

and who shall rise up in his holy place?" And the answer is echoed from within: "He in whose heart Christ dwelleth by faith, and who seeketh those things which are above, he shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."<sup>1</sup>

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### THE DESIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE.

THERE are but two possible theories of what the Apocalypse was written for. It is either essentially *predictive* or purely *descriptive*. Its proper subject-matter is either *events* or *ideas*. In the one case, its purpose is to foreshadow the future fortunes of the Church, at successive epochs of its history; in the other case, to set forth, in symbolic scenes and dramatic movements, the great *principles* that have been struggling for the mastery in all ages and in different forms—light and darkness, good and evil, the so-called *World-Power*, whether Egypt or Babylon, pagan or Papal, in hostility to the kingdom of God.

What I propose in this paper is, to examine the claims of the non-predictive, or purely descriptive theory. And I

<sup>1</sup> I have ventured to apply the title *Κύριος τῶν δυνάμεων* to the Christian's Lord, whom St. Paul, alluding perhaps to our psalm, once calls "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. ii. 8), because I do not hold with Bishop Pearson that the *Κύριος* of the Seventy was meant as a full translation of *יהוה* (in which untranslatable name all the attributes of the Deity were held to be concentrated). I do not wish to bind myself to Bishop Pearson's view (*Exposition of the Creed*, 1676, p. 148), supported by the very poor authority of *Midrash Tillim* on Ps. xxi. and *Echa Rabati* on Lam. i. 6, that the name Jehovah properly belongs to the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament. Bishop Waterland's remarks on Ps. xxiv. (*Works*, ii., pp. 142, 143) seem equally to need revision to harmonize with a philological exegesis. Much as one may sympathise with Richard Baxter's words (*Preface to Version of the Psalms*, 1692), "There is no exercise that I had rather live and die in than singing praises to our Redeemer and Jehovah," it is permissible to correct "Jehovah" into "Immanuel," the only possible short name for the Christ from the point of view of Old Testament theology.

will let its advocates themselves explain it. For this purpose I select the two most recent English expositors of this book. In the *Speaker's Commentary* the late Archdeacon Lee thus writes :

“The book of Revelation (says Ebrard) does not contain passages of contingent events, but certain warnings and consolatory prophecies concerning the great leading *forces*<sup>1</sup> which make their appearance in the conflict between Christ and the enemy. So full are its contents, that every one may learn more against what disguises of the serpent one has to guard himself, and how the afflicted Church at all times receives its measure of comfort and consolation. The imagery of the book (continues Dr. Lee) naturally describes, in accordance with the whole spirit of prophecy, the various conditions of the kingdom of God on earth during its consecutive struggles against the prince of this world. . . . The spiritual application is never exhausted, but merely receives additional illustration as time runs on” (*Introd.*)<sup>2</sup>

Hear now Professor Milligan :

“It is a book which deals with *principles*<sup>3</sup> rather than peculiar *events*. The same remark indeed is applicable to all the prophetic books of Scripture ; for these are *for the most part* occupied with principles that are generally, even universally, fulfilling themselves in human life. . . . They are proclamations of eternal truths—of the sovereignty of God, of His superintendence of the world, of His approbation of good, of His hatred of evil, of the fact that, notwithstanding all the apparent anomalies around us, He is conducting to final triumph His own plan for the establishment of His righteous and perfect kingdom. It is well therefore that prophecy should be uttered *to a large extent* in general language. The men of one age see it fulfilled in what passes around them ; the men of another age do the same. The struggle between the principles of good and evil marks all time. It returns in every age, and God is always the same God of judgment.”<sup>4</sup>

To do justice to this theory is far from easy, from the vague way in which its advocates express themselves. But one or two things seem obvious.

<sup>1</sup> The italics are mine.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Lee calls this the *spiritual* view of the book ; but what his own principle of interpretation is it is difficult to discover, for his exposition consists of little else than a *catena* of interpretations which he himself does not accept.

<sup>3</sup> The italics in this extract are mine.

<sup>4</sup> *Popular Commentary on the New Testament* (Dr. Schaff's). Vol. iv., “Revelation.”

1. Was this book written for no other purpose than to proclaim the sovereignty of God, His superintendence of the world, His approbation of good and hatred of evil, and how, in spite of anomalies, He is conducting to final triumph His own plan for establishing a righteous kingdom? Were these first principles, these elementary truths, of all revealed religion so obscurely expressed and so insufficiently enforced in other parts of Scripture, that it needed a book of such complicated structure and such extreme difficulty of interpretation, to make them clearer and more impressive? Why, they are themselves infinitely plainer than the book which we are told was written to enforce them. Whatever may be thought of other theories, this at least will never do.

2. It is scarcely self-consistent. Its advocates seem to oscillate between the predictive and non-predictive view of its contents. At one time we are told not to look for actual history in it; but anon they say it "deals *rather* with principles than particular events. The same remark," adds Dr. Milligan, "applies to all the prophetic books of Scripture, which *for the most part* are occupied with principles. It is well therefore that prophecy should be uttered *to a large extent* in general language." Now what is the use of this constant guarding against looking for "historical events" in prophecy? The question is, Are there *any* such? That there are, your own language admits; for you say it is only "for the most part" and "to a large extent" that it deals in "general principles," and that it deals "rather" in these—of course implying that it *does* deal, to some extent, in "historical events." And yet we are warned not to look in prophecy for such events. The one question clearly should be, What *is* and what is *not* predictive? That is a purely exegetical question; and, tried by this test, it is hard to see how any other than a predictive design this book can possibly have. The very first words of the book speak for

themselves: "The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to shew unto His servants the things which must shortly come to pass"; and a very unusual blessing is pronounced, and in the next words, upon "him that readeth, and them that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: *for the time is at hand.*" If this does not mean that definite historical *events* were about to happen, for which the Churches were warned to look, what can we make of such language? But is not our Lord's prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem full of concrete historical predictions? And the apostle's prophecy of "the man of sin"—whatever it may mean—does that not bristle with concrete historical predictions? To what purpose then is it to say that prophecy deals "for the most part" with general principles? If the Apocalypse is *not* such a book, it is entirely beside the mark.

3. This theory, in its systematic form, is, so far as I know, entirely novel. I am not aware of one commentary on the Apocalypse constructed on this principle until towards the close of the last and early in the present century, when a tide of anti-supernaturalism set in upon the Church, especially in Germany, begetting a rationalistic criticism that explained away both miracles and prophecy. But if it be asked how to explain the rise of this novel theory among believing expositors, I ascribe it to despair of finding in history any events to correspond with the predictions, suggesting at length the question, What if it was never meant to predict historical events at all? May not its sole design be to hold forth in bold relief, and under the guise of old historic foes of the kingdom of God—Egypt, Babylon, Jerusalem—the ever-recurring assaults upon the kingdom of darkness?

The ablest and most ingenious exposition of this scheme of interpretation is that of the late Dr. Arnold, in his two

sermons on the interpretation of prophecy.<sup>1</sup> Since his time the anti-predictive theory of apocalyptic interpretation seems to have taken hold of a class of English interpreters of both Old and New Testament prophetic Scripture. To bring this theory to the test I know not any better way than to try it on the commentaries already referred to. To Dr. Lee I need not refer, because, as already said, his exposition of the prophetic part of the book gives no clear indication of how his theory comes out at all. But my esteemed friend Dr. Milligan is a pleasant contrast to this, his exposition being rigidly exegetical from first to last—the text and the symbols being explained with elaborate minuteness, and adhering with admirable fidelity to what he takes to be the one object of the book, to explain and illustrate great “general principles”—not to predict at all.

Thus far I had written two years ago, when, on receiving Dr. Dods' *Introduction to the New Testament*,<sup>2</sup> I found Dr. Milligan's theory rejected in terms even more sweeping :

“A still more effectual evasion<sup>3</sup> of the difficulties attaching to any historical interpretation, whether Præterist, Futurist, or continuously Historical, is suggested by Dr. Milligan, who proposes that we should read the book as a representation of ideas rather than events. It embraces, he thinks, the whole period of the Christian dispensation, but within this period it sets before the reader the action of great principles, and not special incidents. It is meant to impress the reader with the idea that many years of judgment, of trial, of victory must pass over the Church before the end comes. The end, indeed, is spoken of as near; but this results from the impression which could not but be received by the early Church, that now that Christ has actually come the end was virtually present. ‘The book thus becomes to us, not a history of either early or mediæval or last events, written of before they happened, but a spring of elevated encouragement and holy joy to Christians in every age.’ It exhibits the Church of Christ in its conflict, preservation, and victory; and it sees these through the forms and in the colours presented to the writer's imagination by what he

<sup>1</sup> *Sermons on the Interpretation of Scripture*, 3rd ed., 1878, pp. 333–394.

<sup>2</sup> “Theological Educator” series, edited by Rev. W. R. Nicoll. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1888.)

<sup>3</sup> Not of course intentional, Dr. Dods would admit.

himself had seen and experienced, and by his knowledge of the Old Testament and of our Lord's discourses. It is not a political pamphlet disguised, but a vision of the Church's necessary fortunes as the body of her Lord, and His representative on earth. Babylon therefore is not pagan Rome, but the apostate Church of all ages, described in a highly elaborated picture, of which the outlines had already been drawn by the prophets. This system of interpretation has its attractions, but is certainly (1) out of keeping with the general purpose of apocalyptic literature, and (2) fails to present a sufficient motive for its composition, and (3) a sufficiently definite guide through its intricacies" (pp. 243, 244).

Of the three objections to which I have attached figures, I have dealt pretty fully with the second and third. But while it is true (according to the first) that it is out of keeping—indeed glaringly so—with the general purpose of apocalyptic literature, I must guard against the abuse to which that phrase is liable.

Of the prophetic books of Scripture, those of Daniel in the Old Testament and Revelation in the New differ widely from all the rest. In both books the subject treated of is the kingdom of God oppressed by hostile worldly powers; in both books successive periods in the history of this struggle are definitely though symbolically predicted; in both the protracted character of the struggle, as well as the final overthrow of these hostile powers and the triumphant establishment of the kingdom of God, are set forth to cheer the hearts of the faithful; while in the latter book the chronology of the conflict in its successive stages is specified with a marvellous minuteness of detail, perhaps befitting the last word of Divine revelation. There is nothing in the least like this in the other prophetic books, and this characteristic is well expressed by the word "apocalyptic."

But such hold did this feature of the book of Daniel take upon the Jewish mind after the captivity, groaning under successive oppressions, that it gave birth to productions of the same character, holding forth the expected redemption according unto the conception of their several writers; and

so fascinating was this kind of literature, that even after the New Testament "Revelation" appeared, similar writings, —or mixtures, rather, of it and Jewish works of this kind —were sent forth. The consequence of this has been, that modern critics have come to mass up all such writings, from Daniel to Revelation and onwards, under the common name of "apocalyptic literature." I cannot assent to this. Any one who compares the book of Daniel of the Old Testament and the Apocalypse of the New must see at a glance that they stand or fall together; that the New Testament Apocalypse is expressly intended as a sequel to and completion of the disclosures in Daniel about the four empires: so that if the Book of Daniel is not a genuine and authentic work, neither is the New Testament Apocalypse; whereas if this last book of the New Testament be indeed "the Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto Him," to forewarn the Church of coming events, so also is its *prodromus*, the Book of Daniel. In fact, nothing could express the connexion between the two books more neatly than the phrase of Mede, that Daniel is *Apocalypsis contracta*, while the Apocalypse is *Daniel protracta*. To mass up these two books therefore with that heap of writings in imitation of them called "apocalyptic literature," ranging from the merest rubbish up to those of more or less pretensions to respectability, is not to be endured.

(The best known of these are the books called "Second Esdras" in our English Apocrypha and the "Book of Enoch." A pretty full account of both will be found in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, ninth ed., art. "Apocalyptic Literature," especially of the Book of Enoch. For the English reader the most serviceable version of it is one made by Professor Schodde of Ohio.—Andover, 1882.)

But what is to be said to the critics of the modern school, who freely admit that historical events, and not mere ideas, are the proper subject of this book, and insist therefore

that "all interpretation not strictly historical must be excluded"?<sup>1</sup> But so far from being predictive in any legitimate sense of the word, they find them all living in the near distance to that of the writer, and some of them in the course of actual occurrence in his time, requiring therefore no higher inspiration than keen insight into the signs of the times. So confident are such critics that they have at length got the true "key" to the Apocalypse in their hands, that they are bold enough to affirm that "the matter of the book is neither obscure nor mysterious," and "without being paradoxical, we may affirm that the Apocalypse is the most intelligible book of the New Testament"!<sup>2</sup> With these critics, everything exegetical in the interpretation of this book is "settled" and "beyond dispute." This is not the stage of our subject at which we can examine their interpretations in detail, but when we come to "The Structure of the Apocalypse," it will soon be seen that their "key," at least, will not do much to help us.

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<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica* (ninth edition), art. "Revelation," by Professor Harnack.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

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