

The Approaching End of the Age by H. Grattan Guinness – Part II.

Progressive interpretation. Chapter III.



Continued from [Part II. Progressive interpretation. Chapter II.](#)

THE APOCALYPSE IS A CONTINUOUS PROPHECY EXTENDING FROM ITS OWN TIME, TO THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS.—IMPORTANCE OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE, IN ORDER TO ITS CORRECT INTERPRETATION.—IT IS A PROPHECY CONCERNING THE EXPERIENCES OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, IN THE WORLD, AND NOT CONCERNING THOSE OF THE JEWISH NATION.

VERY serious are the consequences of a refusal to admit uniformly and consistently, this symbolic character of the visions of the Apocalypse. Like most errors it brings further error in its train, and renders almost impossible any advance in the comprehension of the book. It answers beforehand, independently of investigation, the question whether the prophecies of the Apocalypse are fulfilled or not. It stands to reason, that if these emblematic visions are read under the impression that these things are to come to pass literally, the conclusion that the book consists entirely of unfulfilled prophecies is inevitable, for most assuredly no such things ever have come to pass.

Literalists must therefore be *futurists*, and the abandonment of the first error, is almost certain to lead to the abandonment of the second. The moment we begin to translate the symbolic into ordinary language, the prediction assumes such a very different shape, that it is no longer a self-evident fact that it must be unfulfilled. The inquiry is on the contrary awakened, has this happened? And we turn to history for an answer. If a fulfilment have taken place, we shall then be on the road to discover it; one such fulfilment clearly established will be a clue to others; and every fulfilment so discovered, will be an argument for the truth of that system of interpretation which led to the discovery.

Here we are met by an objection; some are found rash enough to condemn that system of interpretation which leads to the comparison of prophecy with history, on the ground that it does so. The sun, say they, requires no candle to show that it shines; the Bible requires no light from history; history is merely human; we are told to search the Scriptures, but we are nowhere told

to search Eusebius, or Gibbon, or Hallam. God is His own interpreter; He can explain His own Word without human help; history was not written in heaven, it is the wisdom of this world, foolishness with God, and so on.

Now this reasoning, though often advanced in the most oracular way as if it settled the question, is shallow, and based on fallacies; and yet, alas! it misleads many, calculated as it is to flatter ignorance, to foster indolence, and to encourage dogmatism, by throwing the reins on the neck of imagination, which is by it left free, to invent future facts and fulfilments, as it lists. A little reflection will show the superficial nature of the objection.

A knowledge of history is needful to the intelligent comprehension of prophecy. The Bible itself contains a large amount of history, from which alone we learn the fulfilment of many of its earlier prophecies, and without which we might still be expecting a fulfilment, which took place hundreds of years ago. What are the four Gospels, and the book of Acts, but histories, divinely inspired histories of course, but under the point of view we are now considering, their inspiration is mainly important as securing their accuracy and authenticity. They are *authentic records* of a series of facts, which took place eighteen hundred years ago, in a distant land; for a knowledge of which consequently we *must* be indebted to the testimony of others. By the help of such testimony we compare the facts that have occurred, with the predictions of prophecy, and perceive the marvellous and accurate fulfilment. Without such testimony we never could have done this; and to be ignorant of the existence and nature of such testimony, is to be practically without it. But Bible history, while it begins with the first Adam and the first paradise, does not, like Bible prophecy, reach on to the coming of the Second Adam in glory to re-establish paradise on earth. It ends about A.D. 60, and we have only uninspired though authentic records of all that has happened since.

Now according to these objectors, we are not to make use of these; not to compare New Testament prophecy with profane history. Either then there must be absolutely no prophetic light thrown by the Holy Ghost on the last eighteen hundred years, or else God does not intend us to have the benefit of it. Supposing a fulfilment clear as daylight to have taken place, we must remain in ignorance of it, unless God were pleased now to add an appendix to the Bible, to record facts which many trustworthy historians have already recorded. Revelation never teaches things which common sense is sufficient to discover. For instance, a tenfold division of the Roman empire was predicted by Daniel, prior to the establishment of the kingdom of Christ on earth. The Roman empire was still existing in its integrity when John closed the canon of Scripture by his prophecy, which repeats the prediction. Blot out now all historical records, deprive the church of the help of all uninspired testimony, and Christians must to this day remain in ignorance of the solemnly momentous fact, that this prediction has been fulfilled during the last twelve hundred years, and the strong presumption to be derived therefrom that the coming of the Lord is nigh, even at the doors. Nor will it do to say, ah, but that is a notorious fact, evident to our senses without historical testimony. No: our knowledge of it depends upon uninspired testimony, historical or otherwise; and the question is not, to what extent may we make use of uninspired records to elucidate inspired predictions, but,

may we make use of them *at all*? The answer is clear, we must, or for ever remain ignorant, whether the holy prophecies of the Word of God regarding post canonical events, are fulfilled or not.

A still more rash assertion is also made; it is said that no events of this parenthetical church dispensation (save those of its closing crisis) are, or could be, subjects of prophecy.

That this statement is not true is proved by the above instance, and by many more that might be alleged. But it is evident that a knowledge of history is needful to warrant the statement! How without such knowledge, can it be ascertained that the visions of Revelation for instance, do *not* present a connected outline of the leading events between the past and future advents of Christ? A knowledge of what has actually taken place is as needful to justify a denial, as an assertion of the fact. We must know a person as well before we can pronounce that a certain portrait does *not* resemble him, as in order to assert that it *does*.

This prejudice against the use of history in the interpretation of prophecy, seems frequently to be based on a confusion which is made, between the facts recorded by historians and the opinions of the historians who record them. Grant that the latter being merely human are worthless, the former are none the less important. Trustworthy historians record events which *they* neither invented nor caused, but which occurred under God's providential government; it was He who caused or permitted these events; they are in one sense as Divine, as prophecy; that is, both proceed from Him. Prophecy is God telling us beforehand what shall happen; authentic history is men telling us what has, in the providence of God, taken place. In truth each is best understood in the light of the other; the moral features of events, occupy the main place in the prophecy, so that by its study we learn to weigh things in God's balances, to judge of men and systems by a Divine standard. But the history also elucidates the prophecy; when we see what has been allowed to occur in fulfilment of a prediction, we learn what was intended in the announcement, and understand the perhaps previously mysterious form, in which it was made. Apparent contradictions are reconciled, difficulties are removed, and we are filled with admiration and awe at the foreknowledge and wisdom evinced in predictions, over which the ignorant can only puzzle or speculate.

Authentic history ought not to be deprecated as merely the wisdom of this world; it is something more, it is a record of God's providential government of the world. Besides it is vain and foolish to deny, that mental cultivation in general, an acquaintance with ancient languages and literature, with history and with science, *are* a help, in the understanding of Scripture and especially of prophetic Scripture. They are not needful to a spiritual apprehension of saving truth, thanks be to God, nor to growth in grace and in the experimental knowledge of the Lord. God can and does dispense with them, but He can and does also sanctify and use them, for the elucidation of His Word. By themselves they are worthless, for they deal only with the letter; but, sanctified and used by the Holy Ghost, they are invaluable, as helping to explain the letter, in and through which we grasp the spirit.

It is a strange estimate to form of the dignity of the inspired book of the

all-wise God, that those ignorant of his works in nature and providence, are as capable of understanding it, as those familiar with them. It is true that the unlearned Christian has, equally with the learned, the indwelling Spirit to guide him into all truth. But it is also true that he needs in addition *ministry*, human teaching; else why has Christ given *teachers* to his church? Books are but written ministry. Ignorance is an infirmity, an unavoidable one with many it is true, and one for which help is provided; but it is as much an infirmity of the mind, as blindness or lameness is of the body. We blame not the blind and the lame for not seeing and walking, but we should blame them for refusing the help of those who possess the powers of which they are deprived. We blame not the ignorant for their ignorance when it is unavoidable; but we should blame them for refusing assistance, and for glorying in that ignorance as a peculiar advantage. The ignorant Christian must be indebted to the learned in many ways; but for the labour of such, he would indeed have no Bible; for what could *he* learn from the original text? And if the translation put into his hands be defective, how but from the criticisms of the learned, shall he remedy the defect? This is surely designed of God, and is one of the ways in which "the whole body, compacted together by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." It is impossible to assign any reason, why the wisdom and knowledge derived from historical research, should not be made available, as well as every other kind of science, for the elucidation of Scripture.

We dare not for these reasons exclude the light afforded by history, in the endeavour to answer the questions suggested above, *is the prophecy of the Apocalypse fulfilled or partly so, or is it still entirely unfulfilled?* And is it in its general scope Christian or Jewish? The two inquiries are so closely related, that it is impossible to pursue them apart; it is evident that if the Revelation be partially fulfilled, it is in the history of the Christian church we shall be able to trace the fulfilment, seeing the Jewish nation was already cast away,—"broken off" for a time,—before this prophecy was published; and it is equally evident that if it relate to the future history of restored Israel, no fulfilment can have yet commenced, seeing Israel is still scattered, and Jerusalem trodden down of the Gentiles.

We have therefore to ascertain from the internal evidence of the prophecy itself, and from the external evidence of analogy and history, the truth as to these two closely connected points.

And first what says the Apocalypse of itself? To whom is it addressed? This is a fair and fundamental question; it is thus that we judge of the object and scope of the epistles of the New Testament, and of the "burdens" of the ancient prophets. The epistles are addressed "to the saints and to the faithful in Christ Jesus," or "to the church" in such and such a place. Observing this, we argue, the Jews and the ungodly have no right to appropriate the contents of these letters; they are for believers in Christ alone; confusion will result if unbelievers take to themselves these Divine messages. The argument applies with equal force to the Apocalypse. It is addressed to Christ's "servants," "to the seven churches of Asia." This is

reiterated; the expressions occur both at the opening and at the close, of the book. "The Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto *his servants* things which must shortly be done." "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things, *in the churches*." On reading these distinct declarations, simple unsophisticated minds would surely conclude, that the Jews and unbelievers in general, have no more to do with this prophecy than they have with the Epistle to the Ephesians. They may possibly be alluded to in the one, as in the other, but it is not for them, it is not mainly concerned with them; *it is for us*; Christians alone were Christ's servants in the days of Domitian, when John saw and heard these things; to Christians alone was it sent, the seven churches represented the *whole* church, the prophecy is for the Christian church, and they take the children's bread to give it to outsiders, who would rob the church of her Lord's last gift.

It is no use to say, yes! But though given to the church, it might still be a revelation of the counsels of God about others than herself. *It might*; the Epistle to the Ephesians might have been a treatise on the state and prospects of the lost ten tribes, but it was not; the vision of Nebuchadnezzar, might have been a vision of the restoration of Israel, but it was not; the visions of Daniel might have been visions of the seven churches in Asia, but they were not, nor was it likely that they would be, nor is it likely that the Lord Jesus in his last prophetic communication to his cherished church, from whom for eighteen hundred years He was to be hidden, would have nothing more pressing, personal, and important to reveal to her, than the destiny of a future Jewish remnant, with which she has nothing in common, and the final judgments on a world, from which she is already delivered, and from which, according to this theory, she will have been previously removed.

Did she need no guidance, no comfort, no sustainment with the cordial of hope, for the years of earthly pilgrimage that lay before her? True, He had before revealed in broad outline the sufferings that awaited her, and the glories that should follow; but had He, who knows the end from the beginning, and who foresaw all that has since happened, no further words of warning and of cheer for His long-to-be-tempted, and sorely-to-be-persecuted church? Strange, that such an idea should find place in Christian hearts! What! Shall our Lord be less kind and careful than an earthly friend or parent? A father sends forth his young son into a world which he must face alone, into circumstances in which he cannot further communicate with him for some years; he foresees that the separation will be far longer than the lad conceives, that his son will be exposed to temptations and snares, into which he will be only too prone to fall, that he will meet a crafty, specious, dangerous, deadly foe, in the guise of a friend, and that he will have to undergo sufferings that will be hard for him to bear, before he regains the paternal roof. He puts a long prophetic letter into his hand as they part, with solemn, earnest, repeated, injunctions to him to read and mark its contents. In distant lands and dreadful difficulties, the son opens this letter, and finds—suited advice and encouragement? Helpful warning and direction? Oh no! But an elaborate description of what his father intends to do for his younger brother, after his own return home! What should we say of the wisdom or tenderness of such a parent? Do these interpreters indeed believe that God

inspired this prophecy, and that Christ loves his church?

Further, what does the Apocalypse say about its own scope, and about the time to which it refers? Again the first verse of the book supplies a simple and direct answer. It was given to show to Christ's servants "*things that must shortly come to pass*," and the next verse urges the study of the book, on the ground that "*the time is at hand*." In the last chapter the angel speaks of these things as "things that must shortly be done," and commands John not to seal the sayings of the prophecy, for the same reason, "*the time is at hand*." These words may measure time by the thousand-years-to-a-day scale, may not mean "at hand" according to human, but only according to Divine chronology. But it is not likely that this is the case, because in another closely related prophecy, we have expressions of an exactly opposite character, which can be proved to measure time by the ordinary standard. Daniel is twice or thrice told to shut up and seal certain parts of his prophecies, which related to events to take place in this dispensation, "even to the time of the end," because "the time appointed was great" and "the vision for many days." Now the most distant of those events was near if measured by the Divine scale, distant only according to the common computation. *If these expressions in Daniel are used in their merely human sense, we have every reason to suppose that it is the same with the similar expressions in Revelation.* To Daniel, Christ said, "shut up the words and seal the book even to the time of the end," and to John, when these things had already begun to come to pass, the angel says, "seal not the sayings, for the time is at hand." It would not have been at hand in the ordinary sense, if the prophecy relates mainly to still future events. We have every reason therefore to believe, that it relates, on the contrary, to events that began soon after the apostle received the revelation, and that the fulfilment has been in progress ever since.

Another strong presumption that the visions of the Apocalypse form a continuous prophecy, stretching over the whole of this dispensation, exists in their analogy with the prophecies of Daniel. The resemblance between these two is marked and close; both are in the symbolic language, both were given to aged saints who were greatly beloved, who were confessors and all but martyrs; the "Man clothed in linen and girded with the gold of Uphaz, whose face was as lightning, whose eyes were as fire, and whose voice was as the voice of a multitude," who addressed Daniel, on the banks of the Hiddekel, is unquestionably the same Divine Being who addressed John in Patmos. The prophecies were in both cases communicated when the temple was in ruins, and the Jews dispersed; and both Daniel and John, had been trained in a school of peculiar experiences, to fit them to become recipients of these sacred revelations. We take then the symbolic prophecies of Daniel, as those likely to afford the most direct analogy to the symbolic prophecies of the Apocalypse, and we ask, do *they* date from contemporary events, or from a far distant future? And do they present a *continuous* sketch of the interval they cover, or do they dwell exclusively on salient and distant crises?

The question scarcely needs a reply. The fourfold image seen by Nebuchadnezzar begins with the Babylonian monarchy of which he was the first great head. "Thou art this head of gold." It pursues its even course down

through all the times of the Gentiles, and ends with the millennial kingdom of Christ.

The second prophecy of Daniel, that of the four great beasts or empires, was given forty-nine years later, in the first year of Belshazzar, that is towards the end of Israel's captivity, when the days of Babylon's glory were fast drawing to a close; when the time was rapidly approaching for the kingdom to be numbered, finished, divided, and given to others. Accordingly, while the first beast is still the Babylonian empire, the first particular noticed in the prophecy, is the plucking of the eagle's wings, on the lion's back. The prophecy thus starts from the diminished glory of the latter end of Babylon, rather than from the golden splendour of its commencement, that is, *from contemporary events*. It presents a second and fuller sketch of the political history of the Gentile world, (for the spiritual power, the little horn, is glanced at principally in its political aspects,) and traces the main features of the times of the Gentiles, down to the same point as its predecessor, the everlasting kingdom of the Most High.

The third prophecy of Daniel, that of the ram and the he goat, with its four horns and its little horn, was given, as its opening states, in the third year of Belshazzar, two years later than the preceding prophecy. It opens with the Medo-Persian empire, and the conquests of Cyrus. Now when this prophecy was given, Cyrus had already been reigning seven years in Persia, and the rise of his universal empire was close at hand. It gives a continuous history of the Medo-Persian and Grecian empires, and of the Mohammedan politico-religious power, thus ranging from soon after its own date, to far on in the Christian era.

The fourth prophecy of Daniel, that of the seventy weeks to elapse between the end of the captivity, and the coming of Messiah the Prince, began to be fulfilled about eighty years after it was delivered, when Artaxerxes gave the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem. But the decree of Cyrus, to restore and build the temple, and to liberate the Jews from captivity, was promulgated only two years after the date of this prophecy, and would no doubt be taken by the Jews at first, as marking the commencement of the seventy weeks. This prophecy includes a period of about five hundred years, and reaches from the restoration under Nehemiah to the final destruction of Jerusalem by Titus. Its object was less to indicate intervening events, than to measure *the period up to the great event of human history*; the previous and the following prophecies, delineate the main outlines of the history of the period.

And lastly the fifth and great closing prophecy of Daniel, given by our Lord Himself, and recorded in the 11th and 12th chapters, *begins with the date of the vision*, "the third year of Cyrus king of Persia," and takes even a retrospective glance to the first year of Darius the Mede (chap. xi. I). It predicts the succession of the Persian monarchs, condensing into one sentence the reigns of Cambyses, Smerdis, and Darius Hystaspes, down to the overthrow of the rich and mighty Xerxes, who stirred up all against the realm of Grecia. It traces next the history of the Ptolemies and of the Seleucidae, down to the desolations and persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes, gives full detail of the career of the wilful king, and of the closing events of this

dispensation, ending with the deliverance of Israel, and the resurrection of the just. It embraces thus a period of at least 2400 years, and extends from the fall of the *typical*, to the fall of the *antitypical* Babylon; so that *all* the historical prophecies of Daniel start from events close at hand when they were given, and predict with varying degrees of fullness, a series of other events, to follow in regular sequence, to the point at which they close.

Now, judging by analogy, we should expect that when He who revealed to Daniel the things noted in the Scripture of truth, came six hundred years later, to reveal to John "things that must shortly come to pass," He would follow the same method. On opening the Apocalypse, this expectation is confirmed; we find that it starts, like all Daniel's prophecies, from "the things that are," and that it ends like them, with the great consummation. In the nature of things, it could not go over *all* the ground of the older prophecies. Many of the events foretold by Daniel had already transpired. The three great empires had risen and fallen; the fourth was then in its glory. Antiochus had desolated Judaea and defiled the temple; Messiah had come, and had been cut off; Titus had destroyed Jerusalem. So much of the journey lay behind John in Patmos; these facts were no longer themes for prophecy, but materials for history. Israel's fortunes were no longer the object of main interest, either to Him who was about to give this last of all prophecies, or to him who was about to receive it, or to those for whose sakes he was to write it.

Blindness in part had happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles should be come in. The Apocalypse was not given in the sacred tongue of the Hebrews consequently, but in gentile Greek, just as Daniel's two earlier prophecies, which refer to the times of the Gentiles, without much allusion to Israel, are in gentile Chaldee. Taking these altered circumstances into account, what should we expect the last revelation granted to John in Patmos to contain? Should we, judging by analogy, expect that, passing over in silence eighteen hundred years, crowded with events of deep interest, of stupendous importance to seventy or eighty generations of his saints, the Lord Jesus would reveal through this Christian apostle, only the particulars of a brief closing crisis of earthly history, subsequent to the church's removal, and relating mainly to a future Jewish remnant? Assuredly not! We should expect this final prophecy, sent directly by Christ Himself to his church, through his most spiritually minded apostle, to contain *an outline of all that should befall that church, from the time then present, until the Lord's return, with perhaps brief indications of subsequent events*. A first perusal of the prophetic part of the book, gives the impression that our expectation is correct. We find a series of symbolic visions, and we observe a perceptible correspondence between some of them, and some of Daniel's, exactly as would be the case supposing these visions to traverse the same ground as his *later* ones.

We find in the Apocalypse no beasts answering to Daniel's first three, but the fourth reappears very prominently with his ten horns; we find no periods corresponding to the seventy weeks or the 2300 days, but the "time times and a half" is repeated in several forms, and in the same relative connection. We find in the closing visions, features that identify them with the final scenes of Daniel, and it is difficult to resist the conviction, that the

intervening apocalyptic visions, must be *symbolic predictions of the moral and spiritual aspects, of all that has happened to the church of Christ, from, John's day to the present time, and of all that shall happen, to the close.*

But analogy furnishes a stronger argument still. "The Old Testament, when rightly understood," says Augustine, "is one great prophecy of the New." The records of the past are pregnant with the germs of a corresponding but more exalted future. The history of the seed of Abraham after the flesh, is, throughout, typical of the history of his seed by faith. The Lord's dealings with them, were types of his dealings with us; for every fact in their history, some counterpart may be noted in our own; our experiences are but a new edition, on a different scale, of theirs. Now under the old covenant, prophecy threw its light beforehand, on almost every event of importance that happened to the nation of Israel, from the days of Abraham to the days of Christ, the fall of Jerusalem and its temple, the dispersion of the Jews, and the end of that age.

The light of prophecy is a privilege, a blessing, a gift; it is always so spoken of in Scripture; "He gave them prophets," "He gave gifts unto men, . . . apostles, *prophets*, evangelists, pastors, teachers"; and though Christianity possesses many higher privileges, and nobler gifts than Judaism, it lacks none of the real blessings of that earlier economy. We have exchanged many a shadow for substance, but lost no substantial good. New Testament prophecy may therefore be expected to throw its light, on every event of importance to happen to the church of Christ, from the fall of Jerusalem to the second advent, that is, from the end of the Jewish, to the end of the Christian age.

Among the events made subjects of prophecy in the Old Testament were the birth of Isaac, the rapid increase of Israel, the descent into Egypt, the sufferings of the Israelites under the Pharaohs, the duration of their bondage, the exodus, the forty years in the desert, the possession of Canaan, its very division among the tribes; the characters of Saul, David, Solomon, and many other individuals; the building of the temple, the division of the kingdom into two, the Assyrian invasion, and Israel's captivity; the Babylonian invasion and the seventy years' captivity of Judah, the return from Babylon, the time to elapse, and many of the events to occur, between it and the coming of Messiah the Prince, His birth, character, true nature, ministry, sufferings, and death; the ministry of John the Baptist, the rejection of Israel, the call of the Gentiles, and the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus.

Was *Israel* ever left during a long period, full of momentous changes, and events of solemn national importance, without the light and guidance of prophecy? Is there in their history any "mighty unrepresented vacuum," of the occurrences of which we can say, great as are these events in human estimation, they are deemed unworthy of Divine notice in prophecy? If such be the case there will be a distinct analogy, on which to base the theory, that the Apocalypse is still wholly unfulfilled, But such is not the case. The chain is almost unbroken, and though four hundred years elapsed between the last of the prophets and the coming of Messiah, Daniel's prophecy fills in

the events of the interval, so that no gap of even a century occurs in the long series.

Is it likely that there should be no analogy, but a perfect contrast, in the history of the antitypical Israel? Has she no Egypt to leave and no wilderness to traverse, no land to inherit, no oppressors to tyrannize over her, no evil kings to mislead her, no reformers and deliverers to arise, no BABYLON to carry her captive, no temple to rebuild, no Messiah to look for, no judgments to apprehend, no rest to inherit? Are *hers* less important than theirs? Are her foes so much more obvious, her dangers so much more patent, that it should be superfluous to supply her with prophetic light to detect them? Because *they* were an earthly people, and *she* a heavenly church, is she therefore not on earth, and not amid the ungodly? Are her enemies heavenly because the church is so? Nay, but most earthly, for the wicked spirits against whom the church wrestles, wage their warfare incarnate in earthly, sensual, *devilish* systems, and in actual men, as did Satan in the serpent in Eden. Every conceivable reason would suggest her greater need of prophetic light.

Now the Apocalypse is the book of the New Testament which answers to "the prophets" of the Old. If then it contain predictions of the first spread of Christianity, of the hosts of martyrs who sealed their testimony with their blood, during the ten pagan persecutions, of the reception of Christianity by Constantine and the Roman empire, of the gradual growth of corruption in the church, of the irruptions of the Goths and Vandals, and the break up of the old Roman empire into ten kingdoms, of the rise and development of popery, of the rise and rapid conquests of Mohammedanism, of the long continued and tremendous sufferings of the church under papal persecutions, of the fifty millions of martyrs slain by the Romish Church, of the enormous political power attained by the popes, of their Satanic craft and wickedness, of the Reformation, of the gradual decay of the papal system and the extinction of the temporal power of the popes: *if it contain predictions of these events, which we know to have taken place in the history of the antitypical Israel*, then we have a *perfect analogy* with the Old Testament. If on the other hand, the Apocalypse alludes to none of these events, but passing them all over in silence, gives only the history of an Antichrist who has not yet appeared, and of judgments not yet commenced, nor to be commenced until the church is in heaven, then instead of a striking scriptural analogy, we have a glaring and most unaccountable contrast.

We say advisedly *unaccountable*, for none of the reasons assigned for this supposed contrast between Israel's experience and our own in this matter, are satisfactory. Their calling was an earthly one, ours is a heavenly one, it is true; nevertheless our calling from heaven, and to heaven, leaves us still on earth. We have earthly connections and relations; we are not of the world, but we are in the world. The acts of earthly monarchs and the changes of kingdoms and dynasties, affect the church even as they affected her Lord, in the days of his flesh. How came the prophecies "I called my Son out of Egypt," and "He shall be called a Nazarene," to be accomplished? What took the virgin mother to Bethlehem? Why was Paul left bound two whole years? Secular political events have their influence, their mighty influence, on the

church, notwithstanding her heavenly calling, and may therefore well be revealed to her by the spirit of prophecy. It is evident there is nothing in the peculiarity of this dispensation, which precludes the church from receiving predictions, of specific events to take place during its course, because *the epistles contain such predictions*. The fact that the Holy Ghost has announced to the church, events reaching through the whole dispensation cannot be denied. "He who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way; and then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." The hindering obstacle, whatever it was, was in existence when the apostle wrote, and was to continue in existence until another event took place, the rise of the man of sin, and that wicked one was to continue till the Lord's coming. Here we have a prophecy the fulfilment of which, starting from its own date, reaches to the consummation, and covers the whole interval, leaving no room for a break.

There is therefore no ground for asserting, that the fulfilment of the Apocalypse must be future, because the church cannot be the subject of prophecies whose sphere is earth. If she may be the subject of one or two, she may equally well be the subject of a hundred, and the question must be decided on other grounds. If the first generation of Christians were forewarned of the fall of Jerusalem, we may be forewarned of the fall of Babylon. If they knew beforehand that Jerusalem was to be compassed about with armies, we may know that the power of Turkey is to decay. In principle there is no difference; a dispensation that admits of the one, admits also of the other.

The interpretation of this book which asserts a past historic fulfilment of the greater part of its mystic visions, is then in perfect harmony with strong scriptural analogies; and the interpretation which asserts them all to be future and unfulfilled, is in violent and unnatural opposition to all analogy and would require the strongest internal evidence to support it. But such internal evidence it can never receive, seeing it is a negative, and not a positive theory; it denies the historic fulfilment, but substitutes no other that can be tested by its correspondence or otherwise with the terms of the prediction. Internal evidence in its favour is therefore impossible; there is no analogy to support it; and we are driven to the conclusion that it is untenable,

The principal test, however, by which to determine the period covered by this prophecy is a comparison with history. Can any series of events be indicated, which have transpired since the Christian era, which bear a sufficiently clear resemblance to the symbolic visions of the Apocalypse, to justify the assertion, that the prophecy is for the most part a fulfilled one? If so, candour would admit, that it settles the question,

We firmly believe that such a fulfilment is clearly traceable. Yet as Jewish unbelief refuses to perceive that the character and mission, the life and death, of Jesus of Nazareth, fulfil the long series of Messianic predictions, so there may be a Christian unbelief, which refuses to perceive, that the events of the Christian era, answer to the predictions of this Christian prophecy.

Yet if such a series of events have taken place, it ought not to be difficult to observe the resemblance between the history and the prophecy. It is not a question of minor details, but of events of stupendous magnitude, affecting a vast extent of the earth, and reaching through centuries of time. It is not a question of remote antiquity, nor of half explored, dimly known regions; no such difficulties encumber the problem. The things that have transpired in the Roman earth, since the days of Domitian, when the Apocalypse was written, especially those concerning the Christian church, both true and false, and those transpiring in our own day, are not things done in a corner, concerning which there may exist a great variety of opinions and of questions that can never be decided. On the contrary, we have records abundant and varied enough of the whole period, to enable us to live it over again in imagination; and we have remains, and monuments, and present facts, which are so linked with all that eventful past, that no ingenuity can distort or deny, any of its main features. The last eighteen hundred years, present no *terra incognita* to the historian; explorers may not conjure up characters, or concoct transactions, to suit their taste; dates cannot be adapted to fit theories; every error is sure to be detected, and every assertion sifted. Very narrow are the limits within which invention may act; almost boundless is the field for examination and research. This being the case, it must be not only possible, but easy, to recognise the fulfilment of the apocalyptic prophecies if it exist, provided only we are sufficiently acquainted with the facts of history, and rightly understand the predictions themselves.

If a photograph of an extensive and varied landscape, be presented to a person familiar with the scene, he will not fail to recognise its main features; he might not be immediately able to detect the miniature of his own homestead, amid the many similar to it, nor to identify every spire of the neighbouring city, and every little detail of the picture. But the more he studies it, the more he will see in it, and the microscope will enable him to identify objects, which one without a microscope and with less knowledge of the neighbourhood, would never notice. It is thus with a student of the Apocalypse who is familiar with history. Or, to reverse the simile; one who has long being acquainted with a series of photographs, say of the Holy Land, who has pored over them with loving interest and impressed them deep in his memory, is transported to Palestine, and wanders amid those very scenes. He stands on the shores of a blue lake which reflects a snowy cone that rises far away to the north; the level tops of a range of barren mountains stretch along the opposite shore; a ruined, earthquake-shaken town and castle lie behind him; and away to the south a river makes its way out of the lake. He needs no guide to tell him where he is; he stops not to observe the details of the scene; this combination of broad features so often noted in the photograph is enough: "Hermon," he exclaims "that exceeding high mountain apart! Tiberias, solitary survivor of sister cities! Mountains of Bashan, river Jordan, I know ye all"; and he would smile incredulously at any one who should say, "Well, in spite of the general resemblance, I question after all whether this is the sea of Galilee!"

It is thus with a student of history who is familiar with the Apocalypse. The remembered photograph serves to identify the real scene, as in the former case the well remembered scene interpreted the picture; if there be a

resemblance it would be impossible that either could be known, and the other not recognised, if contemplated with sufficient care and attention.

The reason that the resemblance is not more uniformly perceived, between the predictions of Revelation and the facts of history since the Christian era, must then lie, either in a want of thorough acquaintance with one or other, or else in a want of careful and unprejudiced attention to the correspondence between them. Those who have taken the Apocalypse literally, have of course little idea what it predicts when translated into unsymbolic language; and history is too often contemplated, from the worldly political point of view in which it is generally written, for the resemblance between the Divine delineation of its facts, and the facts themselves, to be easily recognised.

Besides this, a foregone conclusion that the book of Revelation is unfulfilled, prevents many from perceiving the proofs to the contrary. But we feel no hesitation in asserting, that a candid student, who admits the Apocalypse to be symbolic, and patiently endeavours by the help of other Scripture to translate its symbols, and who then proceeds to compare its predictions, with the authentic historical records of the Christian era, will be driven to admit, that there is as clear a correspondence between the two, as between any other prophecy and its fulfilment.

We cannot enlarge on this argument here; to do it justice would be to give an exposition of the greater part of the book. The correspondence will be traced somewhat fully as to one or two of the visions, in the third part of this work; and any force of truth therein perceived, must be allowed to lend its aid in deciding our present point, the general principles on which the book ought to be interpreted. We entreat the Futurist reader to remember, that it is possible for the plainest and most satisfactory fulfilment of a prophecy, to be forced on the attention, and yet be unperceived; witness the Jews in the days of Christ; witness the disciples by the empty sepulchre, And yet if a fulfilment of the Apocalypse has been accomplishing for more than seventeen hundred years, and if there remains very little now to be fulfilled, *it is of momentous interest to the church of Christ that she should be aware of the fact*. If in watching an exhibition of dissolving views we judge of the nearness of the conclusion, merely by the time that has elapsed since it began, we may have a vague impression that the end cannot be far off; but if we have held a programme of the proceedings in our hand all the time, and have observed that each scene appeared as announced, and that only the final one remains, we have a certainty that *the end must be close at hand*, which is a very different state of mind.

A Divine programme of the proceedings of this dispensation has been placed in our hands; they who avail themselves of it, they who study it, and watch the dissolving views presented on the stage of history, know how many of the pre-appointed configurations have appeared, melted away, and been replaced by others; they know the position on the programme of the one now on the stage, and they know what remains! They lift up their heads, they know that their redemption draweth nigh, yea very, very nigh!

Nor are the claims of this principle of historical interpretation in the least invalidated by the fact, that interpreters differ among themselves as

to the precise application of some of the visions. Nearly all the writers of the first fifteen centuries of the Christian era, entertained the view that the Apocalypse was a comprehensive prophecy, reaching from the date of its publication to the end of all things, and endeavoured consequently to find its historical solution. It can be no wonder that, as the page of history has unrolled itself, greater accuracy should have been attained, than it was possible for early students to possess. At the time of the Reformation, and subsequently, the great body of commentators still interpreted the Apocalypse on the same principle, but naturally with a far closer approximation to the truth, though they were by no means unanimous in their expositions of detail; and many are the points of controversy which still exist. But the essential agreement, more than counterbalances the minor differences,* and it would be strange indeed if such differences did *not* exist.

* We extract the following note from an admirable little pamphlet by P. H. Gosse, F.R.S., entitled, "The Revelation: How is it to be Interpreted?" (London: Morgan and Chase, 23, Warwick Lane, Paternoster Row) which we earnestly commend to the consideration of those who hold Futurist views. The following list of Presentist expositors of the Apocalypse includes, so far as I have been able to ascertain, all of any note from the era of the Reformation to the publication of the 'Horae' of Mr. Elliott: Luther, Bullinger, Bale, Chytraeus, Marlorat, Foxe, Brightman, Pareus, Mede, Vitringa, Daubuz, Sir Isaac Newton, Whiston, Bengel, Bishop Newton, Bicheno, Faber, Frere, Irving, Cuninghame, Habershon, Bickersteth, Birks, Woodhouse, Keith, Elliott, twenty-six in all. Out of these there are agreed as follows:

1. That seals I. to IV. are the decline of the pagan empire.
2. That seal VI. is the fall of paganism under Constantine.
3. That trumpets I. to IV. are the Gothic invasions.
4. That trumpet V. is the Saracens.
5. That trumpet VI. is the Turks.
6. That the little opened book refers to the Reformation.
7. That chapter xi, is the papal persecution of saints as heretics.
8. That chapter xii, is the depression and recession from view of the true church during the papal ages.
9. That the beasts are aspects of the Papacy.
10. That the vials are the great French Revolution and its results.
11. That chapter xvii. is Rome.
12. That chapter xviii. is the Papacy.
13. That a day is the symbol of a year.

It is right to observe that, the first four seals and first four trumpets referring each to several things, the agreement must be understood as admitting some diversity in details. Also that the application to the French revolution of the vials, could not possibly be made by expositors who wrote before the close of the last century, that is more than half of the whole number. Sir Isaac Newton and Whiston, however, shrewdly foresaw the great infidel revolution, as the earthquake of the seventh trumpet, "that infidelity was to break in pieces the antichristian party which had so long corrupted Christianity." (Whiston, p. 46.)

Prophetic interpretation is not milk for babes, but rather strong meat for those that are of full age, and have their senses exercised by reason of use. But which of the very simplest doctrines of Scripture excludes controversy? Is it an argument against the true view of the atonement, that numerous erroneous and defective views exist? Is there no revealed truth on the subject of church government, because such widely differing creeds on the point prevail? If we cannot see eye to eye on such subjects as these, shall

we marvel that differences appear in the application of the symbolic visions of Revelation to history? The multitude of the events predicted, their range and variety, the peculiar language in which they are foretold, the fact that they bear a strong testimony against existing corruptions in the church, and consequently enlist the antagonism of all who uphold these corruptions, these things are quite sufficient to account for the measure of disagreement, which is found among interpreters, and which decreases in proportion as acquaintance with the subject increases, and as every fresh phase of contemporary history, adds its testimony to the previously existing mass.

But it is needful to notice one or two objections, commonly advanced by a certain school of Futurist interpreters, who hold very strongly the parenthetical character of the present dispensation; because they appear to have more weight than on examination they prove to possess. They settle the question as to the character of the Book of Revelation, in a summary and apparently conclusive way, but in reality on superficial and unsubstantial grounds. The first is a sort of attempt to prove an *alibi* on behalf of the church: "the church cannot be in any way the subject of the prophetic visions of Revelation (chapter vi–xix.) because she is already seen in heaven in the two previous chapters. All that happens after chapter v. is subsequent to the rapture of the church; it must therefore refer to the Jewish remnant." "The church is never seen on earth, or anywhere but in heaven, from the end of chapter iii. till in chapter xix. Christ comes forth from heaven, and the armies which were in heaven follow in his train." *

* "Eight Lectures on Prophecy." W. T. 3rd edition, p. 192.

Fully admitting that the four-and-twenty elders and the cherubim of Revelation iv., v., include the church, we hold, that it would be a sufficient answer to this objection to say, part of the church are seen in heaven, while part are still represented as suffering on earth; or to say "He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together, in heavenly places in Christ" even now, while we still groan, and fight, and toil, and die, on earth. But the chapters themselves supply a more conclusive answer. The church is not only seen in heaven, but she is seen taking part in the action of the beautiful introductory episode of this Divine drama, What is that action? It is the taking and opening by the Lamb, of the seven sealed book. *This action took place while John was an exile in Patmos*; for ever since, the mysteries hidden under those seven seals have been discovered and published to the world.

Clearly the book is not now shut and sealed; for we know its contents; each seal covered or contained a vision, *not be it observed the fulfilment of a vision, but the vision itself*. The visions were not seen till the seals were broken, and the seals were not broken till the Lamb took the book. But the visions were seen eighteen hundred years ago; therefore the Lamb took the book and broke the seals thereof, eighteen hundred years ago; that is, *the scene in which the church is represented as taking part in heaven occurred eighteen hundred years ago*. But the church was *not actually* in heaven eighteen hundred years ago, and therefore there is no ground for the assertion that the church *will be actually* in heaven before the events symbolised in chapters vi. to xix. take place. The church was in heaven, *in*

the only sense in which she will be there till the marriage of the Lamb shall come, when John was in Patmos. In other words the Apocalypse represents the church as mystically in heaven, while still actually on earth, even as Ephesians ii., Philipians iii., and other scriptures do.

So, while we gladly grant to our Futurist brethren, that a portion of the church is represented as in heaven, in chapters iv, v.. we ask them to grant with equal candour that a portion is represented on earth in the subsequent chapters. The one is just as evident as the other; and to deny it is both to destroy the dramatic unity so markedly stamped on this prophecy, and to obscure one of its grandest lessons.

The prophecy is addressed, as we have seen, to *Christ's servants* and to the *churches*; the ascription of praise in chap. i, § is evidently *Christian* praise, it is the praise of those who have been loved by Jesus, and washed from their sins in his blood. John speaks of himself as the brother, and fellow sufferer of those to whom he wrote, and John was a *Christian* confessor, a prisoner of Jesus Christ in Patmos, as much as Paul had been in Rome. He says he was in exile "for the word of God, and for the testimony which he held," which expression therefore means *Christianity*. Under the fifth seal we catch a glimpse of a company of martyrs who were slain "for the word of God and for the testimony which they held," that is, for confessing their *Christian faith*, like John; they were slain because they were Christians. White robes are given to them, and they are told to wait till another company of martyrs should be killed *as they were*, that is *as Christians*. In chapter vii. we have presented to us a company in heaven, unquestionably Christians also, for they are gathered out of every nation, kindred, and tongue, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. In chapter viii, "the prayers of all saints" and "the prayers of the saints" are mentioned; now prayer ascends from suppliants on earth, and "saints" in New Testament phraseology means *Christians*. We have no right in the last book of the New Testament to revert to an Old Testament signification of this word. Let the general tone of John's Gospel and epistles be recalled, and his choice of *this* word to designate true Christians, in the midst of an ungodly world and falsely professing church, will be felt to be in beautiful harmony. What is the grand distinction made in John's epistles between true Christians and those who are not? It is *holiness, saintship*. "If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not." "Every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him." "Every man that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself even as He is pure." "Whosoever abideth in Him, sinneth not." "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God." "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." "Whatsoever is born of God sinneth not." "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." "He that doeth good is of God, but he that doeth evil hath not seen God."

Such language shows that in the eyes of John, practical purity and holiness,

saintliness, is the grand characteristic of Christians. When therefore we find him, consistently designating a certain body, by the distinctive appellation of "the saints," we conclude that those so called are *true Christians*, in opposition to the ungodly, or to false professors. Where does John, ever apply such a term to *Jews*? Where in the whole New Testament can the term be found so applied? Why then should we assert that it is applied to Jews here? Paul uses it forty-three times, and in every case as a synonym for Christians. Luke uses it four times, in the Acts, and Jude twice in his epistle, in the same sense; in fact only once is it used in any equivocal sense in the whole New Testament. ("Many bodies of the saints which slept arose." Matt. xxvii. 52.)

Besides, we observe these "saints," who are thirteen times mentioned in the Apocalypse, doing and bearing exactly what we know from other scriptures, the saints of the Christian church must do and bear in this dispensation. We find them watching, waiting, praying, enduring tribulation (chap. xiii. 10), resisting unto blood (chap. xvi. 6), resting in heaven (chap. xiv. 12, 13), and at last manifested as the bride of Christ, and as the "armies which were in heaven," clad under both emblems with the "fine linen clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints"; we find them associated with the martyrs of *Jesus*, (chap. xvii. 6), a clear proof that they cannot be Jewish saints.

In short, so far from the church being actually and exclusively in heaven, at the commencement of the prophetic drama of this book, *she is seen on earth during its entire course*. She is seen collectively under various symbols, such as the one hundred and forty-four thousand, the two witnesses, the sun-clad woman, the armies of heaven, the New Jerusalem; and her members are seen severally as "the saints." They are seen first in their sufferings, and then in their glory; first slain for *Jesus'* sake, then enthroned beside Him. Can it be questioned that the saints who pray, and wait, and suffer, and die as martyrs of *Jesus*, are the *same saints*, the "called, and chosen, and faithful," who are seen with the Lamb afterwards, as his bride, and as his white-robed followers? If they are *not*, the unity of the book is gone, it becomes an incomprehensible confusion. If the saints who form the bride of the Lamb in chap. xix., are not the saints who in the previous chapters witnessed for Him in life and in death, then the lesson written most legibly on the pages of the prophecy,—the lesson that, in spite of ignorance and obscurity, the church in all ages has learned from it,—the truth that sustained millions of martyrs in their protracted sufferings and cheered them in their dying agonies,—the truth with which this prophecy seems instinct, "IF WE SUFFER, WE SHALL ALSO REIGN WITH Him," is utterly obliterated from its pages! The suffering "saints" get no reward; and the happy, blessed bride, rises not from a surging sea of sorrow and suffering, to the joy of her Lord's embrace and the glory of his throne. One of the great *morals* of the book is gone, as well as its dramatic *unity*. The exigences of a false system alone could suggest such a wresting of Scripture as this.

This system of interpretation, involves besides, a logical inconsistency. 'The bride is the Christian church; her raiment identifies her with the previously mentioned "saints," and the "saints" are—a Jewish remnant!* This

is as if we should say: the army is composed of *soldiers*, they wear *uniforms*; whenever you meet men in uniform they are—*civilians*! Surely they who teach thus should be ashamed for not rightly dividing the word of truth. “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines,” is an exhortation we have need to remember. Let simple minded saints be reassured, and fear not to claim and appropriate, their divinely bestowed name!

* The future existence of a Jewish remnant is not denied, though their history and experiences are mapped out by a certain school of prophetic interpreters, far more definitely than by the Word of God. That the remnant or remainder of the Jewish nation, will be restored to Palestine before the millennium, brought there into great trouble, and prepared by it to say, “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord,” that Christ will appear for their deliverance, and that they will be converted at the sight of Him, this much seems clear from Scripture. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance, and He has not cast away his people whom He foreknew.

The only way of avoiding the force of this argument is, to deny that the bride of the Lamb is the church; for it is evident that the bride is identical with the saints, and it is evident also that the saints are on earth, during the whole course of the book. Those who are resolved to prove that the church is *not* represented as on earth in these visions, must therefore not only deny that the saints are the church, but seeing the saints are identical with the bride, must also *deny that the bride is the church*.

It is a painful and humiliating illustration, of the length to which the desire to uphold a favourite theory, will carry Christian men, that many Futurists are to be found, who actually do deny this, and even glory in their shame in so doing, as if this departure from one of the first principles of Christ, were an attainment of advanced truth!

The bride of Christ a Jewish remnant!! It is then of the Jewish remnant that the apostle Paul speaks in Ephesians v.; it is of the Jewish remnant that Eve, and Rebecca, and Rachel, and Asenath, and Zipporah, and Ruth, and Pharaoh's daughter are types! It is of a Jewish remnant that Paul says, “I have espoused you as a chaste virgin to Christ!”

Even so. “The bride is not the figure of nearest association,” say our accurate Futurist friends; “the *body* is still nearer.” “The church is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.” True! But have ye not read, “he that loveth his *wife* loveth *himself*”? In a sense the bride is the body, and the body is the bride. The figures are twain, the truth is one. Such is the union, that Christ and his church are separate existences, as are bridegroom and bride; such also is the union, that Christ and his church are one, as is the body with the head. “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit”; “because I live, ye shall live also.” Let anyone read Ephesians i. and v., and say is it not making a distinction without a difference, to assert that the bride and the body do not represent the same reality.

Let it be granted then that, fulfilling all these types from Eden downwards, and realizing all the figures of most intimate association and union which language can convey,—the vine and the branches, the head and the members, the bridegroom and the bride,—the white robed saintly bride of Revelation xix. is the church of the redeemed; and we claim that without all contradiction, THE

CHURCH IS ON EARTH DURING THE ACTION OF THE APOCALYPSE, AND THAT THEREFORE THE APOCALYPSE IS A CHRISTIAN PROPHECY, FULFILLED IN THE EVENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA.

(To be continued.)