

one would write a large book on the materials so concisely described by Dom Morin, and ratify his convincing argument. It should prove a very interesting subject.

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APOCALYPTIC SKETCHES.

X.

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE.

REV. xx.

IN the preceding chapter we had the overthrow first of the woman, with the coming forth of the pure bride of God; next of the beast and the false prophet, his ally, before the conquering Bridegroom. In this chapter we have the overthrow of the dragon, "that old serpent the devil," followed by the appearance in heaven of "the great white throne," before which are gathered all nations for the final award of weal or woe.

We have then before us two great subjects: (1) the overthrow of Satan; (2) the general judgment. It so happens, however, that in setting forth the former of these there comes in a reference to an interval of 1,000 years, during which Satan is represented, not as yet destroyed, but bound, and cast into the abyss, after which he is to break forth again with new energy and rage, only to share at last the fate of the beast and the false prophet, which had been cast into the lake of fire.

This millennium comes in only as an episode, and scarcely even that, for it is treated merely as an incident in the victory over Satan; and there is no other reference to this precise period in any other part of the book, nor indeed in any other part of the Bible. Yet, strange to say, this exceedingly obscure and difficult passage in a corner

of an exceedingly difficult book has been lifted into an altogether fictitious importance by the libraries of controversy which have been produced on the subject. One of the wise sayings of the Apostle to the Gentiles is this: "Let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith." Surely that needful caution has been sadly overlooked in the extraordinary proportions to which this age-long discussion of the millennium has been extended. Of all the difficult passages in the Book of Revelation the verses in the 20th chapter referring to this period of 1,000 years are the most difficult. Surely then one would expect great modesty and moderation in any attempts that may be made to interpret it. And yet what an amount of confident dogmatism does one find in looking over the long history of the weary controversy. It has not infrequently happened that readers of the Book of Revelation have begun by making up their minds irrevocably about the millennium, and then have proceeded to force the rest of the book, and any of the rest of the Bible that could be so forced, into agreement with their preconceived views. Think, for example, how many passages in the prophets of the Old Testament, in which there is no reference whatever to a period of 1,000 years, have been taken out of their connection, and fitted into their supposed place in this 20th chapter of Revelation; and passages in the Epistles have been treated in much the same way; and great schemes have been drawn up in which a whole programme of the future has been made out in detail, sometimes with exact dates. Happily there is a greater spirit of modesty now abroad, and a greater disposition to acknowledge the difficulties which every intelligent reader must feel in attempting any detailed exposition of this difficult passage.

There is one portion of Old Testament prophecy with which this passage is most closely connected, viz. the

38th and 39th chapters of Ezekiel, which deal with the great final uprising of the nations under Gog from the land of Magog against the city of God, "the beloved city" as John calls it here. We have already had evidence that this prophecy is in the seer's mind, for any one can see that the carrion feast of the vultures in the 19th chapter is a wonderfully close parallel with a banquet of the same kind described in Ezekiel xxxix. 17-24; and that this prophecy still remains in his mind throughout the vision of Satan's overthrow is evident from the fact that at the close of it (*vv.* 8, 9) the names of Gog and Magog are used as the earthly leaders of the hostile armies, and the brief account of the war is evidently based on the larger one given by the ancient prophet.

We have found throughout that the seer of Patmos makes continual and free use of the imagery of the Old Testament prophets, not in the way of quotation or repetition, but as furnishing a set of symbols familiar to his readers as well as to himself, and therefore ready to his hand to construct a record of the visions and revelations which were granted to him. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between that which belongs to the mere phrasing and that which is of the essence of the revelation. The phrasing is old, the revelation is new, and we must beware of mistaking the old phraseology for fresh revealings. We have seen, for example, that the name Armageddon, or the mountain of Megiddo, in the 16th chapter, was used, not to mark out the exact spot where a great battle was to be fought in the future, but to call up to the mind of the readers of the book the great historic battles which had made the name famous, in order to impress the imagination with the greatness of the conflict, very much as we might say that there was prospect of another Waterloo, without meaning that on that very spot there would be an exact repetition of the old contest.

Here, then, the question comes as to the period of 1,000 years. What association had it for a Hebrew mind? There is, as we have seen, no passage in the Bible which answers this question; even in the Gog and Magog passage, which is specially in his mind, there is no mention of date or period; but it was a familiar rabbinical tradition that the days of the Messiah were to be 1,000 years. As there was no scriptural authority for this, it seems evident that the number was used, according to the common Hebrew custom, in a mystical sense; and accordingly it would lie ready to the hand of the mystic in Patmos. The principal mystical numbers of the Apocalypse are 3, 7, 10, with their parts and multiples. So we have again and again the three years and a half, which stood, not for that exact space of time, but for a broken 7. And just as 666 seemed in its symbolical meaning to be equivalent to wanting, wanting, wanting—three sixes, each one of them just falling short of the complete 7, so may not 1,000 be equal to $10 \times 10 \times 10$, in order to give threefold force to the largest of the mystical numbers of the Apocalypse?

The only periods of time mentioned so far in the book have been comparatively short stretches, the $3\frac{1}{2}$ years, or its equivalent, 42 months or 1,260 days, being the longest. I am quite aware that there are interpreters who take a day for a year, and so stretch out the 1,260 days to 1,260 years; but there is no authority for this. It was done once in one of the acted prophecies of Ezekiel; but there is no authority for applying this to prophecy in general, the very fact that in that particular case it is specified being an indication that where not specified it does not apply. And if it be applied here so as to make $3\frac{1}{2}$ years = 1,260 years, then we should have to deal, in this 20th chapter, not with 1,000 years, but 360,000 years. The longest period, then, which has been specified so far has been $3\frac{1}{2}$

years. The visions, as distinctly announced at the beginning, have had to do in substance with that which will shortly come to pass; but here the prophet is conscious of a sudden enlargement of the scope of his view: he sees a tract of time stretching out before him without any clear limit, and he very naturally, in order to describe it, makes use of the mystic number 1,000, which was conventionally applied to the years of the Messiah. This conventional association of 1,000 years with the times of the Messiah was no doubt the main reason why there was such terrible excitement at the close of the first millennium of the Christian era. There was a general expectation among Christian people that the world was coming to an end. And now we are running on towards the last century of the second millennium, and still the times of the Messiah are in progress. But all difficulty on this head disappears when we bear in mind that the number is not used in a definite numerical sense, but in the mystical sense in which we continually find numbers used in the Apocalypse. We found that there were more than seven Churches in Asia, but the number 7 is used because it is the number of perfection. Why then should there be any more difficulty in discovering that the great Armageddon, or Gog and Magog uprising of the nations, is postponed for more than a thousand years? The figure seems, in fact, to be used with something of the same indefiniteness as we now use the word myriad. A myriad, properly speaking, is 10,000; but we continually talk of myriads without the slightest intention of laying stress on that particular number.

Leaving, then, questions of date, which seem from what we have discovered to be quite indeterminate, what are the main ideas intended to be conveyed in connection with this period indicated by the mystic number? The answer turns on the meaning we attach to the first and the second resurrections. Here we cannot but recall the great passage in

our author's Gospel, where two resurrections are spoken of in succession (John v. 25-29). That is the only other passage in the Bible where two resurrections are successively spoken of; and as it occurs in a book by the same author, we ought to have here, if anywhere, the key to our interpretation. There clearly the first is the spiritual resurrection of those who have passed from death unto life by faith in Christ (v. 25); the second is the resurrection of the body, when "all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done ill unto the resurrection of judgment" (vv. 28, 29, R.V.). Now does not the passage before us look like an expansion of this teaching of the Lord put in the poetic language of the imagination?

That the first resurrection is spiritual and not physical seems implied in the use of the word "souls": "I saw the souls of the martyrs and the saints living and reigning with Christ." Those who are risen with Christ reign with Him. So far as they are concerned Satan is bound and cast into the abyss. This is an idea which runs all through John's great Epistle. "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not." "To this end was the Son of God manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil." "We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but He that was begotten of God keepeth him, and the evil one toucheth him not." So here: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection." True, the victory is not yet complete, but Satan is bound. The wicked one toucheth him not.¹ And though there is to be a great assembling of

¹ It may be said that such expressions are too strong as applied to ordinary Christian experience in the days of the Messiah. But remember again what we have so often had occasion to observe, that this apostle continually deals with ideal contrasts. The description is not in any more exalted terms than the description of the sun-clad woman, or of the seven golden candlesticks. It is the ideal he is always giving us. And if you look at the description of the

the forces of evil before the final triumph over the great enemy, like that gathering of Gog and the princes of the land of Magog in the prophecy of Ezekiel, there is no cause for alarm, for, as foretold by the Old Testament seer, fire shall come from heaven and devour the armies of the aliens; and now, at last, the dragon shall be finally discomfited, being cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. And after that comes the second resurrection: "I saw the dead" (not "souls" this time, but the dead, all the dead, those buried in the sea as well as in the land), "the great and the small, standing before the throne."

I am perfectly aware that this is not a complete exposition, nor is it free from difficulty; but it has this great recommendation, that it is in full consistency with other parts of Scripture. It is the result of an honest and earnest attempt to deal with the passage on the principle the apostle lays down, "according to the proportion of faith"; and it certainly keeps prominently before the mind that which it is the main object of the whole passage to teach, that even that old serpent the devil, before his final overthrow, can be bound and rendered powerless so far as those are concerned who are truly risen with Christ and sit with Him in heavenly places, and will certainly in the end be overwhelmed with destruction no less complete than that which has overtaken his allies on the earth.

Now that we have dealt with the first of our two great subjects, the preliminary binding and final overthrow of Satan, we are prepared for looking at the second—the general judgment (*vv.* 11–15). It is a much simpler pas-

saints living and reigning with Christ during the thousand years, that is, during all the years of the Messiah's reign on earth, including the present time, you will find that it is no stronger than the expressions already quoted from the Epistle of John, and no stronger than the corresponding representations in the Epistles of Paul, where he speaks of Christians as "risen with Christ and sitting with Him in heavenly places."

sage than the other, and full of solemnity. May it be with reverence and holy awe that we approach so great and terrible a subject.

The first resurrection was that of the blessed and holy, the resurrection from the death of sin to the life of faith. The second is the resurrection of all the dead, small and great, the resurrection in which all have part except those who are alive and remain till the coming of the Lord. For you will observe it is not souls only, but bodies also, that are now concerned. "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it" (there can be no mistake that this is the resurrection of the body); "and Death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them," Death giving up the bodies, Hades the souls. Clearly it is the general and final resurrection: "I saw the dead great and small stand before the throne," the great white throne. Yes, it is the final judgment, the last assize. "I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away." "Behold, the heavens are not pure in His sight, and He chargeth His angels with folly." How then shall earth appear before Him? "And there was no place for them." "Who shall stand when He appeareth?"

"And books were opened"—we are not told how many; but is it not most natural to suppose that for each soul there is a book? And yet not for all souls; for over against the many books there is one book sharply distinguished from the many books, and called "the Book of Life," in which many names are written. Why the sharp distinction? Have we not the key in that passage already referred to in the Gospel, where before the first resurrection is spoken of there is this significant declaration, "He that heareth My word, and believeth Him that sent Me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life." Those whose names are written in the Book of Life have been judged already; and perhaps

that is what is meant by the statement about them in the 4th verse: "I saw thrones, and they sat on them (*i.e.*, those living and reigning with Christ), and judgment was given unto them." They have been judged already. Their sins are all forgiven, blotted out of remembrance; the books recording them have been destroyed; their names are already written in the Lamb's Book of Life. There needs only one book for them all; for though they too differ endlessly from each other, they are all alike in this, that they have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The Book of Life is one book. But the books of judgment are many; and all who have rejected the forgiveness offered them through Christ and the gift of eternal life which He bestows, will be judged according to the books, each according to his own book, or, as it is here put, "every man according to their works." The judgment will be a righteous judgment; all allowance will be made; nothing will be charged against a man but what he is clearly and fully responsible for; but though all this is true, who is there that would choose to demand his own book and refuse to accept the atonement by which all sin is blotted out and the name written in the Lamb's Book of Life? It is not said here that every one who is judged by his own book shall be condemned; but it is said that all whose names "were not found written in the Book of Life were cast into the lake of fire." Does that mean that those are all lost who never heard of Christ? Certainly not. "The Lord knoweth them that are His," whether they all know Him or not, wherever their lot is cast. And many names will be found in the Book of Life which God only knows. There will be many surprises in that day. There will be names in the Book of Life which scarce any one expected to see there; and there will be names not found in the Book of Life which almost every one expected to see. The

only names which we can venture to say will certainly not be there will be the names of those who have deliberately rejected the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

And now the enemies are all vanquished and the great salvation is complete. The Scarlet Woman has perished; the beast is no more; the false prophet deceives no longer; Satan is not bound merely, but cast with his allies into the lake of fire. And now the last enemy, Death, is destroyed: death himself with his shadow, Hades: "Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire." Christ has had the keys of both. Remember the great words at the opening of this marvellous Apocalypse: "Fear not; I am the First, and the Last, and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore; and I have the keys of death and of Hades." He has kept them all the while. He has given His beloved sleep, He has watched their very dust; but now the keys have served their purpose, and may follow death and Hades into the burning lake. His people are all free from both; "and death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire." Now it is "life for evermore," life free from sin and pain and death; a new life, with a new environment too, as we shall see in the two magnificent chapters which still lie before us ere we close.

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