

reserve for a second paper. How I wish that I could be privileged to open the eyes of a few readers to the treasures still buried in a misunderstood Psalter !

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## APOCALYPTIC SKETCHES.

### IV.

#### THE SEVEN SEALS.

REV. VI., VII.

OUR subject this month is the opening of the seals. They are seven in all; and we shall find, as is often the case, that the complete number is made up of two series; one of four, the other of three. In Oriental symbolism four marked the earthly, three the heavenly; and in accordance with this we shall find that the first four seals show what is coming on the world, while the remaining three have their sphere for the most part within the veil.

We must keep before our imagination the Throne of God and of the Lamb as described in chapters iv., v. We have just been listening to the chorus of praise when the Lamb, alone found worthy to open the book, has taken it from the hand of God and is proceeding to break the seals.

As each of the four seals is broken, a voice like thunder is heard from one after another of the four Living Creatures addressed to the Lamb in the midst of the Throne. In each case it is the one word "COME." The force of this is quite lost in the Authorised Version, where it is rendered as if it were a mere invitation to the apostle to look at what is coming next: "Come and see." But when we follow the correct rendering of the Revised Version, we find it to be an invitation from the longing heart of creation in all its manifold life, as symbolised in these four Living Creatures

—an invitation from the whole of creation to Him who is coming to right its wrongs, to break its bonds, and to crown its highest aspirations.<sup>1</sup>

All this can be accomplished only through terrible things in righteousness; yet the Living Creatures—each with six wings remember, in token of aspiration, and full of eyes without and within, to signify the highest possible intelligence—shrink not from the ordeal. “Behold He cometh with clouds.” “Yes,” they say; “even though it be with clouds, let Him come.” The first seal means war, for it is a horseman who rides forth; and the first Living Creature says “COME.” The second means slaughter, and the second Living Creature cries “COME.” The third is a black horse, and it means famine; yet the third Living Creature calls, “COME.” The fourth is a pale horse meaning death, and the fourth Living Creature, unappalled, calls out, “COME.” How impressive it all is! “Even so, come Lord Jesus,” however dark and mysterious and dreadful be the manner of Thy coming. Such is the high note of faith and hope sounded in thunder from the living creatures round the Throne. It is not that they regard with a light heart such terrible things as war, and sword, and famine, and death; it is that they can see through it all to the glorious consummation—the sufferings of the present time, however severe and prolonged, not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed. These piercing eyes of theirs are looking forward to the manifestation of the sons of God.

It was the prospect of this great consummation that enabled the four living creatures to give the repeated welcome to the heavenly warrior and his terrible war horses.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Rom. viii, 19-21 R.V.: “The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason, of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.”

There cannot be war without bloodshed and famine and death ; the red, the black and the pale horses cannot be left out ; but forget not that the Leader is mounted on a white horse, and that He comes forth not only conquering but to conquer, conquering now under the first seal, when He seems to have the whole field to Himself, to conquer under the second, third and fourth seals, when the red horse shall have the field, when the black horse shall have the field, even when the pale horse Death seems to carry all before him. The rider of the white horse is the first ; He is also, we shall find, the last. The red, the black, the pale horses will have their day and cease to be ; but after they have passed quite from the scene, we shall still see the rider on the white horse. Look forward for a moment to chapter xix. 11 and following : "And I saw the heaven opened ; and, behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon, called Faithful and True ; . . . and upon His head are many diadems. And He is arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood : and His name is called the Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven followed Him upon white horses clothed in fine linen, white and pure. And He hath on His garment and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." The mighty conflict which is coming is His, and however dark may be its course, it is sure to end in glorious victory.

The Son of God goes forth to war,  
A kingly crown to gain ;  
His blood-red banner streams afar ;  
Who follows in His train ?

Such is the spirit-stirring call of the four seals.

We may not take time to show in detail how all these things did assuredly come to pass. They have been verified to the letter by extracts from the Latin historians, even to such details as the scarcity of necessaries, while luxuries were in superfluity, as strikingly set forth in verse 6 : "A

measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny;<sup>1</sup> and the oil and the wine hurt thou not." For this most unusual state of things we have separate evidence both as regards Rome and Jerusalem, for Josephus refers to the reckless waste of wine and oil in the Temple while the people were starving in the streets; and in Rome, so acutely was it felt that the Emperor Domitian issued an edict for the restriction of vineyards and the extension of corn areas. Let this suffice for mere illustration. Full details are given in Dean Farrar's *Early Days of Christianity*.

We pass now from the four seals whose scene is earth to the three which carry us within the veil. The first of these is a vision of the "souls" of the martyrs who have perished and are perishing in the awful persecution. These are seen "underneath the altar." No altar has been mentioned in the description of the Throne; but we find references later on, first (ix. 3) to "the golden altar which was before the throne," and later (xiv. 8) to an altar which appears not to be immediately before the Throne, but some distance on the earthward side, and therefore probably corresponding to the altar of burnt offering in the outer court of the Temple. This then seems to be a projection in vision of the altar of sacrifice, with the familiar sight of the blood of the victims flowing down beneath it. In sacrifice "the blood is the life"; so as he sees it flowing he sees the lives of the martyrs as it were underneath the altar; and even as the blood of righteous Abel cried out for vengeance, so these *lives* (for such is the literal translation of the word "souls") cry to heaven with a great voice, saying, "How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" Indeed a

<sup>1</sup> Not to be thought of as our penny; it was a whole day's wage; so it was to take the whole of what a man could earn in a day to buy a single measure of wheat, or three measures of barley, equivalent to prison fare.

lamentable cry. Surely it must bring speedy deliverance ; but no : the persecution rages still, and the pale horse still holds the field. At this point the altar of sacrifice seems to pass out of view, and the thought of lives poured out on this side the veil is transfigured into that of lives redeemed in heaven. It becomes in the true sense a vision of *souls*, its sphere in the Unseen, and therefore no blood any longer in sight ; but because the end is not yet, they are called to "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him," "until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, which should be killed even as they were, should be fulfilled." So the killing must go on. The lamentable cry seems to pass unheeded. The blood of new victims still must flow on the altar of sacrifice. But of the consciousness of innocence no tyrant can deprive them, and as soon as they pass within the veil, see them arrayed in white ! Nero may stain their earthly robes in the dust and blood of the arena, but "there is given them—to each one—a white robe" which he cannot touch ; and so in their patience they will possess their souls. Such is the reading of the fifth seal.

When the sixth seal is opened, we see the answer to the lamentable cry for vengeance in the fifth. The darkness deepens. "On horrors' head horrors accumulate." The imagery of Joel and other great prophets of the Old Testament is freely used, but all former descriptions are exceeded in the awful picture of destruction and despair in which we see the cruel tyrants overwhelmed. This dreadful passage needs no exposition in detail. It is enough to read it through and let its storm clouds pass before the eye of our soul. "And I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake ; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood ; and the stars of the heaven fell unto the earth, as a fig tree casteth her unripe figs, when she is shaken of a great wind. And the heaven was removed as a scroll when it is rolled

up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places."

All this is to take place on the earth; but it is not earth only as in the first four; heaven is opened too, opened not to John alone and to the saints of God, but opened to the tyrants and their cruel followers. They recognise now that these thunders and lightnings proceed from the Throne; and that is what fills them with despair; they even recognise that they proceed from the Lamb upon the Throne: "The kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand?" What depth of meaning and of power in that extraordinary phrase, "The wrath of the Lamb." The wrath of the lion a strong man might well brave even though the next moment he should be torn in pieces; but the wrath of the Lamb, the wrath of injured, scorned, rejected love, love which has been patient and gentle and long-suffering, love which has given itself up to suffer and to die, for it is "a Lamb *as it had been slain*," love which is stricken through the heart with pain at the terrible compulsion which makes the wrath inevitable, who can stand up against that?

And now we come to one of those breaks in the storm cloud which reveal the Throne above and sunny shore beyond. True we are yet in the sixth seal; but the seventh, when it is unrolled, will be found to be itself a series of seven, the seven trumpets; and accordingly this sixth seal is dealt with as the last, and there is a holding back of what is coming when the seven trumpets of the seventh seal shall begin to sound.

The arrest is made by four angels (vii. 1): "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that no wind should blow on the earth, or on the sea, or upon any tree." Why this pause? To give time for the sealing of the saints.

We can well imagine that in the mind of the prophet and of his readers there might arise the fear that in such an awful catastrophe as that which has just been described, when not only the kings of the earth, but the great men, and every bondman and every freeman fled in terror, and not only so, but the mountains and islands were removed out of their place, and heaven itself rolled up as a scroll, even the righteous must be involved in the general doom. But "the Lord is mindful of His own." "Though the earth be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea," they need not fear, for "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His." And the sealing follows, *on their foreheads*. It is to be an open secret.

First the roll of Israel is fully made up, as indicated by the round numbers of each tribe and of all the tribes "And I heard the number of them which were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel. Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand." And so of all the twelve. But though the numbers of Israel are fully made up, that vast company of 144,000<sup>1</sup> is small compared with the hosts which follow: "After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation, and of all tribes and peoples and tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands; and they cry with a great voice, saying, Salvation unto our God which sitteth on the

<sup>1</sup> As large and complete a number as the mind can well grasp; when the multitudes appear from every nation, all attempt to number them is given up.

throne and unto the Lamb." All the clouds are now rolled away, and the thunders are hushed, replaced by the mighty chorus of the triumphant saints. And now that the mist and the darkness are gone, there is the Throne of God in full sunlight, unveiled so completely that every movement is noticed in the pellucid air ; and accordingly John observes the movement towards him of one of the twenty-four elders—might it not be Peter, one of the latest victims of Nero's cruelty? As we are not told, perhaps we should not ask. The elder asks the question, "These which are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and whence came they?" The apostle is too much overawed to attempt an answer. So the elder answers his own question, and in doing so gives us one of those exquisite glimpses into the future which are the crowning glory of this wondrous book. To appreciate it fully it is important to observe the present tense, not "These are they which *came* out of great tribulation," but which *come*. They are coming now. We should think of a procession of martyrs from Roman dungeons, past Roman scaffolds, through death's portals, on and up to the Throne of God. What a difference in the look of them as they go from earth and as they come to heaven! They are falling before the axe of Nero, they are burning in his gardens, they are torn in pieces by his wild beasts, they are dying in agony in multitudes, they are ruthlessly trampled down by the pale horse, whose name is Death—that is what men see, that is all that can be seen this side the veil ; but now draw the veil, come up hither and see what is happening on the other side. "These poor wretches," did you call them?—whom you saw going—watch them coming with the white robes and the triumphant palms! "These are they which come out of the great tribulation." And why are their robes so stainless? "They washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."



It is not their goodness, nor their courage, nor their constancy; nor is it the suffering, so heroically endured, which affords the explanation:

I asked them whence their victory came,  
They, with united breath,  
Ascribed their conquest to the Lamb,  
Their triumph to His death.

And what are they doing now, and what is to be their future? "Therefore are they before the Throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His Temple; and He that sitteth on the Throne shall spread His Tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."

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## THE GENESIS OF DEUTERONOMY.

### IV.

#### *The Laws Peculiar to Deuteronomy.*

HAVING now examined the main reasons assigned for thinking that Deuteronomy is a programme of reform, we wish at this point to offer two or three additional arguments to justify our rejection of this new view.

Our first is, that the laws *peculiar* to Deuteronomy possess no marked signs that they were written *with the intention to reform*.<sup>1</sup> Certain laws in the book of Deuteronomy, in all about twenty-five and wholly within the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bissel's article on "The Independent Legislation of Deuteronomy," in the *Journal of the Society of Bibl. Lit. and Exegesis*, June-December, 1883, pp. 67-89.