

own researches, that historical critics have fallen into error on the office of "David's sons." It is not, indeed, an extremely important error, but it is a conspicuous one, and it has arisen from their undue conservatism in matters of textual criticism. Caution is not everything in textual criticism. Indeed, neither caution nor boldness is specially the characteristic of the textual critic, but resourcefulness.

T. K. CHEYNE.

APOCALYPTIC SKETCHES.

VI.

THE SUN-CLAD WOMAN AND HER ENEMIES.

REV. XII.-XIV.

THE seventh seal opens out into seven trumpets; and now we shall find the seventh trumpet opening out into a series of developments which issue in the catastrophe of the seven vials or bowls of judgment. I am aware that some regard the seventh trumpet as closed in the eleventh chapter; but this seems quite inconsistent with the solemn warning of the fourteenth verse: "The second woe is past: behold the third woe cometh quickly." The first and the second woes have been so appalling that we naturally expect the third to be more appalling still, whereas if it is finished in the eleventh chapter it could scarcely be reckoned a woe at all; rather is it a jubilation. The true view, therefore, seems to be, as in former cases, that when a great catastrophe is about to be announced, the mind is prepared for it by a preliminary assurance that what is dark and dreadful is only temporary, only a preparation for the time when the harshest discords shall be resolved into universal harmony. The third woe then is the woe of the seven vials or bowls reached in the 15th chapter, in which we are

told (xv. 1) "is finished the wrath of God." And that this is no mere conjecture can be seen by looking back to the vision of consolation preceding the seventh trumpet, in which we find (x. 7) this definite declaration: "In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery of God." This clearly identifies the seventh trumpet with the seven vials which are to be its outcome.

How then does the passage before us this month come in? Let me endeavour as briefly as possible to make this clear. The whole series of judgments through which the Son of God will advance to victory is given in this book in the form of a treble seven-fold woe: seven seals, seven trumpets, seven vials; but these, strictly speaking, are not three but one, for the seven vials are all comprehended in the seventh trumpet, and the seven trumpets are included in the seventh seal. Before each great outbreak of judgment there are visions of consolation and preparation: before the breaking of the first seal, the great vision of the throne of God and of the Lamb (iv., v.); before the breaking of the seventh seal, introducing the trumpets, the vision (in chap. vii.) of the four angels and the sealing of the 144,000 and "the great multitude that no man could number out of every nation"; before the blast of the seventh trumpet, the vision of the strong angel, and the measuring of the temple and sifting of the church (chap. x., xi. 1-13). But now that the final catastrophe of the seven vials is coming, there is, as it were, a great reluctance to bring it out. There is a lingering and a holding back, and a multiplication of gracious assurances, all fitly expressing the mind of Him who through His prophet Hosea said to Israel of old: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within Me, My compassions are kindled together."

This is still more striking when we realize that the third and last series of woes has specially in view those who have an outward connection with the Church, but instead of having the seal of God on their foreheads allow themselves to be branded with the mark of the beast. Up to this time judgment has been on the world as distinguished from the Church; now the Church is sifted, the tares and the wheat are separated, and while the wheat is gathered into the garner the tares must be burnt up with unquenchable fire. We can well understand then why there should be chapter after chapter of warning, and instruction, and encouragement, and comfort, before the seven angels having the seven last plagues are allowed to pour their vials on the earth.

See then what we have in the way of preparation. First there are these great voices in Heaven proclaiming in advance what was to be the glorious consummation (xi.15-17), the dark side only hinted at as yet in verse 18. Then there is the opening of the Temple of God in Heaven, and the vision of the Ark of His Covenant, to suggest that the Church is specially interested in the judgments which follow, indicated here by "the lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake and great hail" (v. 19), and now in chapters xii.-xiv., the passage specially before us, we see as it were the *dramatis personæ* of the tragedy, the combatants in the awful conflict which will be finished when the vials shall be poured out.

A most unequal contest it promises to be; for on the one side there is a woman in agony; on the other side a great red dragon, supported by two monsters more horrible and dreadful than even imagination had ever pictured before. But we must follow the passage a little more in detail, though not so as to depart from the general plan of these sketches.

The scene of the mighty conflict is first in Heaven

(xii. 1-12a), then on earth (12b-xiii. 18), and back again in Heaven (xiv.).

First, then, in Heaven we see a woman and a dragon arrayed against each other. The woman's sole defence is "the armour of light." She is "arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars"; and her hope is in the pangs she is enduring, for they are birth pangs, and her child is to be the hero of the awful conflict. The woman is the symbol of the Church. The Virgin Mary naturally rises to our mind, but we are not to think of her as an individual; if she was in the mind of the Apostle at all, it must have been simply as the representative of the tribe of Judah and the House of Israel, of whom sprang the man Child who was to be the great Deliverer (cf. Rom. ix. 5). The dragon opposed to her is "great," for his power is terrible, and "red," for he thirsts for blood; "with seven heads," for there is no end to his devices; "and ten horns," for there is no lack of power to carry them out; and "upon his head seven diadems," for he is "the prince of this world," "the prince of the power of the air." The reference to the casting to the earth of the third part of the stars of Heaven probably points to the angels who shared with him in his fall. And he it was at whose instigation Herod lay in wait for the coming Child to destroy it as soon as it was born; and not Herod only, but the whole power of the world, set against the Holy Child all through His earthly pilgrimage on to the time when another "Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together against Him" and put Him to death. But even that was no victory for the dragon, for He did not remain under the power of death: "the Child was caught up unto God and unto His throne."

But still the war goes on; for the woman has fled to the wilderness, and the Church of Christ is suffering perse-

cution, and the battle seems to go against her. But that is only on earth and only for a limited time.¹ Look up and follow the fortunes of the war in Heaven (*v. 7 seq.*). Who is Michael? None other than the man child who has been caught up unto God and unto His throne. We are accustomed to think of Michael as an archangel and to class him, say, with Gabriel and Uriel. But it is not Scripture, but *Paradise Lost*, which is responsible for that idea. In Scripture there is only one Archangel, and every time He appears He stands for the Lord Jesus Christ. The Archangel is the Lord of Angels; that is the meaning of the word. The name Michael means, "Who is like God?" and its appropriateness here is evident from the connection with the man Child who has just been caught up to God and His throne.

A man Child? Yes; nevertheless Divine; and when He goes forth to war with the dragon, His name is Mi-cha-El, "Who is like unto God?" (cf. here xiii. 4, "Who is like unto the beast?") And look further down, *v. 6*: "to blaspheme His name," *i.e.* the name Mi-cha-El). Nothing more seems needful to be said to make clear the story of "the war in Heaven" (*vv. 7-11*).

All this has been in Heaven, *i.e.* in the region of the Unseen. The veil has been drawn, and we have seen that though the Church on earth is as a feeble woman, driven into the wilderness, the armies of Heaven led by the Son of Man Himself, now "declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead," are arrayed against the devil and his hosts, and have already gained the victory. This agrees with what we have in the Gospel: "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out."² How far cast out? Only out

¹ 1,260 days, =42 months, = $3\frac{1}{2}$ years (*v. 14*, cf. xi. 3, etc.) = $\frac{7}{12}$ = broken as distinguished from complete time.

² In this passage (John xii. 31) the reference is to the cross; cf. xii. 11, "they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb."

of the heavenly places where those dwell who are risen with Christ. "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven." He has no more place there; "therefore rejoice, O heavens, and ye that dwell in them" (v. 12). ("Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not.") But "woe for the earth and for the sea; because the devil is gone down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time."

The scene, you observe, is now transferred to earth. And here, in a passage which has difficulties in detail I shall not here attempt to face, it is plainly intimated that a certain portion of the professed followers of Christ make terms with the enemies of the Church, and save their earthly lives by losing the heavenly, while the remnant remain faithful, to the intense disgust of their relentless foe, who "waxed wroth with the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus" (v. 17). Feeling his weakness, the dragon looks out for allies. "He stood upon the sand of the sea." This to a Hebrew would mean a westward look; for the Great Sea was the western boundary of their land. And as he looks westward there emerges from the sea a frightful monster, described in such a way as to make it evident that the great world power of Rome is meant, as embodied in the reigning Emperor. The dragon will henceforth act through this monster—leopard, bear, and lion all in one—and, claiming to be Divine, demand to be worshipped as the divine Augustus.¹ There is one then who on earth takes the name of Michael (Who is like unto God?) "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and there was given to him authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation. And all that dwell on the earth shall worship him,

¹ Augustus, Latin form of Greek *αεβαστός*, which literally means "a man to be worshipped."

every one whose name hath not been written in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain from the foundation of the world." A terrible prospect this, and therefore a heartening word is given (*vv. 9-10*) before another terrible ally of the dragon appears.

"And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth." Remember where the dragon was standing, on the sand of the sea, and looking westward, saw the first beast rise out of the sea. The second would rise behind him on the land, *i.e.* the land¹ of Israel. For this reason especially I am inclined to accept the view that as the first beast was the Roman Empire as embodied in the reigning Emperor, the second was the land of Judah as represented at this time by the Roman procurator, "who exerciseth all the authority of the first beast in his sight," and by the apostate Jewish Church,² which also played into the hands of Rome. That the Roman procurator, in the later years in the reign of Nero, was himself a second Nero is as certain as history can make it; and if we were acquainted with all the facts of his administration, we might be able to follow all the details of his tyranny as set forth in *vv. 12-17*. The second monster set himself to insist on all worshipping the first monster, the Nero in Jerusalem compelling his subjects to be marked with the mark of the number of the name of the Nero in Rome. That number was 666, which certainly fits exactly Nero Cæsar when put in Hebrew letters, though it is perhaps more to the purpose to observe that as seven is the number of completeness, so six is that which falls short of it; so that no number could to a Hebrew mind more solemnly impress the thought, "Weighed in the balances and found wanting." O Nero, thou seemest all but God;

¹ Both in Hebrew and also in Greek the word for the earth and the land is the same.

² This twofold reference is perhaps confirmed by the alternation between the two different names given to this monster, which is sometimes known as the second beast and sometimes as the false prophet.

thou art well nigh omnipotent ; but thou art wanting, thou art lost. And lost too are those who allow themselves to be marked with the number of thy name, 6-6-6.

Now surely the case is hopeless for the poor woman in the wilderness, for the persecuted Church of God, and especially for those who are faithful to the death, for those who "keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus." There are three great enemies arrayed against her : the great red dragon, who is prince of the power of the air ; the resistless might of Rome and of its Emperor, who is prince of the power of the sea ; and the cruelty and rage of the viceroy in Jerusalem, who is prince of the power of the land, having at his disposal its spiritual forces as well as its material strength. Surely the result must be ruin to the defenceless woman in the wilderness.

Look up again. The scene is once again transferred to Heaven. The veil is drawn, and before the seer is the sunny mount with a rejoicing throng of holy worshippers pouring out their hearts in the thrilling music of the new song (xiv. 1-5). What a marvellous contrast to the harrowing scenes on which the eye was resting ere the veil was drawn ! And now turn from the heavenly Zion, with its happy throngs arrayed in white, and look away into the wondrous future of the purposes of God. See first a mighty angel flying in mid heaven with the eternal gospel to proclaim to every nation and tribe and tongue and people (vv. 6, 7). See another angel following, proclaiming the doom of godless Babylon (v. 8) ; and still another, proclaiming the eternal overthrow of all who surrendered to the blasphemous claims of the world-ruler (vv. 9-11). What a contrast to the faithful ones who loved not their lives unto the death ! "Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth : yea,

saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours ; for their works follow with them."

And now the harvest has come : " And I saw, and behold, a white cloud ; and on the cloud I saw one sitting like unto a son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle " (v. 14). There is first the ingathering of the saints by the Lord Himself (*vv. 15, 16*). Then follows the vintage of judgment, committed to the angel who had power over fire (*vv. 19, 20*).

Thus the mighty conflict is to end in the triumph of the Lamb over all the powers of evil, a triumph so vividly set forth in this marvellous preparatory vision that the heart of the seer who writes and the saints who read the word of this prophecy may be reassured before the seven angels with the seven last plagues shall pour their vials on the earth.

J. MONRO GIBSON.

THE STAR OF THE MAGI.

The Editor of the EXPOSITOR has kindly forwarded to me the following interesting letter from a correspondent in Calcutta :

I have read with great interest Mr. Canton's article on the Nativity in your February number, and it seems to me that there is much to be done yet for the elucidation of the Bible by bringing to bear upon it the historical and poetical imagination of such minds as his. But has not his imaginative insight failed him in two points connected with the journey of the Wise Men ? He justly takes exception to the expression "star in the east." All stars rise in the east and set in the west. But it does not appear to me that we are compelled to fall back upon the explanation "in its rising," which conveys little more of a definite sense than the other. St. Matthew says nothing about a star in the east. He says twice that the Wise Men *saw it* in the east