacrifice is that on which all depends. The link between God and the people is now the priesthood.

Before they pass over Jordan, all their wilderness history is rehearsed to them, that it may be practical wisdom for their new position, and then they are to take possession of the land which God had promised to Abraham; although not yet do they possess it according to the terms of the covenant with their fathers. They are on the footing of law, and must make good their title to the land by actual victory over the inhabitants of it. "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses." (Josh. i. 3.) Thus the extent of the land, as the Lord describes it to them, they never actually acquire. Only in David and Solomon's time does their *dominion* extend to the Euphrates, the Abrahamic boundary, while they never properly *possess* thus far; Philistines, Phœnicians, Hittites, confine them in fact within much narrower limits. Two and a half tribes they leave on the other side of Jordan, defeated by their own success; just as in Christian times the church has gained by its victories a possession the wrong side of death.

In the land, the Lord delivers their enemies into their hands. But failure is everywhere apparent. The sin of Achan, the defeat at Ai, the snare of Gibeon, follow one another in quick succession. They do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, but make gain of their sin by holding them as tributaries, then go after their gods, as the Lord had warned them, and are soon captives in the hands of those they had conquered.

If Gilgal characterizes the book of Joshua, and there

the reproach of Egypt—of their slavery there—is rolled away, Bochim (weeping) characterizes the book of Judges, where they return to a more shameful one. The history shows now their broken unity, the inroad of foreign enemies, the uprising of domestic ones. Again and again they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivers them out of their distress. A judge is raised up, and is the instrument of their deliverance; and as long as he judges, maintaining the authority and holiness of God among the people, the deliverance lasts. But their weakness (which is only their willfulness,) is fully apparent: the judge dies, and once more they wander; there is a new captivity, followed at length (because the mercy of God does not forsake them,) by a new deliverance.

These revivals become, however, more and more feeble and less decisive. At last, the <sup>theological</sup> ~~precept~~ <sup>Library</sup> ~~itself~~ <sup>Seminar</sup> fails utterly, and that when the judge and high-priest are one. Eli's sons make themselves vile, and he restrains them not. The Lord swears that this iniquity shall not be purged with sacrifice and offering forever. And though He raise up for Himself a faithful priest, as He declares, and will build him a sure house, yet the order is again changed: Joshua stood before Eleazar, but now the priest is to walk before God's anointed (1 Sam. ii. 35; iii. 14).

In the meanwhile, ruin is complete. The Philistines come up against Israel, and smite them; they superstitiously send for the ark of God to deliver them—the ark of the covenant so often broken! They are again smitten, Hophni and Phinehas slain, the ark is taken; Eli falls backward at the news and breaks His neck, and Phinehas' wife, expiring, gives to her son a name expressive of the people's terrible condition. "And she named the child 'Ichabod,' saying, 'The glory is departed from

Israel.'” The priesthood, as the link between God and Israel, had come to its final end.

Twenty years pass, and all the house of Israel are found lamenting after the Lord. The ark had not indeed remained long in the Philistines' hand, but had wrought its own deliverance apart from the people. It had returned, but not to Shiloh, its former abode, nor to the tabernacle, no more to receive it. Beth-shemesh—a city of priests—to which it had first come, smitten for its irreverence, had had to yield it up to Kirjath-jearim, where it remained in retirement, kept by Eleazar “in the fields of the wood” (Ps. cxxxii. 6) until David brought it out (2 Sam. vi. 2). All this time was marked thus as a time of disorder and disturbed relation between God and Israel.

This gap of time between Eli and David is bridged by the prophet Samuel, the real link between God and the people even during the reign of Saul. The prominence of the prophets was always a sign of disorder and decline among the people. It was an extraordinary agency, with no provision for succession or permanence at all; in this case, from the first, a note of preparation for the king (1 Sam. ii. 10), whom at last it anoints and makes way for.

Before the priesthood is set aside, Samuel is established as the prophet of the Lord; but through the unbelief of the people, twenty years pass, after the return of the ark, before the value of God's gift is realized. Then Israel gather for confession and prayer to God at Mizpeh, and Samuel judges them there. This brings up the Philistines; but the battle is now the Lord's, and Israel has but to pursue a smitten foe. The Philistine yoke is broken, and Samuel becomes the judge of Israel. We see the prophet here, as never before under the law, building his altars and offering to the Lord, the priesthood quite unrecognized.

But Samuel grows old, and his sons, whom he has

associated with himself in the judgeship, walk not in his ways. The enemies of Israel begin again to gather strength. The unbelief of the people becomes manifest. They desire a king, explicitly to be like the nations, from whom God had separated them. Now, He intended they should have a king. Moses had spoken of it, anticipating indeed their desire as expressed here (Deut. xvii. 14-20). Hannah had spoken of God's king to whom He would give strength. And to Eli, God had told, by His prophet, of His anointed one, before whom the faithful priest should walk (1 Sam. ii. 35). Self-will might here find its excuse, but nothing more. In fact, as they are forewarned by God through Samuel, the rule of a king among them, while it would bring them into a bondage hitherto unknown, would be the sign of God being further removed from them—another step downward in the long descent they had been making. It does not affect this that under David and Solomon they were in fact freed from their enemies, and attained a worldly eminence such as they had not enjoyed till then. The characters of the kingdom as Samuel depicts them were none the less fully illustrated in these reigns; and the more the grandeur of the monarchy, the more even might the yoke press, the more the distance between king and subject. But above all, God Himself, rejected as their King, dealt now with the people, not on the old familiar terms, but at a distance, through the king himself. Let David be rejected, and the show-bread, even if just sanctified, is but common bread (1 Sam. xxi. 5).\*

That the king was here also the shadow of the King of God's kingdom in a coming day is true, but neither does it alter the significance of the fact literally. Faith here

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\* The passage is otherwise rendered in the Revised Version, and by other translators. The common version is, however, justifiable, and I believe to be preferred, as see the Lord's use of this incident in connection with the Sabbath and His own rejection (Matt. xii.)

as elsewhere may find tokens of the coming day, and see also the justification of God's long-suffering then. None the less the links between God and His people were more and more being strained. And if this last endured longest of all, it was surely because it *was* the last: there was no other, and God's patience lingered.

Saul, the first king, though chosen by God, is given them as one after their own heart, as his name providentially signifies,—“the Asked.” After being fully tested, he is set aside for the man after God's heart, David. And Saul, though the anointed of the Lord, is never recognized as the true link between the people and God. He is throughout dependent upon Samuel, who, as he anoints him to his office, announces also his rejection, and before his own death anoints his successor.

David is thus the first king fully owned,—with Solomon, the double type of Christ, the Sufferer-Conqueror and the Prince of Peace. He brings the ark to Jerusalem, appoints the courses of the priests and the service of the Lord's house, for which he provides abundantly the material, and receives the pattern. His kingdom is greatly extended and his enemies are subdued, and Solomon builds and consecrates the house, with “neither adversary nor evil occurrent.”

But “man being in honor abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish.” And all this glory is like the flower of grass; it has scarcely blossomed before it begins to fade. The first love passes, and there is no indistinct threatening that the candlestick is under sentence to be removed. Solomon loves many strange women, and his heart is drawn after their idols. Adversaries are stirred up against him. He passes away, and a sudden rent tears ten out of the twelve tribes out of the hand of his son; and in the fifth year only of his reign, Shishak sweeps down upon and spoils Jerusalem and the house of



the Lord. Henceforth, in Israel, with the worship of the golden calves, it is one monotonous story of evil ever growing worse; in Judah, the descent stopped, indeed, again and again, by the intervention of divine grace acting in an Asa, a Jehoshaphat, a Hezekiah, a Josiah, but still with no recovery really. Blow after blow falls upon them; prophet after prophet warns and threatens in vain: at last, disintegration fully begins. The ten tribes are carried captive into Assyria; Judah, spared for a hundred and thirty years longer, is at last carried into Babylon.

The glory has before this departed from the temple, which the king of Babylon plunders and destroys. The people are now (though not forever) disowned of God. The legal *covenant*, in fact, is over, although the dispensation of law cannot be said to have ceased. "The law and the prophets were until John." But the history of the people as such is closed, although a feeble remnant return from Babylon. But they return only to await in Messiah their Deliverer, amid the tokens of the ruin in which they have involved themselves. The glory does not return. The ark of the covenant, Jehovah's throne in the midst, is gone from their new temple. The Urim and Thummim, by which the Lord had communicated regularly with them in the past, is also gone. Prophets His mercy raises up to them for a brief time, and every one of them is a witness that the moral and spiritual condition is unchanged. This voice soon passes. The history of the favored people ends in blank and total, most significant silence. The throne of the earth is in the hands of the Gentiles. Israel's dominion is passed away; and those "times of the Gentiles" have begun in which we still are, and which continue until the kingdom of the Son of Man is introduced by His coming in the clouds of heaven.

But the significance of this change we must consider more at length

## THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES

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**T**HE "times of the Gentiles" is the Lord's own expression for the whole period of their divinely appointed supremacy over Israel (Luke xxi. 24). It is the period, therefore, of Israel's rejection nationally, and begins with Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the temple and city when Judah was carried away captive into Babylon, and ends with their deliverance from the assembled nations by the coming of the Lord from heaven (Zech. xiv. 3, 4, 9).

It is the time of the four Gentile empires seen in the visions of Daniel and the Gentile king, with a noteworthy exception which we find in the book of Revelation, that there is a time in which the last empire "is not" (xvii. 8), before its final appearance and complete overthrow. In this gap we stand, for none of the great world-empires exist, and all the political effort of the present is to prevent any possibility of the revival of such a thing. Napoleon's history is a warning of how easily God can break through these human counsels, and bring about what He has ordained.

For the history of the times of the Gentiles we are dependent largely upon prophecy, even though much of this be now historical fact. But the history of the Old Testament almost ceases with the subversion of the kingdom of Judah, and no mere human hand can supply the deficiency. It is God's view of things we are seeking, and "the Lord seeth not as man seeth." Thus man's history would be likely by itself to lead us only astray from the divine view, which alone has any real significance. W.

should hold fast, then, to prophetic scripture as to our sure guide through the mazes of human history.

But prophecy, while it throws light upon the darkness of the present, hastens ever onward to the accomplishment of God's counsels in the time before us, and indeed mainly in revealing this declares the present to us. The end is the time of manifestation, for the tree is known by its fruit. We misjudge constantly by anticipating this, mistaking the true harvest-time which it is the glory of Him who knows the end from the beginning to make certainly known.

This will prepare us for a character of prophecy to miss which will leave us in continual perplexity. All prophecy connects with the end, and by this means with every other prophecy. None is its own interpreter, as that passage in the second of Peter, so commonly perverted, really means.\* And why? "For 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." It is all one plan, one counsel. To separate one part from the rest would be to make a rent in a seamless robe. Every seeming by-path connects at any rate with some road that ends not, save in the city of the Great King. And as we approach this, the highway widens, the view lengthens, road after road comes in and pours its contribution into the swelling stream that hastens onward whither all ends—at the feet of the King Eternal.

It is to prophecy that we mainly turn, then, and for our present purpose especially to Daniel and its complement, the book of Revelation. And the fact that the history is at the present time prophetic has a significance which we must now consider.

With Israel in the Old Testament man's history mor-

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\* "No prophecy of Scripture is of separate"—literally, "its own"—"interpretation."

ally ends. The law has given its judgment as to him. "There is none righteous,—no, not one" is the verdict it renders. If true of the favored nation, true then of all, for "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man."

There is indeed another trial to be made here, but for which we must pass on to the pages of the New Testament. Will he not, now convicted and exposed, be ready for grace when it is offered him? Will not the prisoners of hope turn to the stronghold,—to the Mighty One on whom God has laid help? The answer to this is but the cross; and in this the full and final judgment of the world is found. In the meanwhile, the law has already, and to leave him thus shut up to grace, given its verdict. Man's history closes with Israel's ruin. The *record* closes. God may predict the future of him with whom He has now parted company; *but He has parted company.*

It was the throne of the Lord upon which Solomon had sat (1 Chron. xxix. 23), and the ark of the "God of all the earth" had long before passed through the dried-up Jordan to the place of His rest. But now the glory of God had passed from the mercy-seat, and Ezekiel had seen its lingering sorrowful departure from the city (Ezek. xi. 23); and now God's title is, in the books which speak of this time, the "God of heaven" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 23; Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel). The *God of heaven* gives Nebuchadnezzar the kingdoms of the earth, and the Gentile kingdom widens out soon into an empire such as never had been seen in Israel. Nebuchadnezzar is thus a king of kings,—a petty image again of Him who will be the "King of kings and Lord of lords;" somewhat also in the absolute authority possessed by him. But there the resemblance ends. How different the character of the one who possesses this power, and how rapid the degeneration of it!

To him whom God had raised up He appears, that he may know the hand that has raised him up; making him debtor too for the interpretation of his dream to one of the scanty remnant of the people he had overthrown, that he may learn the vanity of his false gods in the presence of Him to whom they are opposed. This dream makes him aware of the fact that He who had placed can displace, and of the continual degradation of power in the kingdoms which succeed his own until at last they all together come to an end, smitten by a kingdom which becomes really world-wide, and which stands forever. About this final kingdom little is said; only that it is of no human shaping, but set up in a peculiar way by the God of heaven Himself, that it destroys all others, and abides. It is the vanity and corruptibility of all mere earthly power that is insisted on: a homily against pride and independence of heart read to one who is in the greatest need of it.

In this view of the kingdoms, the debasing of material shows the decay of power in the successive forms. The Babylonian was the head of gold, owing no allegiance save to God Himself. In the Persian—the silver,—the law when made, although the king might make it, could not be altered even by himself. The kingdom of Alexander—the “brazen-tunicked Greeks”—had risen on the ruins of a pure democracy, of which it retained many elements; while Rome, which succeeded this, though strong as iron, was in principle entirely such, the power of the emperors being gained by their assuming to themselves a number of democratic offices. Finally, in the latter days of the divided empire, the inroads of barbarian nations mixed the iron with clay. There was no real cohesion, and the heterogeneous elements falling apart, the kingdoms of Europe arose out of this division. But this was not the smiting of the image with the stone.

This belongs to a still future time, as we shall see, if the Lord will, as we proceed.

The next four chapters of Daniel show, step by step, the character which these world-powers assume, and are the preface to the seventh chapter, in which they are viewed prophetically in their history as before God, the history in which these features are manifested. The third chapter shows the assumption of control over the conscience, which has characterized man's rule wherever he has had the necessary power. Nebuchadnezzar's image is marked as that which *he has set up*. To refuse to worship in the prescribed way is rebellion, therefore, against himself. How invariably, we may say, has the civil power assumed to be the religious also, wherever it could. Liberty of conscience—precious as the boon is,—is in our days the sign of the decay of absolute authority, and it will not last, but give way finally to the worst form of spiritual despotism which the world has ever seen. But this, as in the case before us, surely leads into opposition to God in the persecution of His people. Others may escape by submission, but not they; although the Son of God is with them in the furnace.

The fourth chapter is the descent of the kingdoms from what has at least the form of a man, as in the second chapter, to the beast-form in which they are seen in the seventh. It is the pride of power which forgets God, which levels man with the beast that has none. Nebuchadnezzar claims the great city over which he rules as built by his own power and for his own glory. In the same hour he is driven to the beasts, until he has learnt that the "Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will." Then he is restored, but the lesson remains, not, alas! to avert the doom of the Gentile empires, but as a note of warning for him who has the secret of the Lord.

The fifth chapter shows us the moral declension still progressing unchecked. Belshazzar openly lifts himself up against the Lord of heaven, exalting above Him the senseless idols of silver and gold; and fingers of door come forth and write his sentence before his eyes.

Thus the Babylonian empire runs its course, and is followed by the Persian; but the Persian we see also, in the next chapter, brought in to complete the terrible picture of decline, ending in complete apostasy. The king exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped, making a decree that for thirty days no petition is to be asked of any god or man except himself. That Darius himself is not the real author of this decree, and is personally very different from what it would imply, does not alter the significance of this terrible act,—the presage of that last antichristian blasphemy for which the Gentile powers come to an end, while Israel, like Daniel, is delivered from the paw of the lion.

The seventh chapter now gives these empires, seen in the prophetic vision, as four wild beasts. But attention is concentrated upon the last, and that, too, as seen at the time of the end. It has already its ten horns, corresponding to the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image, and then there arises another little horn, on account of whose blasphemous words, the beast is destroyed, and his body given to the burning flame. But the kingdom now becomes His in whom meet the characters at once of the Son of Man and of the Ancient of days; and "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, that shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

Thus when Israel's course is ended for the present in utter ruin, God takes up the Gentiles, (not as yet to reveal Himself in Christ to them—that is another and totally different thing, as will, I trust, in its due place appear,—but) to give them their trial also. This will seem strange

and contradictory at first sight, for has it not been just said that with Israel in the Old Testament man's history morally ends? That is surely true also. In all this history of the Gentiles, there is no fresh stirring of that question. No law, no moral code, is given to them. No revelations at all are made, save only Nebuchadnezzar's vision; although Cyrus speaks of a charge which God had given to him to build Him a house in Jerusalem. This he might readily have found in Isaiah's prophecy (chap. xlv. 28), and probably was shown it there. At any rate, the founders of the first two empires were made perfectly aware from whom it was they had received their greatness. Here all personal communication ends. God does not bring them nigh, as He had brought Israel. He has significantly left the earth, putting it afresh, in the most decisive way since Noah's time; into man's hand, but with scarcely a word as to its government. There was His written Word, indeed, if they had heart for it; for ignorant He took care, as we see in Cyrus, that they should not be. And there He leaves it.

What, then, can be the new test when God takes up the Gentiles? He has not left us without plain intimation as to this, and it must be our endeavor now to trace it out.

Two reasons the Word of God gives for the delay of Christ's coming. For why should God delay in what was nearest to His heart? The need of the discovery of man's need fully is the reason assigned. "When we were yet without strength, *in due time* Christ died for the ungodly." So there was a "due time;" and to what this has reference is plain from the apostle's statement. It refers to the trial of man morally in Israel under God's righteous law. This had been proved to have no help for man. Where it had found him, there it had left him—ungodly, and without strength. He was shut up to Christ, then; there was no hope but in Christ.



In 1 Corinthians, the apostle gives us another side of this delay. The *Jew* had had the law,—true; but what about the Gentile? Had God altogether left him out? The book of Daniel, if nothing else, would prove the contrary. Even God's silence, moreover, must have its significance. There must be a meaning even in "the times of ignorance" which "God winked at." And so the apostle declares. "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of the preaching"—not the manner, but the matter—"to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." But "hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" Yes, wisdom as well as righteousness, for Gentile and for Jew alike, are found in Christ: "who is made unto us wisdom from God, righteousness as well as sanctification and redemption:" "that *no* flesh should glory in His presence," but that "he that glorieth should glory in the Lord."

Here, then, is the secret of the matter. The question of man's wisdom was for him an excessively grave one. Where had he got it? Alas! a "tree to be desired to make one wise" was the bait which Satan held up before the woman, and by which our first parents were seduced and fell. "Ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil," says the tempter. "The man is become as one of Us," says the Lord God, "to know good and evil." What, then, is the value of the wisdom he has attained? Taught of necessity, into which he has now got, he has "sought out many inventions." The apron of fig-leaves was only the first of a long line which is not ended with the steam-engine and the telegraph; and all, if it be considered, are but inventions to cover his nakedness, or like John Bunyan's "wholesome instructions," of which cart-load after cart-load the slough of Despond swallowed up, and was nowise bettered after all.

What blanks man's wisdom? We shall find it in the Old-Testament "preacher", clothed in sackcloth though a king. For God has given us, as I have elsewhere said, side by side, in two Old-Testament books, the two questions we are looking at. A divinely pronounced *best* man, Job, is the preacher of repentance: a divinely pronounced *wisest* man, Solomon, is the preacher of vanity. Yes, the vanity of wisdom, if it be only human, more than all. For the beast has no regrets and no sad anticipations; finds his place in a world of change, enjoying the present, and never thinking of the future. But man, if he does not *know*, anticipates and dreads; cannot bear his everyday burden and lie down in quiet. Death levels all; and what beyond death? Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward? Yet the heart says, "God judgeth the righteous and the wicked." Here we stop, the one thing certain our ignorance, with eternity in the heart and no sure outlook beyond time,—except God give it. Human wisdom fails: we must await, says one of the wisest of the Greeks, God's revelation.

But "vain man will be wise, though he be born a wild ass's colt." Even yet he prefers a guess to the truth,—the first being his own, the latter God's.

It is strange and significant, in that blessed Word where all is significant, that in these two books of Job and Ecclesiastes, the Jew takes up the Gentile question, the Gentile Job takes up the Jew's. Thus the same truths are applied to all the world.

Notice, too, that Solomon is not only the wisest of men, but the richest and most powerful. Man's wisdom needs plenty of material to work with. God gives him all he can desire. When He takes up the Gentile, He gives him just the same things. The Gentile becomes the possessor of the world, and the controller of it. But he only forfeits his power and loses it, runs through the

portion of goods that falleth to him, and leaves his crown to his successor. The Babylonian leaves and the Persian enters; the Persian thrusts at the Greek, and falls by a back-thrust; the Greek power breaks into fragments, and is devoured piecemeal by the Roman. When Christ comes, after the predicted sixty-two weeks of silent waiting (Dan. ix. 26), the Roman is already issuing his mandate that all the world shall be registered, although he does not know that God is making him move all the machinery of his empire to bring a Jewish woman to Bethlehem, that her child may be born there, and then for years will stop the census, which is not taken up again till Cyrenius is governor of Syria. So must the world wait after all upon Christ.

And He comes, He lives among men, He dies, He ascends to heaven, and the Holy Ghost is sent down at Pentecost. The Church is formed, and the world is dropped. Since that time, the world has had no history. Even prophecy in the meantime is silent. The empires are for God already gone, although their history yet for a space will be taken up again after the Church is gone from earth, and when the harvest of the world is come.

#### THE NEW BEGINNING.

The voice of Old-Testament prophecy does not cease without predicting the time of the coming of the Deliverer, in whom now plainly is man's only hope. The seventy weeks of Daniel, to which we shall have to return hereafter to consider them more fully, foretell this as to take place sixty-nine weeks (of years—483 years) after Nehemiah's commission to restore and to build Jerusalem. This plainly reaches to the time of Christ's public ministry, after which the prophecy declares He would be "cut off." Before this, the Gentile empires have already reached their fourth or final form; the Jew-

ish Maccabean revival has shown itself to be but the flash of an expiring flame; politically, the people lie helplessly under the foot of the oppressor, while the law is overweighted by human observances, in the vain attempt to patch with new cloth their rags of legal righteousness.

It is at this time, when utter failure and hopeless ruin are every-where manifested, that we reach a new beginning,—the beginning of what is not susceptible of failure or decay at all. A new, a second Man,—since Adam, there had been no second,—appears upon the scene, to be the “last Adam” of a new creation, “the Beginning of” what God can identify as His thought from the first —“the creation of God.”

Man, true and perfect Man, is here, holy and righteous, not merely innocent; perfect in obedience in the scene of the first man’s failure—not in a garden, but in a wilderness, which sin has made the world. To man at first, the trial had been made as light as possible: to the Second Man, everything that could make the trial full and searching to the utmost was ordained. With miraculous power freely used in behalf of others, He never uses it to minister to His own need, or to take Himself out of the condition of absolute dependence upon God, which is the necessity of the creature. “Tempted in all things like as we are, sin apart” (Heb. iv. 15, *Gr.*), He not merely walks by faith, as the people of God in all ages have done, but is “the Leader and Perfecter of faith.” (chap. xii. 2, *Gr.*) One who fills the whole possibility of such a life in His own person. Moreover, as He lives not in a scene like the first paradise, where all ministers to Him, so He does not walk as One who is served, but as One who serves. The law of His life is that of sacrifice. He closes it with laying down of Himself what none could take from Him. His one principle throughout is, “Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.”

Such, then, as He is, He is no product of His times—no outgrowth of preceding generations. Light does not develop out of darkness, nor life out of death. And in Him the Eternal Life is manifest; not that He *has* it merely, struggling, as in His people, with many discordances; He *is* it,—the Eternal Life itself.

But this brings us where to know is to worship. It is God who is come down to us. He who visited man's abode in goodness at the beginning, to prepare it for him, has now visited it after another fashion; and "we beheld His glory," says the apostle, "the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Here, indeed, is a new beginning, and who shall tell the blessedness of it? God, always Light, is now in the light. Exactly when it is fully proved that man can never find his way into the presence of God, His glory is unveiled, and in grace, not in judgment. Judaism is plainly over. God's grace can never be manifested side by side with law. The hopelessness of all attempt to develop anything out of man for God has been made apparent. And the light now come into the world, although not come to condemn the world, but for its salvation, yet only confirms the solemn fact. God's own Son, come in grace, awakes man's heart only to enmity and rejection of Him. It is not mere ignorance: "They have both *seen* and hated both Me and My Father."

He comes with His hands filled with the blessing which He has to communicate. With Him, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Let them own but to what palpably their sins had brought them, and He was there on God's part with remission of their sins. The power ready to banish from among them the effects of sin already showed itself. Sickness removed, Satan's power destroyed, death itself made to give way at His word, what more evident than that in Him God was reconciling the world unto

Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them? Paradise was once more opening the way to the tree of life, where no flaming sword forbad men's access. Would not the blessing under their eyes prevent their refusing Him who thus by every tie of interest would bind them to Himself? So one might surely reason. Alas! such is man's enmity to God that not even blessing will win him to receive Him in whom alone it can be found. "For my love, they are my adversaries: . . . they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love." Of this the cross is the fullest proof. They can taunt Him there with that good itself—"He saved others, Himself He cannot save."

Jew and Gentile have their part in this. It is the commencement of that grand conspiracy which the second psalm predicts, and it ends not until the Lord asks and obtains the world for His inheritance, the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. And how then must He make good His claim? "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." This is of course when He comes again; and the opposition, although at times more covert, only ceases then. "Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy footstool." Still we know He sits there; and when He actually comes forth (as Rev. xix. depicts it), it will be when the enmity of the world has blazed out again most fiercely, and there is no concealment of it any longer.

The cross, then, is the expression, on the one side, of the world's hatred: "The mind of the flesh is enmity against God." Thus it is the judgment of the world—a judgment pronounced, but waiting execution. On the other hand, it is the expression of God's over-abounding grace—a grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Whatever man's enmity, then, this grace must find utterance—must be published

and have its proclamation in the world. The sweet savor of Christ's work must come abroad. The fruits of it must be gathered and garnered. This pause of blessing is Christianity.

Christ, then, as come to Israel, their Messiah, is (in the language of Daniel's prophecy) "cut off, and has nothing." Israel is not gathered. Three years He comes looking for fruit upon that fig-tree, whose leaves give a deceptive promise of fruit that is not found. But man's condition is apparent, and "without shedding of blood is no remission." "The Son of Man must be lifted up." His followers in Israel must see their Jewish hopes expire in His death, and be "begotten again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," now "to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved *in heaven*."

Judaism must give place to the "precious faith" of Christianity. The risen Lord ascends to heaven, receives from the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost (Acts ii. 33), Pentecost beholds His coming, and the kingdom of God begins upon earth.

Yet Israel is not at once set aside; on the contrary, "to the Jew first" the message of grace is proclaimed. Nor only individually, but nationally also. The three years of Christ's ministry have found no fruit upon the barren fig-tree; still, the words are uttered, "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that, thou shalt cut it down." So, at the cross, the Lord intercedes, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;" and Peter proclaims to them the acceptance of that prayer: "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. . . . Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of

the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached unto you; whom the heavens must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." (Acts iii. 17-21, *Gr.*)

National repentance would even then avail to bring Christ back from heaven, and to bring in the glories of His reign on earth, as the Old-Testament prophets had pictured it. Alas! there was no repentance. Numbers indeed believed, but the nation remained what it remains to this day—rejecters of the Prince of Life. They who had said that if they had lived in their father's days, they would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets, proved themselves, as the Lord had predicted, the children of those who killed the prophets, by persecuting, even to death, the new prophets God had raised up. Stephen, arraigned before their tribunal, sums up their guilt, proving from their history how they had always resisted the Holy Ghost, rejecting the divinely raised up deliverers sent to them; and they consummate their sin by stoning him, and sending him, as it were, a messenger after Christ, to say, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

Thus the time given for repentance ends. Persecution scatters the saints from Jerusalem, and they go everywhere preaching the Word. Philip goes down to Samaria, and evangelizes it. Then the Ethiopian eunuch carries away his new-found blessing. Then Saul, the incarnation of Jewish enmity, is converted to be the apostle to the Gentiles; the first of them, however, are received by the apostle of the circumcision—Peter himself. Antioch soon after becomes the new centre of Gentile evangelization, and from thence Paul and Barnabas go forth to their mission among the heathen round.

Jerusalem yet remains, however, and converts even



multiply there greatly; but the nation is unceasingly hostile. Nor only so: the zeal for the law, which disfigures Jewish Christianity, and which warps even Peter himself and Barnabas (Gal. ii.), after it has been decided that it must not be imposed as a yoke on Gentile converts (Acts xv.), persuades even the great apostle of the Gentiles to conduct which brings the fury of a Jewish mob upon him, and shuts him up in a Roman prison. From Italy he writes to warn the Christians to leave the camp of Judaism altogether. Finally, according to the Lord's prophecy, Jerusalem is destroyed, and the temple-worship of necessity wholly ceases.

Alas! that still remains which becomes a subtle infection for the new and spreading faith. This we shall see, if the Lord will, as we proceed; but first, we must look at this new faith itself, and ask ourselves, (alas! in the nineteenth century of its existence, not a needless question,) What is Christianity?

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## CHRISTIANITY

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**W**HAT, then, is Christianity? How many answers would be given in the present day to such a question! But the variety of discordant answers assures us of this, which of itself is a lesson needing, however painful, to be laid to heart, that as a dispensation—not it has failed, but—men have failed under it, as they always have. The history of the Church which its historians give us is something widely different from a development of what is Christianity, if we take Scripture for it. The grain of mustard-seed has grown into a tree,—true; but in this it has lost its primitive character. The malign “birds of the air” dwell in its branches, and the power that shelters them is the type of power which we see in Babylon (Dan. iv.). It is indeed Babylon the Great, alas! (Rev. xvii.) The irony of truth to-day affirms that there is a Christian *world*, and that the true Church is *invisible*.

But let us go back to Scripture for the answer to our question, What is Christianity? And this is but asking, What is the New-Testament faith? Let us first define it in its contrast with that Judaism which passed away from before it, and then add to this some other things which will be needed to give an outline of it at all complete.

In the first place, then, Judaism was part of a systematic trial of man: as Moses says, at the time of the giving of the law, “God is come to prove you.” Christianity affirms this trial over, the sentence of the law given—“none righteous, no, not one;” the cross, the judgment

of the world more fully still, "the carnal mind" as enmity against God." It thus begins in the soul as a true repentance, an acceptance of God's righteous judgment against man, the end of all hope of betterment for him, save in a new life and nature from God:—he must be born again.

Man is thus judged as to the old creation, his history is ended: God in His grace remains; and this is expressed in the Second Man, head of a new creation, in whom alone all resources are. He, too, must go down to death to lay hold upon us there, for "except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." Dying, He justifies God in His sentence upon man, and becomes the way of righteous blessing for him. Rising from the dead, He is the sheaf of first-fruits in whom the after-harvest finds acceptance.

The characteristic of Judaism was an unrent veil: man at a distance from God, who dwelt in the thick darkness unapproachable, unknown. Christianity declares the veil rent in love and righteousness,—rent by the cross of Christ, and a way of access thus to God, revealed in Him.

Judaism, with its many constantly repeated offerings, could not make the conscience perfect. The law was efficacious to condemn, but not to justify; and its forgiveness, needing again and again to be renewed, spoke only of the "*forbearance of God,*" gave no place of assured rest and acceptance with Him. In Christ, by one offering are perfected forever those who are sanctified; the worshiper once purged has no more conscience of sins; and the righteousness of God justifies the ungodly, who believe in Jesus.

Judaism left, therefore, the children of God confounded with the world—necessarily, as giving no full assurance to any. "I am a Father to *Israel*, and Ephraim is My

first-born," God was saying. No cry of "Abba, Father," therefore, was known—no spirit of adoption. Christianity separates its justified ones from the world, to which they no more belong, and separates them to God, to whom they belong.

Judaism, for worldly men, had a "worldly sanctuary" and "carnal ordinances"—things suited to act upon men in nature. The worship of Christianity is heavenly, spiritual, in the intelligence of faith, and needing it; the worship of those brought nigh. It is thus associated, necessarily,—as Abraham's altar with his tent,—with a stranger's and a pilgrim's place on earth, having here no continuing city, but seeking one to come.

Finally, Judaism had its separate order of priests, who alone had to do with sacred things. Priest and people were distinct; and while none could draw really nigh, the former had an outward, official nearness which the latter had not. In Christianity, people and priests are one; there is real, not merely relative nearness; and as a consequence, an overflowing of joyful testimony to those outside, for whom also, without restriction, the way is opened by grace into the presence of God.

In all this, Christianity is in contrast with Judaism, and, as a divine revelation, its necessary complement. The questions raised by the former dispensation are answered in the new one. The shadows of the one find their substance in the other. But there is an overabundance beyond this even, in the grace that has visited us. The Church is, as indwelt by the Spirit, the house of God—His habitation on earth; it is the body of Christ, His bride, the Eve of the last Adam.

In Judaism there was God's house, but of necessity the house and the people were quite distinct; in Christianity they are identified; and this is the first way in which the Church is announced, viz., as a building:

"Upon this rock I will build My Church." Peter develops it as a building of living stones—a spiritual house (1 Pet. ii. 5), and Paul as the temple of God in which the Spirit of God dwells (1 Cor. iii. 16).

That the Church is the body of Christ is Paul's doctrine only, and of this there was not even a type or figure in the Old Testament. Both these things depend upon the coming and indwelling of the Holy Ghost, the fruit of Christ's work accomplished and ascension to the Father: as the Spirit of God dwells in the temple of God, so by the baptism of the Holy Ghost the body of Christ is formed (1 Cor. xii. 13).

*In the thought of God* these two things are coextensive; and as the body of the individual believer is the temple of the Spirit (1 Cor. vi. 19), so the bodies of believers are the members of Christ (v. 15). Every part of house and body is thus instinct with the glorious presence which claims and seals the whole for God. Holiness is the character of God's house as such; subjection to the Head, and mutual care among the members, the responsibility of the body; the unity of the Spirit the practical *unity of the whole*.

To be the bride of Christ is the *destiny* of the Church. Now espoused to Him (2 Cor. xi. 2), she is by and by to be presented by Him to Himself (Eph. v. 27); and of this the Old Testament has many types. Eve is the first and the fullest; but Rebekah, Asenath, and others fill in the blessed picture. As body and bride of Christ, the mind and heart are both provided for. For her union with her Lord the true Church waits and longs.

This, then, in the briefest way, is Christianity, the expression of the "manifold wisdom" (Eph. iii. 10) as of the "exceeding riches of the grace of God" (ii. 7). How it has fared in a world which rejected Christ is a question which must now be answered, though to answer it should

wake up in our hearts all their capacity for sorrow. Rejection and persecution by the world are indeed her natural heritage, and this fellowship with her Lord could hardly be unfriendly to her. Fiery trial has manifested, again and again, the true Church, brightening her features with her own unearthly beauty. But these have been but occasional glimpses of a record of which men's hands have written but a few pages, and which waits the day of manifestation to be made known. In general, the history of the Church has been but the history of what has usurped her name and travestied her character. Scripture itself gives us but the history of this professing Church; noting for us its departure from the truth, as He whose eyes are as a flame of fire reads it, and comforting us with its foreseen end. This, then, must be our course as well, following Scripture as our only guide and safeguard against ourselves; for the witcheries of Babylon are many, and by her sorceries have all nations been deceived.

The statements of the Word are explicit as to the failure and corruption of the Church, from which it gives no hope of recovery either, but only the promise of the Lord's return. If we go back to apostolic days, we may find in Corinth the leaven of immorality and the denial of the resurrection; in Galatia, law superseding grace; in Rome, all seeking their own, not the things of Jesus Christ (Phil. ii. 21); Ephesus by and by having lost its first love; and in the days of John's first epistle, already many anti-christs (1 Jno. ii. 18). In these, too, the apostle recognizes the sign of the "last time," as Paul characterizes the "last days" by the denial of the power of godliness (2 Tim. iii. 5), and Peter by "scoffers, walking after their own lusts" (2 Pet. iii. 3). Jude tells us that already there had crept in among Christians the men of whom Enoch prophesied that the Lord was coming to execute judgment on them. While Paul again assures us that

the mystery of iniquity was already working which would work on to open apostasy and the man of sin, who was only to be consumed by the breath of the Lord's mouth, and destroyed by the brightness of His coming (2 Thess. ii., comp. Isa. xi.)

This is explicit assurance as to the close of the dispensation. Evil men and seducers waxing worse and worse (2 Tim. iii. 13), the course of christendom startlingly repeats the history of Israel in its religious features. But we have more connected and detailed account of this decline in its successive stages, and this from the lips of the Lord Himself. The parables of Matthew xiii. give us four of these; the addresses to the seven churches a large supplement to them. I do not propose to enter upon or justify the interpretation of these at this time—it has been often enough done,—but rather out of these to construct an outline which will be, if truly given, the *divine* history of the professing church.

The Word sown in men's hearts is that which establishes the kingdom upon earth: it is received by faith, not yet set up in power. From the first, therefore, there is varied success: the seed tests the quality of the soil; and here the hard-trodden ground refuses entrance, here the rock below forbids any proper root, here the thorns spring up with it and choke it. We see at once there is no universal reception of Christ, but three parts of the seed out of four become unfruitful. A more ominous thing still is here—that where there is real fruit, few bring forth in any due measure: if "some a hundredfold," more often "some sixtyfold, some thirty."

It is this failure in true disciples which is the secret of all that follows. Men sleep, and "while men slept, the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat." Here is the introduction of what is not the Word of God at all, but the word of Satan, and the fruit of this is not hypo-

criters and backsliders merely, but heretics and false teachers. Here the devil has already a secure place in the professing church; and this evil cannot be remedied until the harvest, as the Lord declares.

In the addresses to the churches we see the root of failure in a general departure from first love, with men claiming to be apostles falsely, and Nicolaitanism (or clerisy) in fact, if not in doctrine. But both these are yet resisted. In the next step, we find, amid persecution from the world, the rise of a Jewish party, which the Lord stamps as Satan's synagogue. We see at once how every distinctive principle of the Church is in peril here. Law supplants grace, salvation is clouded, the children of God lose their known place as such, separation from the world grows shadowy and indistinct. Worship becomes necessarily formal, ritualistic, official. The heavenly people become citizens of the earth: the church the synagogue.

All this is at first the badge of a party, but it is a party which attracts to itself every element of declension, and grows rapidly and necessarily as the decline goes on. The state of the third church addressed, as of that pictured in the third parable, shows now its complete victory. The persecution, which alone for awhile has hindered this, is over; the church is firmly settled in the world. It *dwells* where Satan's throne is; the little seed has become a tree, and the birds of the air—the type of the powers of evil— *dwell* in the branches of it. Nicolaitanism (the "subjection of the laity") is now complete—an open doctrine, and not merely a practice; and there are followers of him who loved the wages of unrighteousness, and sought to mix the separated people with the nations around in unlawful intercourse and idol-worship.

Another step, and we find, in Thyatira and the fourth parable, the "woman." It is the professing church itself,



now taking the place of rule and authoritative teaching only to repeat the lessons of the Balaam-teachers, and to mix the leaven of evil with the pure meal of the bread of life. This is now Jezebel, the bloody persecutor of the prophets of the Lord, and for whom the Lord reserves a corresponding retribution. And now the remnant of true saints becomes more distinctly marked out and separated from her, and encouraged by the Lord's reprobation of her and the promise of His own return.

Another stage: we find the Lord has uttered His own voice in answer to the assumption of the false church, and there is a people who have received and heard. But, alas! they are already called to *remember* what they have received and heard, and to hold fast and repent. Yet it is not corruption of doctrine which characterizes them, but simply a lifeless profession. They have a name to live, but are dead,—the world but a Christian world,—with here too a remnant, not merely of living, but of *pure* living saints whom the Lord owns and commends. But the rest are but the world, and will be treated as the world: He will come as a thief upon them, and they will not know the hour. This answers, without reasonable doubt, to the state churches of the Reformation.

And now follows a solemn time, a time of peculiar blessing, a time of peculiar solemnity. There is evident revival, as we say, the word of Christ being hearkened to, the name of Christ wakening fresh response in the hearts of His own, His people thus being necessarily drawn together—"Philadelphia" is "brotherly love." The word of His patience being kept shows, too, the hope of the Lord's coming in some freshness, held. All this is full of encouragement. There is, indeed, no blame at all expressed on the Lord's part, although they have but a little strength. No blame, indeed, but a *warning*, and the Lord's warnings are never without meaning—

“Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”

Here, then, is the danger; here is the peculiar responsibility: here is the room for overcoming in Philadelphia also, for overcomers there are here. And now the application is plain. What have all the movements been, that have been taking place since almost the Reformation itself, in which wave after wave of blessing and revival have swept over Protestant lands, wakening renewed attention to the Word, renewed love to Christ, renewed desire for His coming, and gathering, whether professedly or not, by necessity of these, the people of God together, in separation more or less distinct from the world, which knows nothing of them? And what have been the results, again and again, of all these movements? Alas! in how brief a time has the freshness, the zeal, the simplicity, died out, and only another sect perhaps been added to the number of those before, in its main features little different from others.

All these impulses of revival, in their passing away, emphasize the impossibility of restoration and the near coming of the Lord Himself: “I come *quickly*” is now His word. Doubtless Philadelphia, in some measure at least, will go on till He comes, as Sardis, as Thyatira, as even Pergamos, go on. Plain proof of it is the assurance: “Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee out of the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.” But the direct result of the collapse of Philadelphian movements is but Laodicea; in which the heat of Philadelphia has become mere lukewarmness, self-satisfaction, and complacency, with Christ outside: and His word is, “*I will spue thee out of My mouth.*” Upon this I do not linger: it is the rejection by the Faithful Witness of what is now but a false witness for Him on earth. It

is the long-threatened removal of the Church's candlestick. The predicted apostasy is now at hand, and the man of sin ready to be revealed. Let the Lord's voice be now heard summoning His true saints to Himself, and darkness thicker than ever before, settles down upon the scene. "Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the nations," is now fulfilled.

### THE "END OF THE AGE."

It has been already stated, at the commencement of these papers, that the expression in Matthew xiii. 39, 40, 49, and xxiv. 3, is not properly "the end of the world," as in our common version, but rather "the end [or consummation] of the age;" and this may be now found in the margin of the new revision. It is a change of immense importance, as it is one of absolute necessity.\* As it was itself, no doubt, the product of the belief that Christ's coming is at the end of the world, so this mistranslation has done perhaps more than anything else to sustain this.

What is this end of the age? It is the harvest-time when the wheat-field of Christendom will be reaped, the wheat gathered into the barn, and the tares gathered and burned in the fire. It was entirely natural, therefore, for those who supposed that after Christianity there could be nothing more, to suppose that the end of the age and the end of the world were one. It is strange, but true, that the expression itself shows exactly the opposite; for the truth is, that the end of the age does not refer to any Christian age at all. For us, the cross was the "con-

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\* It is well known that the true word for "world" in the physical sense is *κοσμος*, found in xiii. 38—"The field is the *world*;" while the word here is *αιων*, expressing time, not physical structure.

summation of the ages" (Heb. ix. 26, *Gk.*); and upon us, therefore, the "ends of the ages are come" (1 Cor. x. 11, *Gk.*). Nay, the apostle uses an expression which shows at once the impossibility of a Christian age when he calls *Satan* the "god of this age" (2 Cor. iv. 4, *Gk.*). The time of the display of God's heavenly purpose is not reckoned among the ages of the world. In the Old-Testament prophecy, its history has no place; it is an uncounted interval—a mere gap of time. Of this we shall have proof as we proceed.

But what, then, is this "end of the age?" If we turn to Matthew xxiv, we find the Lord's answer to the disciples' question as to it: "What is the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the age?" Of Christianity, it should be evident, they could know nothing; the end of the age would be for them Jewish,—the age of law, which was to give place to the age of Messiah's reign. Doubtless the end of the age connected itself for them with the destruction of the then-existing temple, of which the Lord had spoken to them. But even so, He says nothing to them of Christianity, but pictures a scene in Judea in which disciples would be found to listen to His word, still connected with a temple in Jerusalem; the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place, their warning to escape from the following tribulation.

"Yes," people say, "but this is passed!" Then, has Christ come in the clouds of heaven with all His holy angels with Him, according to this prophecy? Yet this ends the short, sharp, yea unequalled tribulation of which He speaks. It is plain that this "end of the age" is future to us still, as indeed it must be if it is also (as the 13th chapter shows,) the time of the *harvest of Christendom*.

Now put these things side by side, and how complete and unexpected the harmony! *Jewish* disciples once more owned, and Jerusalem again occupying the Lord's

mind, in a day when the wheat of Christendom has been gathered into the barn, and only tares, which He does *not* own, remain for the burning! Yes, "darkness shall cover the earth, and *gross* darkness"—not the light of Christianity—"the peoples; but the Lord shall arise upon *thee*, and His glory shall be seen upon thee" (Isa. ix. 2).

Then "the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place," becomes very plain and full in its significance. We shall find the first mention of it in Daniel ix. 27, in connection with the last week of those seventy *at the end of which Israel's blessing was to come*. This last week is cut off from the previous sixty-nine in a way which the knowledge of Christianity as coming in to fill up an uncounted gap of time in prophecy, alone can make intelligible. Sixty-nine weeks (of years—483 years—) pass before Messiah the Prince is there. After it, He is cut off and has nothing (v. 26, margin), and (more than forty years after the sixty-ninth week is ended,) "the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and to the end of the war desolations are determined."

Thus, if taken without a break, the seventieth week is already gone far past; yet the prophecy closes most unexpectedly with just this seventieth week: "And he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease, and on account of the wing of abominations shall be a desolator"—I translate literally,—*"even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate."*

Many questions might be asked here, but the abomination, on account of which there comes a desolator, is plainly "the abomination of desolation" of which the

Lord speaks, while its being "in the holy place" shows clearly how the sacrifice and oblation are caused to cease.\* Then the short time of tribulation reads in the prophecy as half a week (3½ years), to the end of which the judgment continues, which suddenly comes to an end with the appearing of the Lord.

The "end of the age" is plainly nothing else than this last week of Daniel's seventy, covering the time from the removal of the heavenly saints to heaven till the time the Lord appears with them in glory. That, "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we appear with Him in glory," Colossians (iii. 4) teaches. How we come to appear with Him then, we are taught in 1 Thess. iv, which includes the dead in Christ as well as those alive and remaining till He comes. That Christians go forth to meet the Bridegroom on His way to earth is told us in the parable of the virgins in Matt. xxv. But we need the putting together of such scriptures, as we have had before us, to see that any such interval occurs between our being caught up to meet Him and our appearing with Him as that which now is plain. When seen, it harmonizes all the scriptures, and throws a flood of light upon the whole.

Thus, if we go on in Revelation past those warning words to Laodicea in which we have already seen the judgment of the professing church, we reach at once, in chap. iv. and v, a heavenly scene. The apostle by a trumpet-voice is called up there: and there he sees, upon thrones around the throne of God, a company of elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and crowned with golden crowns. From these, prostrate before the Lamb, we soon hear the song of redemption, the angels worshipping in an outer circle.

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\*The connection is made quite plain by chap. xi. 31—"They shall pollute the sanctuary, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and place the abomination that maketh desolate."

The throne itself is a throne of judgment: thunders and lightnings proceed from it; but around it is the bow of promise, the token of God's covenant with the earth, for the earth is coming into remembrance before Him. The Lamb who takes the book and looses its seven seals is also now heralded as the "Lion of the tribe of Judah"—King of the Jews. With the blessing of the earth, Israel's blessing is necessarily connected.

After this, we look down upon earth, to find, before the seventh seal is broken, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed of all the tribes of Israel, and then a multitude of Gentiles who have come out of the *great tribulation*. The years of this great tribulation we find numbered variously afterward: "time, times, and a half," "forty and two months," "a thousand, two hundred and three-score days"—all give its measure as that of the *last half week of Daniel*.

These harmonies in the book of God are a sure witness for the truth of this interpretation; and by it we see that the end of the age is the harvest of the world in every phase. Israel, the Gentiles, the professing church, alike come up for judgment in it. And it is this which gives it much of the importance which attaches to it in Scripture. People are slow to believe that two chapters of Revelation can suffice for eighteen centuries or more of Christianity, and fourteen more be required for seven years of a short closing period. But it is in this short period that we find the ripe result of all that preceded. And here are for us lessons, which it is true we have little fathomed or even cared to fathom, but which none the less bear witness to the goodness and wisdom of God in furnishing us with the true end of all which is about us. Would that fellowship with Him were more prized by us! Not only would our feet be kept out of a thousand snares, but what would it be to realize as to everything, the mind

of the Holy One! May we seek and find it more from day to day!

But beside the end of man's ways, we find also the ways of God, at a time when He is not merely showing long-suffering patience, but actively moving to accomplish His blessed purposes. Here the converging lines of prophecy unite after a manner which tells of God's interest, at least, in what for man may have little. We must in this way study prophecy to find its proper end. Prediction has a moral purpose for us. It is not given merely that we may be able to say, with a wisdom beyond the wise man's, what shall be after us upon the earth, but that in this we may find, as in all other scriptures, sanctification by the truth.

We can here but look in the briefest way at some of the features of this time of the end, as prophecy develops them. We have seen the crisis of trouble for the Jews, and their deliverance. The agents in the former we may now look at. And, first, who is it who confirms a covenant with many [of the Jews] at the beginning of the seventieth week? Most commentators, viewing the seventy weeks as an unbroken period, have considered it to be Messiah Himself; and this is favored by the common translation, which gives "*the* covenant," as if it were the divine one so often spoken of in the after chapters. Of course, no one but a divine Person could do this, and so it passes, among most, without question. But the real translation is "*a* covenant;" and if he who makes it, makes it void, as we have seen in what directly follows this, it is clear that Messiah cannot be the maker of it.

The natural person to think of is the one mentioned in the verse previous,—“the prince that shall come;” but he, again, has been confounded with Titus. “The *people* of the prince that shall come” does not, however, necessitate the thought that he comes with the people, nor is there



any reason apparent in the prophecy, for marking Titus with this special emphasis. The *people* who destroyed Jerusalem were, we know, the Romans; but if we did not know, it would be surely the question, interpreting scripture by scripture, Is there any prince to come sufficiently marked by Daniel elsewhere to be spoken of in this way, and who could fulfill the further statements of the following verse?

We may put it more distinctly thus: Does Daniel speak anywhere of a great Roman prince who shall arise at the time of the end, and be in connection with and hostile to the Jews at that time? This question is very readily answered: *Daniel has already spoken of this very person.*

The fourth beast of the seventh chapter is allowed by almost all commentators to be the Roman empire, and the angel who interprets the vision to Daniel speaks thus of its last king: "And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall arise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak *great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and the law;*\* and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of a time. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end."

Here, surely, is the "prince that shall come," in opposition to God and to His people, his changing of Israel's law, the very time of his power, (the last half week of the seventy,) and destroyed by the coming of the Lord. Who can doubt the identity?

But another objection arises: This fourth beast, or Roman empire, how can it be destroyed at the coming of

the Lord, when in fact it has already ceased to be long since? Here Revelation comes in to supplement, as in so many other cases, the older prophecy. Revelation, as we know, speaks also of this fourth empire and of its last head, and similarly of his destruction when the Lord appears. But it completely clears up the difficulty that exists by showing us this empire as coming up again out of non-existence—"The beast that was, *and is not*, and *shall be present*;" this is given by all now as the proper reading of Revelation xvii. 8.

Thus, again we see the gap of time which has to be allowed for in Old-Testament prophecy; and thus the last end of the Gentile empires is revealed. But this by no means fills the whole field of prophetic vision for the last days. The abomination of desolation is still only in part disclosed, and it requires only once more to compare prophecy with prophecy, to find another power side by side with this last blasphemous head of Gentile empire, his main ally and instrument in the east, and indeed *the* Antichrist of whom the apostle says, "Ye know that he shall come."

His marks are these:—

(1) "Who is *the* liar, but he who denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is *the* antichrist who denieth the Father and the Son" (1 Jno. ii. 22). Antichrist thus denies absolutely the Christian revelation; he does not deny the Jewish hope, but claims to fulfill it; does not say there is *no* Christ, but that *Jesus* is not the Christ. He thus heads up Jewish unbelief in both respects.

(2) 2 Thessa. ii. so naturally connects with this, that most will readily allow the connection. Here we find an apostate from Christianity, "the man of sin," "the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he

is God." Here we might think of the Church as the temple of God, but for two things: (1) that he is an apostate—does not profess Christianity at all, as we have seen the antichrist does not; (2) the connection with an abomination of desolation standing in the holy place is so simple, so evidently satisfying the conditions, that it is hard to suppose any other than the Jewish temple meant.

Then notice his end: "Whom the Lord shall consume with the breath\* of His mouth, and destroy with the brightness of His coming." Here, "that wicked one" is literally "that lawless one," and is a point of connection with another prophecy.

(3) In Daniel xi. 36 a king is found in the land of Israel whose character is portrayed in words precisely similar: "And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished, for that that is determined shall be done." Yet "a god whom his fathers knew not shall be honor." Compare this with—

(4) Rev. xiii. 11-17, where we find a second beast rising up after the first or Roman beast, with two horns like a lamb, but speaking as a dragon; full of such power as the passage in Thessalonians speaks of—doing great wonders, and causing men to worship the first beast, as Christ to worship the Father. These two we find meeting a common doom, when the Lord is revealed from heaven in the nineteenth chapter.

These scriptures clearly show us how the abomination of desolation is planted in the holy place.

The desolation is caused, as we have seen, by a deso-

\* Not "spirit." The reference is to Isaiah xi, where "the wicked" is also "the wicked one."

lator from without, and his course we find in Dan. xi. 40-45, where the king of the north sweeps down upon the king in the land of Israel, and overflows and passes over, reaching down to Egypt and Ethiopia. This king of the north is all the way through the chapter a Grecian king; and the account of him who has this place in these latter days is given in chap. viii. He too comes to his end in the land of Israel, the rod being broken when it has served its purpose, and at the same time, plainly, with the beast and false prophet. (See chap. xii. 1.)

Lastly, Ezekiel xxxviii, xxxix, give us still another power, whose rise and growth and attitude in the present day are (along with the revival of Greece and Italy,) among the most striking signs of the times. It is Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal,—as the words should read. Russia is here really named; and she too, doubtless all through at the back of Greece, comes up as an enemy of Israel and of God, in days which cannot be far distant.

Thus the whole prophetic earth is in convulsion in the time of the end, and amid this, Israel find their discipline, in which a preserved remnant are taught to look for and to find Messiah in the Christ they had rejected. The two tribes only—or those we now call Jews—returning partly (as they are beginning to do) and in unbelief into their land, return to find themselves under the tyranny of Antichrist, whom the mass receive, and between the opposing ranks of Gentile powers. But amid them God raises up and maintains a prophetic testimony, and from them the gospel of the kingdom goes out also to the nations around. Babylon the great, the harlot church, falls under the wrath of the western powers; but the new testimony has its effect in the salvation of many, who are the sheep placed on the right hand of the Judge when the Son of Man takes His throne on earth. Even of these

gathered against Jerusalem,—and in the very crisis of her trouble the Lord appears (*Zech. xiv.*)—many are spared, and sent as messengers of mercy to the nations round. Then, from all parts of the earth Israel are brought back, and, judgment having wrought for purification, the earth's blessing is at last brought in.

But who can give an idea of the lessons of holy wisdom to be gathered in this solemn field of prophetic history? The conviction of how little distant in the future these things are should give to them an intensity of interest, painful indeed, but salutary. For in all of us lie hidden the seeds of what we here find springing up and in maturity. And true, emphatically, is the rule of divine government: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

#### THE KINGDOM OF THE SON OF MAN.

The "world to come," the apostle tells the Hebrew Christians, is to be subjected, not to angels, but to *man*. "For unto angels hath He not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, 'What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that Thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; Thou crownedst him with glory and honor; Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.'"

We have only to read attentively the tenth chapter of *Daniel* to know what is meant by being subjected to angels, and to find that this is what is true of the *present* world. We there read of angelic "princes" of Persia and Grecia, and the former, at least, in conflict with the angel who speaks to the prophet, while he is helped by another angel, "Michael, your prince,"—that is, prince of the Jews. Angelic "principalities and powers" are thus made known to us as in relation to the earth, and

Satan is seen in all his power, as "prince of this world;" while in the same sphere the holy angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation."

But the world to come is not subjected to angels, but to man; and here, not to the first man, who has lost it, but to the Second Man, and He is the subject of the eighth psalm—"made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death," as the apostle explains, and "crowned with glory and honor." But as yet we "see not all things put under Him," he adds: this is not fulfilled in His exaltation to the right hand of God now, but will be when that glorious time shall come of which prophecy has been ever full—the "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." These He must come again to introduce.

Accordingly we find, at the time when the Gentile empires come to an end, in Daniel's vision of the seventh chapter, "Behold, One like the Son of Man, came in the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people and nations and languages should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

Between this kingdom of the Son of Man and the kingdom which He now has, the Lord Himself distinguishes in His address to the church in Laodicea: "To him that overcometh will I give to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne." It is "One like unto the Son of Man" who thus speaks, and as this alone can His people be, through His marvelous grace, associated with Him. No saint could sit with Him upon the Father's throne, and now it is the "kingdom of God's dear Son" (Col. i. 13). In

this, we are only subjects; but "if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him;" and then it will no longer be long-suffering patience, but the exercise of power which will beat down all opposition. So in the address to Thyatira the Lord says, "And he that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of My Father."

In this character we see Him come forth, in the nineteenth chapter of the same book, upon a white horse, the symbol of conquest and victory, the armies of heaven following Him also upon white horses, to the judgment of the earth: "and out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations, and *He shall rule them with a rod of iron*, and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."

Now, therefore, no adverse power can be tolerated. Not only do the beast and false prophet meet their end at His appearing, but Satan is bound and cast into the bottomless pit, to be shut up there until the thousand years of the last dispensation shall be fulfilled. Then he is cast finally into the lake of fire. The close of the twenty-fourth chapter of Isaiah had long before announced this, though in more general terms: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and be shut up in the prison, and *after many days* they shall be visited." This clearly shows the judgment to be premillennial. "Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of Hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients [or "elders"] gloriously."

With this breaking of Satan's chain comes the removal of the curse upon the earth. "The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." Creation, fallen with her head, waits till the open declaration of God's grace toward man shall be seen in the redemption of the body. Then it also "shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and translated into the liberty of the glory of the children of God." (Rom. viii. 19-21.) Well may the earth rejoice, the floods clap their hands, and the hills be joyful together before the Lord. The Redeemer is the Creator, and the "rule" of the rod of iron is a *shepherd*-rule, as the word means. The judgment itself is the effect of love as well as righteousness, to "destroy those who destroy the earth." (Rev. xi. 18.)

This is not the eternal state, however; it is not that in which divine love can rest. The Lord's own words to His disciples speak of it (Matt. xix. 28) as "the regeneration," not the state of glory or of full blessing, though a great and important step toward it.\* The word evidently implies the rule of righteousness, not by any means yet the complete absence of sin; and this all the pictures given us of that time confirm. Indeed, the very meaning of that apparently so strange letting loose of Satan at the end of the thousand years is to detect the hidden evil. The display of power when Christ comes, easily compels a certain obedience. "As soon as they hear of Me, they shall obey Me," says the prophet, personating Messiah; "the strangers shall lie unto Me." (Ps. xviii. 44, *margin*.) And then—"The strangers shall fade away, and be afraid

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\* There is a plain correspondence here between the steps of blessing for the individual saint and for the earth. In both, there is at first "the bondage of corruption;" then a state in which the dominion of sin is broken; then the material change, whether of the body or the earth itself; and then rest and glory.



out of their close places." Again, in the sixty-sixth psalm it is said, "Through the greatness of Thy power shall Thine enemies submit themselves unto Thee." Here the same word, "lie," is used; they are "enemies" still. Now when a thousand years of blessing have not sufficed to change this stubborn enmity, Satan is allowed to claim his own, and the multitudes who follow him show speedily the true condition of things: "the number of whom is as the sand of the sea."

Indeed the character of the millennium has been wrongly estimated by many, through confounding Christianity with that which replaces it upon the earth. But in fact, we must go for our pictures of it, not to the New Testament, but to the Old. The New Testament simply supplements the prophecies of the Old with the few verses in Rev. xx.-xxii, and these add little but the reign of the heavenly saints and the account of the apostacy at the close. The Old-Testament prophets give us pictures which, because they accord little with our thoughts of what should be, have been "spiritualized," as the phrase is, until they have lost all distinct meaning; while others have used them to lower the final portion of Christians to Jewish—or rather Israelitish—promises, as the apostle of the Gentiles declares them to be (Rom. ix. 4).

No doubt the Gentiles too are blessed, but by no means, as now, on the same footing with converted Israel. Everywhere in the Old-Testament prophets the old distinction is maintained. Nay, it is plainly said, that while on account of their rejection of Christ "therefore He will give them up, until she which travaileth hath brought forth"—until the nation be born as in a day, "then the remnant of His (Messiah's) brethren shall return unto the children of Israel;"—they shall be Israelites once more (Mic. v. 3).

And in the millennial earth Israel will have chief place.

Purified in the fiery trial to which they have been exposed, and gathered out of their long dispersion, Judah and Ephraim in their twelve tribes united again together, they will be the first example of a nation *all* saved and holy; "*all* Israel shall be saved" (Rom. xi. 26). According to the terms of the new covenant, to be made with Israel and Judah in the time of which we are speaking (Heb. viii. 8; Jer. xxxi. 31, etc.), "they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them; for I will be merciful unto their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

Thus sanctified, the glory of God, driven away from them by their sins, will return to Israel: "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Isa. ii. 2, 3.)

This is already very different from Christianity. When there are added to it the coming up of all nations yearly to Jerusalem to keep the feast of tabernacles, as spoken of by Zechariah (xiv.), and the restoration of the temple and its services, even to the reinstatement of the animal sacrifices as given by Ezekiel (xl.-xlvi.), the incredulity of many is aroused by such a reversion to the types and shadows of the old economy. Yet the declaration of Zechariah is as plain as can be, while the long detail of Ezekiel, and the blessing of the land, with the final settlement of the people in it which follow in Ezekiel, will neither admit of spiritualization nor of setting aside.

Christianity it is not, surely; but Christianity, as we have seen already, is a break in the earth's ages of probation. Of these the millennial age is really the last—a dispensation of sight rather than of faith, and for that very reason less spiritual than that addressed to faith. Men reason as to the heathen now, and even amid the blaze of full light require more evidence, and would throw on God the blame of not giving it. In the millennium, the earth is filled with the knowledge of His glory. The new Jerusalem descends from heaven; the Lord and His saints reign openly; the power of evil is repressed; the doom of disobedience is before the eyes of men (Isa. lxvi. 24) in that which the New Testament takes up as the type of hell itself:—yet with all this, men's hearts can resist all. Satan goes out once more to deceive the nations, and gathers them together to battle, *the number of whom is as the sand of the sea*. “And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city, and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.”

And now the end is at last reached. Satan is cast into the lake of fire; there is a great white throne, and One who sits on it, from before whose face the earth and the heavens flee away; the judgment of the wicked dead takes place, raised up in the resurrection of judgment. They are judged every one according to his works, and death and hades are cast into the lake of fire. The truth comes out that for man in every age there is no salvation save in the sovereign grace of God. “Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

#### ETERNITY.

As soon as ever we are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, eternity is for us entered upon. God's rest has not come, nor therefore the eternal condition of things

around us; but we are forever with the Lord, enjoying the fruit of His blessed work for us. The fruit of our work follows, and is connected in Scripture, not with our being caught up, but with the Lord's appearing—the day of *manifestation*.

As taken up, whether raised or changed, we are already in the likeness of Christ's glorious body. Redemption is complete in body, soul, and spirit; no spot of sin, no wrinkle of infirmity, remains for any. We have taken an everlasting farewell of both. Who can imagine the blessedness! escaped forever from all subjection to vanity, from the whole body of sin and all connected with it; nothing left but the memory of it to awaken the endless praise, fuller than angels'.

Then the Lord's presence, seeing Him as He is! All inability removed, with all the unlikeness to Him. Knowledge and enjoyment perfected in open vision. Divine love in all-revealing light.

With this, the Father's house, for so the Lord Himself connects these: "In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." To know Christ here is to know the Father; to come to Him, to come to the Father: to be with Him face to face cannot be separated from the Father's presence, nor this from the joy of the Father's house. With Him, in the children's place, owned as His in heaven now,—children brought home.

The book of Revelation, which gives the throne of God rather than the Father's house, adds to these things two others as found in the twenty-four elders round about the throne: they are "kings and priests"—a royal priesthood,—sharers with Him who is to come forth as King and Priest.

These things belong to all the heavenly company of redeemed ones. But Scripture distinguishes two classes of these—"the assembly of the first-born ones, whose names are written in heaven" and "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. xii. 23). That the latter class are Old-Testament saints is plain, from their being spoken of as all departed ones, while the Church waits on earth till called up by her Lord's voice. On the other hand, "the firstborn ones" are not such in time, but in privilege. And such is the Church, Christ's body. It may be, as others have thought, that the number of the crowned elders (24) indicates the union of these two companies ( $2 \times 12$ ) in the royal priesthood of Revelation iv.

Just when Babylon the false church is judged, and when the Lord is nearly ready to come forth, we hear that the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready; and then, too, it is granted her to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, for the fine linen is the *righteousnesses* of the saints. It is not now the "*best robe*" as in the parable, which is the value of Christ Himself before God; this is expressed by another word; but, according to the character of Revelation, it is the practical obedience of the saints which is now granted to them to be arrayed in. And this tells, surely, of the judgment-seat of Christ passed, and the reward of works measured out. Only grace, after all, can do this; and *such* garments need to be washed in the blood of Christ to be made white.\* This shows the immense difference between these and Christ as our righteousness, which it would be blasphemy to speak of as needing washing.

The marriage of the Lamb is now come, therefore; and

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\* It is well known that chap. xxii. 14 should read, "Blessed are they who have washed their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." See also chap. vii. 14, and comp. chap. vi. 11 and xii. 11.

soon after, the Lord appears with His saints, who, changing their attitude with His, come out as His "armies" to the judgment of the earth. The same "fine linen, clean and white," covers them still. Judgment is executed, as we have seen. The saints reign with Christ, the martyrs under the beast being added to them, and so the first resurrection is complete.\*

In the final judgment, the Lord alone is on the throne; while after it, the new Jerusalem, the bride of the Lamb, descends from heaven, to be the "tabernacle of God with men." The picture of the bride which closes the prophecy of the book is doubtless millennial, though the city itself be eternal.

The earth comes out of her baptism of fire (2 Pet. iii. 7-13) a "new earth;" for surely it is not regenerated as in the millennium, to be afterward set aside. The notice that "there was no more sea" agrees with this. The very type of instability and barrenness is removed. God is with men; although among these Israel retains a distinct place (Isa. lxvi. 22). The kingdom of the Son of Man is over; its object is achieved. Having brought all things back to God, and all enemies subdued forever, Christ delivers up the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all. This is God's rest, the seal of eternity put upon all—a rest never to be disturbed again.

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\* Note that xx. 4, 5, first sentence, gives the vision; the rest is interpretation; and this latter is not symbolic, or it would not be interpretation. It shows indeed how clear the vision itself is, that it does represent a real resurrection, and that the "thousand years" is literally this.