

APOCALYPTIC SKETCHES.

V.

THE SEVEN TRUMPETS.

REV. VIII.—XI.

WE are now entering on the intricacies of this book; and if we would not lose ourselves, we must adhere strictly to our method of dealing with only the main lines of thought. It is for this reason that we include four chapters in our text this month, so as not to make a break in the vision of the seven trumpets, which begins with chapter viii. and does not close till the end of chapter xi. The whole of this space is not occupied by the trumpets, but the portions which intervene are episodes, and so related to the trumpets, especially to the closing one, that we should make a mistake if we took them out of their connexion and bearing. We shall find reason to regard them as visions of consolation brought in before the final catastrophe of the seventh trumpet, to relieve the awful tension of the sevenfold woe.

It would be an immense advantage to the reader of the apocalypse, if it were printed so as to mark out these episodes and interludes. It may be premature to issue a polychrome Bible on the basis of the higher criticism. But a polychrome Book of Revelation would be of immense service, giving the main lines of the successive series of sevens in black type, with episodes in colours and glimpses of the end in gold. This would show at a glance, what requires somewhat careful study now to discover, the marvellously symmetrical structure of the book, and the bearing of its subordinate parts. I wish some enterprising publisher would give us an *édition de luxe* of the Book of Revelation. Whether there could be found an artist of colossal enough genius to illustrate it worthily is another question.

Looking now at the series of trumpets as a whole, the first thing which strikes us is the many points they have in common with the seven seals. Besides the number seven, there is the division into the two subordinate series of four and three, the latter three far exceeding in impressiveness and in minuteness of detail the first four, and moreover, in the one case as in the other, taking us across the boundary of the seen (with which alone the first four deal) into the mysterious realm of the unseen. What is still more remarkable, there is in the trumpets, as in the seals, a break between the sixth and the seventh. It will be remembered that before the opening of the seventh seal there was an arrest of judgment, four angels at the four corners of the earth holding back the winds of wrath until the servants of God had been sealed in their foreheads. In like manner before the blowing of the seventh trumpet there is the sudden appearance—not of four angels this time at the four corners of the earth—but of one strong angel, followed by a vision of measuring just as the other was followed by a vision of numbering the servants of God. Finally, just as at the winding up of the seals we were carried on to the great consummation of all things, when the white-robed throng gathered round the throne, so at the winding up of the trumpets we are carried on to the time when “the kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever.” Thus from beginning to end there is a marvellously close correspondence between the one series and the other.

What does all this suggest? Surely not a continuous history following first the line of the seals and then the line of the trumpets. It is true that history repeats itself, but not in such a fashion that it can be blocked off into cycles of seven, so very closely corresponding to each other. Surely it is much more natural to suppose that this second series is another general view of the great march of events

by which the great Head of the Church "sends forth judgment unto victory." To adopt an illustration which is familiar to all students of Revelation, it is not a totally different stretch of history brought into the field of St. John's telescope; rather have we the same elements thrown into fresh combinations by the turning of St. John's kaleidoscope.

Why then the repetition? Let the patriarch Joseph tell us what such reduplication meant to the Hebrew mind (Gen. xli. 32): "And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice, it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass."

While it is true that in the main features the trumpets are a reduplication of the seals, there are striking differences of detail. In this respect we may compare these successive pictures of coming judgment with the threefold picture our Lord gives us in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew in the successive parables of the Virgins, the Talents, and the Sheep and Goats; or with the successive parables of the kingdom of heaven in the thirteenth, or indeed with the successive Lives of Christ by the four Evangelists, each one covering the ground in his own way, yet with such instructive variety that none of them could well be spared.

This leads us now to look at the new features which emerge in the trumpet series. First, there is a quite new impressiveness in the way in which it is introduced. The seals were preceded by the grand chorus of the elders, and the four living creatures, and the angels, and the whole universe breaking out into an anthem of praise. The trumpets are introduced by "silence in heaven for the space of half an hour," an awful silence during which seven angels noiselessly take their places before the Throne, each one receiving a trumpet. Then as noiselessly there comes another angel and stands over against the altar of incense.

Recall the fact that when the fifth seal was opened, the souls of the martyrs were seen under the altar of burnt offering pouring forth their lamentable cry. These prayers of the saints seemed for the time to pass unheeded, for the persecution still went on. But they are not forgotten; for what is this angel doing? He has a golden censer, and in it much incense, representing the pleadings of the Heavenly Intercessor; and the prayers of the saints and of the Intercessor ascend together to the throne of God. O ye, whose hearts are poured out in an agony of prayer to God, and who seem to get no answer, think not that these supplications are lost; they are caught up by the prayer-angel, taken into his golden censer, laid close beside the pleadings of the Lord Himself; they are not lost, but gone before you to the throne of God, and the answer will surely come in God's own time and way.

In this case we may think of the prayers as having the great burden, "Thy kingdom come." But the kingdom cannot come *per saltum*. It cannot come without effort and struggle; it cannot come but through toil and pain; it must be through judgment that victory is reached. Hence the necessary delay. Hence, too, the significant action of the prayer-angel in taking fire from the altar and casting it on the earth, on which there followed thunders, and voices, and lightnings, and earthquakes. Before the trumpets are done we shall hear that "the kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ"; but many "terrible things in righteousness" must come to pass before that longed-for consummation; for see, there are the seven angels preparing themselves to sound; and now the solemn silence is broken by the first loud trumpet blast.

Again, as in the seal series, we have the first four trumpets finished in as many sentences or brief paragraphs. In the seals the destroyer was in each case

prominent; in the trumpets it is the destruction on which the stress is laid. This destruction comes first upon the land, then upon the sea, then upon the rivers and fountains of water, and finally upon the luminaries of the day and of the night; and in each case one-third part is destroyed. The forms in which the destruction presents itself to the seer are evidently suggested by the plagues of Egypt.

The break between the four and the three is made by the flight of an eagle (not an angel, as in A.V.), bird of ill omen to the Jewish mind, flying in mid-heaven, and screeching out, "Woe, woe, woe, for them that dwell on the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, who are yet to sound." As at the fifth seal, so at the fifth trumpet, we pass into the mysterious realm of the unseen, and are confronted by a fallen angel, to whom is given the "key of the bottomless abyss," as our version puts it. "And he opened the pit of the abyss, and there went up a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit." So hell is let loose upon the earth; for these "locusts," which are described so gruesomely in the verses which follow, are evidently not literal locusts; they are demons of the pit, who "have over them as king the angel of the abyss," known in Hebrew as Abaddon, and in Greek as Apollyon, the destroyer.

As the fifth trumpet loosed the demons of the pit, the sixth sets in motion a still more formidable host from the farthest boundary of the land, the river Euphrates, the familiar direction from which the Assyrian armies had been wont to descend upon the land of Israel and make it a desolation. But no Assyrian host that ever came from the Euphrates can be compared with this. The very number is appalling. It is twice ten thousand times ten thousand, two hundred millions of cavalry; and such cavalry! Armed with no ordinary weapons, but breath-

ing out fire, and smoke, and brimstone. One can imagine the plight of the literal interpreters here, compelled to find somewhere in history a literal army of two hundred millions of horsemen, and such horses and men! How different when you realize that we have here a powerful poetical presentation of the resistless might of the forces God can let loose to put an end to the wickedness of wicked men!

For that this is a force on the side of righteousness seems evident, not only from the fact that it is summoned into action by four angels, but also that it is set in motion ultimately by the prayers of the saints; for this is what is meant by the voice coming from the horns of the golden altar which is before God (*v.* 13).

Once more we have reached a climax of horror corresponding to that at the close of the sixth seal, when the "kings of the earth and the chief captains, and the rich and the strong, and every bondman and freeman . . . said to the mountains and 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." And again, as before, there is a pause, a break, an arrest of judgment, and the intervention of an apocalypse of an entirely different kind, to relieve the tension of feeling, and bring courage and hope to the fainting heart of seer and of saint.

This is no less than a vision of Christ, not now in form like unto the Son of Man, but in the likeness of a mighty angel. That it is Christ Himself and no other is evident from His being arrayed in a cloud ("Behold, He cometh with clouds"), from the rainbow round His head, from the face as the sun and the feet as pillars of fire. His absolute control of all things, above and beneath, is magnificently set forth by the attitude as described: His right foot on the sea, His left upon the earth, and His right hand lifted up to heaven; and His voice, which before had

been likened to the sound of many waters, now awakening the roar of seven thunders, whose message, however, was for the ear of John alone. But all these were only accompaniments of the solemn assurance which He gives, in the name of the eternal God, that these dreadful things are not to last much longer, for the time of the end is drawing near, and the mystery of God will be finished when the seventh angel shall sound.

With this assurance there was given to the seer a little book. The seven great seals have been broken; the sixth trumpet of the seventh seal has sounded; one trumpet only now remains, so a little book will cover it. It may be the little book contained only the summary of the seventh trumpet in verses 15-18 of the next chapter. If we look forward to that summary, we see that it is sweet to the mouth, for it is a proclamation of the kingdom of our Lord; but inasmuch as the establishment of that kingdom meant the final overthrow of all its enemies, as set forth in the chapters which follow from the 12th to the 20th, it had its latent bitterness, which must be tasted before the substance of it could be assimilated; and some terrible things had yet to be said concerning many peoples, and nations, and tongues (*v.* 11), before the great apocalypse should close.

Then in place of the sealing in the former series there is the measuring: "And there was given me a reed like unto a rod; and one said, Rise, and measure the temple of God and the altar, and them that worship therein." The whole passage is one of great difficulty, so much so that some expositors give it up as hopeless; but I think the reason of this hopelessness is the failure to set it in contrast to the corresponding passage in the seal series. When this is done, it seems to me that its secret is yielded up, and we have a passage of singular power and impressiveness.

In the corresponding passage under the seals there is

a numbering; and the numbers are vast, thousands on thousands, twelve thousands after twelve thousands; and then all power to number is lost in the "great multitude which no man could number, out of every nation, and of all tribes, and peoples, and tongues." Nothing could be more cheering and reassuring. But what are those to think who live in the dark days when the number of the saints has been reduced to the very lowest, when the Church loses her members on both hands, her faithful ones by martyrdom, her faithless ones by apostasy, and when this has gone on through such awful days as those which have been foreshadowed in the seals and in the trumpets, till the Church seems annihilated, annihilated so utterly that a Roman Emperor has struck a medal to celebrate the final extinction of the pernicious sect? In days like these the seventh chapter of the apocalypse will scarcely do. Its thronging hosts and innumerable multitudes might seem a mockery. Well, if you must give up the numbering, suppose we try the measuring. "One said, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein." That includes all the faithful, both the martyrs who have offered themselves on the altar, and the worshippers who still remain. Only these, however; none of the unfaithful shall be reckoned; "the court which is without the temple leave without, and measure it not"; reckon not the mere formal Christians, those who hang on the outskirts of the temple, and have not courage to face the dangers of the full acknowledgment of God and of His Christ.

Well, where are you? As for the counting, there is no difficulty, for the witnesses are reduced to *two*, the minimum number of Matthew xviii. 20. And these two, how are they arrayed? "In white robes, and palms in their hands"? Nay. They are "clothed in sackcloth" (v. 3). Alas! Alas!

But we are not numbering now; we are measuring. And perhaps these two may require a larger measure than you think. Suppose they are men like Peter and Paul. Well, they certainly seem to be, for it is said of them, "These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the Lord of the earth." And see what power they have (*vv.* 5, 6). Even though the Church be reduced to two witnesses, the minimum number, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." "Fear not, little flock," though you be reduced to two in number; "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give *you* the kingdom."

Aye, it may even go worse yet with the Church. These two may finish their testimony as their Lord finished His, in death. As He was crucified, and all hope seemed buried in His grave, so may the last two of His faithful disciples be done to death; and as you look at their dead bodies, again you seem to see the corpse of Christ. (Is this the force of the strange singular number? Look at R.V., margin.) For the second time the hope of Christianity is in a dead body. Ah, but who will measure the dead body of Christ then or now? And it is even worse now than then. When the Lord was crucified, His dead body was taken by loving hands and laid in Joseph's tomb, and women brought spices and anointed it. But now the dead body of Christ, as represented by the corpses of the two witnesses, lies unburied in the streets, and the people of the world are rejoicing over it and making merry, saying, "Now we see the end of these poor fanatics who disturbed and annoyed us; they are dead and gone for ever" (*v.* 10).

Are they? Behold, even as Christ rose from the dead, so shall they; as He ascended into heaven, so shall they. "And after the three days and a half the breath of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which beheld them.

And they heard a great voice from heaven, saying, Come up hither. And they went up into heaven in the clouds, and their enemies beheld them." And before the face of the risen two, seven thousand fell, and the "rest were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven." Now, was not this vision of measuring fitted in a marvellous way to strengthen faith and perfect patience, even when the worst came to the worst, when the Church was reduced to its lowest, when it actually seemed as if the very last Christian had sealed his testimony with his blood? "God is able even of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."

And now the seventh trumpet, leading on to the final woe, is sounded. And here, just as the seventh seal opened out into the seven trumpets, so we shall find the seventh trumpet opening out later into the seven vials. But again notice the contrast between the opening of the seventh seal, "when there was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour," and the blowing of the last trumpet; for instead of silence in heaven there were great voices of triumph and adoration (*vv.* 15-17).

Here, again, we seem to have reached the consummation; but once more it is only by anticipation, for the nations are yet wroth, and wrath must yet come. The seventh trumpet will see the finishing of the mystery of God; but here, too, it must be through judgment that the Son of God will pass to victory. How this shall come about we shall discover as we proceed to what remains of this great book of Revelation.

Meantime let us see that we, amid all the tumults of our time, be strong in faith, clear in hope, and steadfast in patience, until we all attain to "where beyond these voices there is peace."

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