

The Four Women OF THE Apocalypse

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The Four Women of the Apocalypse.

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CHAPTER I.

JEZEBEL IN THYATIRA.

OF the four women mentioned in the book of the Revelation two symbolize agencies that have spread corruption, while the other two are symbolic of the two great communities which God has formed to bear witness for Him, and to act as His instruments of government in the ages that are to come. The first woman is described in the letter to the church in Thyatira. She is the corruptress of the Lord's servants there, and the Lord remonstrates with that church for allowing her presence and influence. He says: "I have this against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess; and she teacheth and seduceth My servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols" (2. 20).

Thyatira Trade-Guilds.

Thyatira was situated north-east of Smyrna, in a fertile valley in the Province of Asia. Its inhabitants were possessed of considerable commercial advantages. At the same time they were grossly immoral. The citizens were formed into several Trade Guilds. Membership of these was essential to worldly success. Guild-feasts were

held at appointed times, and the proceedings on these occasions were characterized by the utmost licentiousness. "The bond which held a guild together lay always in the common religion in which all united, and in the common sacrificial meal of which all partook; the members ate and drank fellowship and brotherhood in virtue of the pagan deity whom they served. In the existing state of society it was impossible to dissociate membership of a guild from idolatry, and the idolatry was a kind that by its symbolism and its efficacy exerted great influence on its adherents, making them members of a unity which was essentially non-Christian and anti-Christian. In the second place, the common banquets were celebrated amid circumstances of revelry and enjoyment that were far from conducive to strict morality."*

"To hold aloof from the clubs was to set oneself down as a mean-spirited, grudging, ill-conditioned person, hostile to existing society, devoid of generous impulse, and kindly neighbourly feeling, an enemy of mankind."†

This shows the danger to which the converts in Thyatira were exposed. The woman spoken of as Jezebel, posing as a prophetess, as the advocate of broad-mindedness and enlightenment, would easily seduce the careless believer to go in for membership of a guild, or to return to it if it had been abandoned at conversion. The advantages would be great. Ridicule and persecution would be avoided. Prosperity in business would be practically ensured. Personal prestige in the city would be enhanced. And why not bring a healthy influence into society by joining the guild? These and other arguments, with which Christians who are tempted by the worldly-minded are so familiar to-day, would be used to entice believers from their faithfulness to Christ.

* Prof. W. M. Ramsay, in the article, "Thyatira," in *Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible*.

† Prof. W. M. Ramsay. *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 348.

Whether Jezebel was actually the woman's name or not, we may take it that there was such a woman in Thyatira, and that she inculcated doctrines in the church by which she successfully allured some of the believers to partake in the licentious and idolatrous practices referred to. Here, then, in the early days of Church history antinomianism became rife, and immorality was practised under the fair garb of the Christian faith; there was a form of godliness, but a denial of the power thereof.

Jezebel and Ahab.

We cannot dissociate this woman's name from the Jezebel of 1 Kings. She was the daughter of Ethbaal, a Sidonian. Her father was priest to Astarte, the vile goddess of the Syrians, the religion of whom was derived immediately from Babylon. Jezebel, whose name signifies a "dung heap," came into the midst of Israel as the wife of Ahab, and was the dominating influence amongst God's people. Her husband was practically her subordinate. The story of her pollution of the nation, her slaughter of the prophets of God, and her substitution for them of the prophets of Baal, is well known. Through her instrumentality Ahab "did yet more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him." The gorgeous ritual of the worship of Astarte replaced that of Jehovah. Jezebel's baneful influence continued during the reigns of her two sons, Ahaziah and Jehoram, and, through the marriage of her daughter Athaliah to Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, it extended to the tribe of Judah. Athaliah had a house of Baal erected in Jerusalem and her sons "broke up the House of God; and also all the dedicated things of the Lord did they bestow upon the Baalim" (2 Chron. 24. 7).

The Seven Letters.

In the letters to the seven churches there is every indication of a wider scope of teaching than what was immediately applicable to those churches. Clearly there is a great deal to be said for the view that the churches are, in the two chapters which contain the letters addressed to them, purposely arranged in an order which represents anticipatively the whole course of what is called Christendom during the present era. We notice, for instance, in connection with the subject we are considering, the immediate sequence of Thyatira after Pergamos. There were false teachers present in Pergamos but Thyatira suffered them. Pergamos was indifferent to the evil; Thyatira became associated with it. These two succeed Smyrna, which was appointed to endure persecution. Correspondingly in early Church history, after the persecutions which took place in the period from the Emperor Domitian to Constantine, *i.e.*, from about A.D. 170 to the beginning of the fourth century, the churches experienced a time of immunity from opposition and cruelty, and rapidly became possessed of worldly influence and authority. Departing from the path of simple allegiance to Christ, the Church sought a power and affluence for which her Founder had not destined her, and eventually placed herself under the ready patronage of the Emperor. The weakening of paganism, and the self-aggrandisement of the churches, provided Constantine with an opportunity for acquiring supreme political power which his ability and energy were not slow to seize.

A Parallel.

Under his prestige the union of the Church with the world proceeded apace. The conditions represented by the letters to Pergamos and Thyatira rapidly took shape. As in the days of Israel under Ahab and Jezebel, the

faithful ministers of God's Word, the true prophets of the Lord in the churches, were expelled, and pagan priests, advocates of the religion of the Egyptian goddess Isis, were brought into the House of God to act as the spiritual guides of His people. This diabolical amalgamation of Christianity with paganism was completed by Pope Damasus at the end of the fourth century. The apostate Church had become heathenised. Damasus was not only made the leading ecclesiastic in the Church ; he was also elected Pontifex Maximus, or Chief Pontiff, of the heathen world. Nothing could be more striking than the comparison between the idolatrous decadence of Israel under Jezebel and that of the Church under the Roman prelacy. The corruptions which were spread by the symbolical Jezebel amidst the churches were of the same sort as those by which the pagan queen poisoned the life of God's earthly people Israel. Damasus vauntingly acted on the principle that the end justified the means. No matter how glaring the enormity, how unrighteous the deed, everything was justified so long as the cause of the Church's religious and political power was advanced. The abominations of heathendom were admitted into the churches under the cloak of the Christian faith.

The Doom Pronounced.

Thus what took place in the narrower sphere of Thyatira transpired subsequently in the broad realm of Christendom. Whether those who were guilty of yielding to Jezebel's seductions in Thyatira actually repented of their deeds, or whether the Lord's threat was carried out, we cannot definitely say. We may gather that it was so, however, from the fact that the Lord says, "I will kill her children with death ; and all the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and the hearts : and I will give unto each one of you according to your works" (v. 23).

Probably what took place in the slaughter of the children of Ahab and Jezebel in Israel (2 Kings 10. 11) had its counterpart in the case of Jezebel's children in the church in Thyatira. So, again, in the broader view of the subject, when the Babylonish ecclesiastical system of Christendom in its final form is hereafter overthrown by the anti-Christian federacy of nations (Rev. 17. 16), then this threat against the evil in Thyatira will receive its fulfilment in the wider sphere of Christendom. This we are to consider more fully in our next chapter.

CHAPTER II.

MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT.

THE second of the two evil women described in the Apocalypse is the subject of a vision given to John and recorded in the 17th chapter. There came to him one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls of the wrath of God, and talked with him, saying, "Come hither, I will shew thee the judgment of the great harlot that sitteth upon many waters; with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication,* and they that dwell in the earth were made drunken with the wine of her fornication."

The Apostle was carried away in the spirit into a wilderness, a place suggestive of destitution and apparently symbolizing a condition barren of all that is fruitful for God, void of that which could delight His eye; a striking contrast, as we shall see, to the place from which the Apostle was afterwards called to see the fair heavenly woman, the Bride, the Lamb's wife. He now sees a woman "sitting upon a scarlet-coloured beast, full of

* The reason why these events are described as already having taken place, though they were actually future to the Apostle's time, is because they are viewed from the time when the judgment is to be executed.

names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations, even the unclean things of her fornication, and upon her forehead a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

Why "Mystery?"

That the woman is called "Babylon the Great" indicates her association with the ancient city of the East. That the word "Mystery" is annexed to the title implies that the appellation has a spiritual significance, that facts relating to the woman have something more than a mere geographical and historical connection with the city. A mystery in Scripture is not calculated to convey to the mind of the believer the obscurity attached to what is mysterious. It comprises facts which he is intended to understand, the truths relating to which are to shape his conduct according to the will of God, whether preventatively or formatively, and thus to direct his loyalty to Christ. A mystery lies outside the ken of the natural mind, for "the natural man understandeth not the things of the Spirit . . . they are spiritually discerned."

The last phrase of the woman's title, "the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth," intimates that Babylon is the source both of unholy unions of the people of God with the world, whether in Israelitic history or in Christendom, for such associations are described in Scripture as spiritual fornication (Jer. 3. 6, 8, 9; Ezek. 16. 32, *e.g.*), and of all systematized idolatry in the world, for whatever is set before men as an object of worship other than God is, in the language of Scripture, an abomination. The language is also sugges-

tive of the immorality and unchastity which accompanies idolatry.

Babylon the Source of Idolatry.

Idolatry, in an organized form, originated with Babylon, under the rule of Nimrod, son of Cush. The name of the ancient god, Bacchus, denotes "Son of Cush," and is therefore to be identified with Nimrod, who was deified after his death. The most ancient pagan religions of the world, though varying in details, have certain features in common which are distinctly traceable to the primal system of idolatry known to have been established by Nimrod and his queen Semiramis in Chaldea after Nimrod had made Babel the beginning of his kingdom (Gen. 10. 10). The Baal and Astarte worship to which we have made reference in connection with Jezebel, sprang from the ancient Chaldean system. The nations had drunk of the wine of Babylon and had become intoxicated (Jer. 51. 7). It was in this original Babel cult that the worship of a trinity of father, mother, and son was initiated, the mother being regarded as the queen of heaven. That place she retained among the nations under such names as Asttarte, among the Syrians; Diana, among the Ephesians; Aphrodite, among the Greeks; Venus, among the Romans; Isis, among the Egyptians. Israel itself was corrupted into worshipping the queen of heaven (Jer. 7. 18; 44. 17-25), and later the same Eastern source affected Christianity in the establishment of the worship of the Virgin Mary.

From Babylon to Rome.

The Chaldean religion was transferred to Rome in the following way. After the capture of Babylon by the Medo-Persians, under Cyrus, in 539 B.C., the tonsured priests of the Chaldean cult, still unchanged in its character from the time of its inception in the days of

Nimrod and Semiramis, were expelled. They fled to what is now Asia Minor, where they were welcomed by the Lydian king and established with all their ritual at his capital, Pergamos. Satan thus transferred thither the seat of his power ("Satan's throne," Rev. 2. 13, r.v.). In 133 B.C., on the death of Attalus III, the last of the Lydian kings, his kingdom, and the Chaldean hierarchy with it, passed under the dominion of the Romans. In the next century Julius Cæsar removed the priests and all their ritualistic equipment to Rome, so as to enhance the glory of the office he already held as Pontifex Maximus, or "Chief Pontiff," of the pagan religion of Rome. Combining in himself political and religious authority, as both Imperator and Pontifex, he was now not only Dictator of the Republic, but also the recognized head of the Romanized oriental priesthood. Thus Rome became the seat of the Babylonish abominations. This was the Satanic preparation for the corruption of the Christian religion when, having already declined from its Apostolic purity, it found its ecclesiastical centre in Rome. In this manner Rome became "Mystery-Babylon." The vast political power of Rome had thus been mounted by the Babylonish woman before Christ appeared, and, at her instigation, the whole machinery of the Empire was eventually set in motion to crush His true Church.

What has been said above, then, provides the explanation of the fact that not only is the woman named "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of the Harlots and of the abominations of the earth," but also, in the interpretation at the end of the chapter, is identified with Rome, "the great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth" (v.18).

Her Intoxication.

The Apostle saw the woman "drunken with the blood

of the martyrs of Jesus" (v. 6). Everything that has been and is represented by mystic Babylon is chargeable with the slaughter of saints of God. The same spirit that leads men to the spiritual abominations of setting up any other object of worship than the true God, likewise instigates them to the persecution of His people. While the political rulers of the earth, allured by the woman's pomp and grandeur, are intoxicated by the wine of the cup of her abominations, she herself is intoxicated by the blood of the true followers of Christ.

The Woman and The Beast.

Again, the woman was seen sitting on a scarlet-coloured, seven-headed, ten-horned beast. It will be beyond the scope of our immediate subject to go fully into the details of the latter.*

In the interpretation the beast is indicated as the ultimate federal head of the ten-kingdomed league of nations. A comparison of the details of this 17th chapter with the 13th, and with Daniel 7, shows that the term "beast" is symbolic both of the monarch and of his dominion (cp. Dan. 7, ver. 17 with ver. 23), and that his dominion will consist of the resuscitated Roman power in this altered form. That the woman is seen riding the beast clearly sets forth the domination of the ecclesiastical system centring in Rome over the political federation of nations. The ecclesiastical power has dominated the civil in separate kingdoms in past history, but at no time has it exercised its power over a league of federated nations. The fulfilment of the vision is yet future. It is true that the Romish religion has received severe checks and set-backs in the past, but it is nowhere decadent or dying to-day. Its converts are multiplying in almost every country, and its power is far from being

* See "The Roman Empire in Prophecy," and "The Mysteries of Scripture," by the same writer, in the *Every Christian's Library* Series. Pickering & Inglis.

on the wane. The woman will yet occupy, though only for a brief time, a position of religious and political domination over the nations comprised in what was the ancient Empire. She not only rides the beast, she sits "upon many waters," which are interpreted as "peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues." That is to say, besides controlling the ten-kingdomed league with its rulers, she exercises her influence over the masses of the people.

Her Destruction.

Her doom, however, is sealed. Her destruction is destined to take place at the hands of the very potentates who will have supported her. The change in the situation is dramatic. "The ten horns which thou sawest, and the beast (not "upon" the beast as in A.V.), these shall hate the harlot, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and shall burn her utterly with fire" (v. 16). How this will actually transpire is made clear in the 13th chapter. The two beasts, the confederate world-rulers there mentioned, will establish a religion co-extensive with their universal dominion. Its creed will be simple but absolute. The Emperor must be acknowledged as God. Refusal will be punished by death. "And he deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by reason of the signs which it was given him to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, who hath the stroke of the sword, and lived. And it was given unto him to give breath to it, even to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as should not worship the image of the beast should be killed" (Rev. 13. 14, 15, R.V.). The power at the disposal of these two potentates will be sufficient for the enforcement of this worship. Every other religion must be crushed, Romanism included.

Various movements amidst humanity are to-day directly preparing for this. A striking illustration of the manner in which the woman is to be destroyed has taken place in Russia. Atheistic Communism is spreading its influence rapidly throughout the world. Its institutions are working in practically every nation. The idea of God and the Christian religion are to be overthrown. Man is to be his own saviour and master. Within the pale of Christendom, in the congregations of those who dissent from Rome, rationalism and modernism are playing their part toward the same end. The issue of it all is clear from Scripture. The ruling potentates of the ten-kingdomed league, having committed their power to the Antichrist, will with him destroy Popery and everything else that is associated with mystic Babylon. Its ecclesiastical possessions, with all its vast wealth and treasures, will be confiscated, its ritualistic paraphernalia given to destruction, its cathedrals, churches, and other idolatrous fanes demolished, and those who refuse to acknowledge the new worship slaughtered. The woman will be made "desolate," stripped of her wealth; "and naked," stripped of her finery; they will "eat her flesh," she will be deprived of her power; "and shall burn her utterly with fire," she will be reduced to utter social and political ruin. The Divine decree has gone forth. The human instruments will be ready at the appointed time; "for God did put in their hearts to do His mind, and to come to one mind, and to give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished" (v. 17, R.V.).

CHAPTER III.

THE WOMAN ARRAYED WITH THE SUN.

WE are now to consider the two other women depicted in the Apocalypse. Their character is entirely different from those which have been before us in the preceding pages. The first is described in the 12th chapter. This chapter really has its beginning in the last verse of chapter 11. "The Temple of God was opened in Heaven, and the ark of His Covenant was seen therein," details which, taken with the context, indicate that what follows has to do with the nation of Israel. Indeed the 12th, 13th, and 14th chapters are to be taken together, and carry us through affairs connected with that nation from the time of the birth of Christ till the end of the Great Tribulation and the overthrow of Antichrist by the Son of Man.

The Apostle was shown a great sign in Heaven, "a woman arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child, and she crieth out, travailing in birth, and in pain to be delivered. And there was seen another sign in Heaven; and behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his head seven diadems. And his tail draweth the third part of the stars of Heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was about to be delivered, that when she was delivered, he might devour her child. And she was delivered of a son, a man-child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and unto His throne" (Rev. 12. 1-5, R.V.).

The Sun, Moon, and Stars.

That she was arrayed with the sun, possibly points to the nation's being under the protecting power of God;

that is directly set forth subsequently in the chapter. That the moon (an emblem of derived authority) is seen under her feet, indicates that the power she might have exercised under God has gone from her, and that at the time in view in the vision she is in a position of subjection to her foes. At the same time there is a suggestion that she is yet to be possessed of supreme authority on the earth. The first mention of the sun, moon and stars in the Bible is in connection with the government of the earth (Gen. 1. 16). The crown of twelve stars indicates the glory and universality of the administration which God has determined for His chosen nation. He has said, "I will make . . . her that was cast far off a strong nation, and the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth even for ever, and thou, O tower of the flock, the hill of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come; yea, the former dominion shall come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem" (Micah 4. 7, 8).

The Great Tribulation.

Using the analogy of child-birth, Isaiah uttered a prediction concerning Israel which provides a key to the present passage. In connection with the Birth of Christ in the nation, and the still future time of the Great Tribulation, "the time of Jacob's trouble," the prophet foretold that the historical order would be the reverse of the natural process of generation. Of Israel he says: "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man-child. Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such a thing?" Then as to the fact that a remnant of the nation will be preserved through the time of trouble and brought into Millennial glory, he continues: "Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth at once? For as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children. Shall I

bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the Lord. Shall I that cause to bring forth shut the womb? saith thy God." The Lord thus assures His people Israel that they shall be completely and suddenly delivered from their relentless foes, and that, though the nation will be largely depopulated, "a remnant shall be saved." That the time is Millennial is clear from the joyous predictions that follow: "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all ye that love her . . . rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn over her. . . . For thus saith the Lord, Behold I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream, . . . as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem . . . and the hand of the Lord shall be known toward His servants, and He will have indignation against His enemies" (Isa. 66. 7-14).

The Man-Child.

As to the Man-Child, the same prophet had given the Divine assurance to the nation that it should give birth to the One who would break the yoke of its enemies and be its Deliverer: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His Name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His Kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with judgment and with righteousness from henceforth and even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this" (Isa. 9. 6, 7, R.V.). Micah speaks of the same events without referring to the inversion of the natural process in the analogy. He specifies the tribe into which the Man-Child would be born, and the place of His birth:

"But thou, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, unto thee shall One come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel; Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will He give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the residue of His brethren shall return unto the children of Israel" (Micah 5. 2, 3).

The woman, then, seen in the vision given to the Apostle, is Israel, and the Man-Child of whom she was delivered is Christ. So the Apostle Paul, speaking of his own nation, says: "Of whom is Christ as concerning the flesh" (Rom. 9. 5). He was not brought forth by the Church, be it noted, for the Church springs from Him. The woman "was delivered of a Son, a Man-Child" (v. 5, r.v.), when Christ was born in Bethlehem—long anterior to the time of her travail, for that is yet to take place at the close of the present age. He it is who "is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron," as Jehovah had declared in the second Psalm: "Yet I have set My King upon My holy hill of Zion. I will tell of the decree: the Lord said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (Psa. 2. 6-9).* The description given of Him as a "Man-Child" is suggestive of His perfect humanity, in virtue of which, or, to use His own words, "because He is the Son of Man," "the Father gave Him authority to execute judgment" (John 5. 27).

The Dragon.

The vision next reveals the Arch-Adversary of God and

* Some would associate the Church with Christ in the interpretation of the Man-Child. While several details are true of the Church as well as of Christ, there is no direct indication that the symbolism refers here to more than Christ Himself.

His people. "And there was seen another sign in Heaven; and behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his heads seven diadems. And his tail draweth the third part of the stars of Heaven, and did cast them to the earth." These details are symbolic of his control over, and its effects upon, the Roman Empire, especially in its final and yet future phases, under the power of which, at his instigation, the Jewish nation is to suffer its last woes. The consideration of these details lies beyond our present subject.

"And the dragon stood before the woman which was about to be delivered, that when she was delivered, he might devour her child." The failure of his effort, intimated here by the absence of any further reference to it, is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, in the account of the futile attempt of Herod to destroy the Infant Christ. Instead, after all things concerning the days of His flesh and His resurrection were accomplished, "her Child was caught up to God and unto His Throne." This statement, actually fulfilled when Christ ascended, is reminiscent of His own words, "I also overcame, and sat down with My Father in His Throne" (3. 21). *

The Flight of the Woman.

The vision now carries us, in point of time, from that event to the efforts of the Devil against the Jewish people at the end of this age. He had been unable, in spite of numerous attempts, to prevent the Son of God from accomplishing his irremediable defeat at Calvary, and thereby, potentially, his everlasting destruction; his final pre-Millennial effort will be against the nation, through the instrumentality of which Christ became the Man-Child.

"The woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a

* When the Church is caught up it will not be to His Father's Throne; see 1 Thess. 4. 17.

place prepared of God, that there they may nourish her a thousand two hundred and threescore days" (v. 6). The subject of her flight and of the effort of the dragon against her is continued in verse 13. The parenthetic passage, from verses 7 to 12, indicates the time of these events. That passage describes the casting out of Satan the Dragon from the heavenly places, a sphere in which his activities are as yet partly carried on (Eph. 6. 12). Since his energies will then be confined to the earth, its godless inhabitants will be given over to the last pre-Millennial woes, and a great voice in Heaven declares that the time of the Kingdom of God and the authority of His Christ has come. That proclamation is a time-indicator. The flight of the woman is to take place during the Great Tribulation. At that time, that which nationally corresponds to the symbolism of the woman will consist of the godly remnant of Israel, who are to be preserved alive through the time of extreme national distress and peril under the Dragon's persecution. Then it is that the woman flees to the wilderness, as previously mentioned in verse 6. "There were given to her the two wings of the great eagle." God had borne His people "on eagle's wings" when they fled from Pharaoh into the wilderness of Sinai (Exod. 19. 4; Deut. 32. 12). So now the same metaphor describes His care in preserving them from the final fury of Satan. The eagle's wings are suggestive of swift escape and certain deliverance.

She is nourished "for a time, and times, and half a time," a period identical with the 1260 days of verse 6. For this period the Great Tribulation is destined to last (Dan. 7. 25; 12. 7). The time is the same as the latter part of the 70th week, or period of seven years, in Daniel 9. That the "times" are years is clear by comparison with Daniel 4. 23. The one description views the period in its smaller divisions of days, the other in its broader

divisions. God, who views things in their whole scope, takes into His view at the same time the minutest details.

The Place of Her Refuge.

God has a place prepared as a temporary refuge for the Jewish remnant, "a shelter in the time of storm." That the locality is a wilderness suggests the absence of natural resources. Scripture has given intimation as to the region. East of Judæa, on the far side of Jordan and the Dead Sea, there lies a remarkable district occupied in ancient times by the nations of Edom, Moab, and Ammon. The territory contains mountain fastnesses of an extraordinary character, hollowed out by gigantic gorges and chasms, occasionally broadening out into areas of considerable size, though still surrounded by lofty perpendicular cliffs. In some of these wide hollows lie the ruins of famous ancient cities, the most famous of which was Petra. Along the sides of the gorges there are caverns and tombs of enormous size, many of them artistically constructed, the whole of these gorges and recesses being sufficient altogether to provide accommodation for hundreds of thousands of inhabitants. The ornamentation and sculpture give evidence of an attainment to a high degree of art, and suggest that the population, while secure from foes, lived in comparative ease and luxury. The nature of the locality is such that people could to-day take shelter there in immunity from the power of modern implements of war, safe even from the mightiest guns and the deadliest gases.

Now it is significant that the prophecies in the 11th chapter of Daniel relating to the warfare of the end of the present age, the time of the Great Tribulation, predict that this very region is to be delivered from the attacks of the King of the North. "These shall be delivered out of his hand, even Edom and Moab, and the chief

of the children of Ammon" (Dan. 11. 41). Again, coincidentally with this, our Lord, foretelling events of the same period, and predicting the tyrannical acts of the Antichrist, gave warning that the people of Judæa should then flee to the same district. "When therefore," He says, "ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), then let them that are in Judæa flee unto the mountains" (Matt. 24. 15, 16)—obviously the mountains lying to the east and south-east.

It has been pointed out that an army, attempting to cross from Judæa to this district, would have to traverse a sandy plain several miles wide, frequently the scene of sudden and terrific sand storms of such violence as to render military movements impossible. It is not difficult to conceive how comparatively simple would be the fulfilment of that part of John's vision recorded in Revelation 12. 15, 16, following upon the flight of the woman into the wilderness from the face of the serpent: "and the serpent cast out of his mouth after the woman water as a river, that he might cause her to be carried away by the stream. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the river which the dragon cast out of his mouth." The language is of course symbolic. The actual fulfilment, political and military, is known to God.

To whatever these details may actually refer, the godly remnant of the Jews, so frequently spoken of in the Psalms and the Prophets, would be able to dwell in this region, under the care of Jehovah, literally, "in the secret place of the Most High," passing the night of the Great Tribulation "under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psa. 91. 1). Their defence would be "the munitions of rocks." God's people would find here "a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall" (Isa. 25. 4). The whole of this passage, from Isaiah 24. 16 to the end of chapter 25, should be read in this connection. It

speaks of the judgment which immediately precedes the Millennium and of the deliverance of God's people at that time.

There are numerous passages in the Old Testament which foretell, in language confirmatory of what we have been setting forth, the circumstances relating to God's protection of His people in the manner indicated. There may indeed be a prophetic import, relative to these events, in the fact that here David hid his father and mother while being pursued by king Saul (1 Sam. 22. 3, 4). Cp. Isaiah 16. 4, "Let Mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab; be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler."

The Rest of the Jews.

Baffled in his attempt to destroy the woman, the Dragon, with increased wrath, goes away to make war "with the rest of her seed, which keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus" (v. 17). Judging from the Lord's prophecies as recorded in Matthew 24. 15-22, there will be a considerable number in the nation who are not included amongst those who flee to the mountains. Comparing this passage with what is set forth in Revelation 11 concerning the testimony of the two witnesses, we may gather that a multitude of Jews will by this time have turned to God as a result of their ministry and will be expectantly anticipating the appearing of Christ in glory. They would, therefore, properly be described as those "who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus," in contradistinction to those people who will own allegiance to, and obey the commands of, the Antichrist. The "testimony (or witness) of Jesus," is to be put into connection with verses 3-7 of the preceding chapter. It is especially a testimony given to the two witnesses there mentioned, of whom it is said that, when they had finished their testimony, "the beast that cometh up out of the abyss shall make war with them, and overcome them and kill them." We may reasonably conclude that these two witnesses are amongst "the rest of her seed" spoken of in chapter 12. 17, and that the objects of Satan's malignity

will be all God-fearing Jews in whatever part of the world they are found.

The vision passes. No more is seen of the woman. We do not even find in the remainder of the book of Revelation the definite mention of the establishment of the children of Israel in the land of Palestine, for it is not the specific object of the Apocalypse to describe this. The Millennial blessedness of the nation as symbolized by the woman is there by implication. That God has determined to deliver His people Israel, and restore them to communion with Himself, with their Messiah reigning over them in peace and righteousness, and associating them with Himself in His sovereignty over the nations, is clearly foretold in many other Scriptures. Michael, who is spoken of in this 12th chapter, as defeating Satan and his angels, and driving them out of Heaven (vv. 7-9), was described in the book of Daniel as "the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people" (Dan. 12. 1), and the Divine promise made to that prophet was, "at that time (the time of unprecedented trouble, verse 1) thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." The number of the children of Israel shall yet be "as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass that, in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not My people, it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the Living God" (Hos. 1. 10).

CHAPTER IV.

THE BRIDE THE LAMB'S WIFE.

WE now turn to consider the last of the women mentioned in this book. The vision is one of undimmed glory. No adverse power is present. There is no dark background of suffering and persecution. Here we are brought to the closing presentation of one of the greatest subjects of Scripture. Previously it has been set forth in various ways, by illustration and type, by prophecy

and doctrine; now it constitutes the final vision given to the beloved Apostle. Here Christ is seen with His Bride in all her beauty and glory. It is His glory that shines in her. His enemy who had assiduously sought to prevent her very existence and to thwart the Divine purposes of Him who died to make her His own and hereafter to consummate her union with Himself, has been hurled to his doom. His subtlety and fierce antagonism have only served to enhance the glory and increase the blessedness of this union, and to show forth the power and grace of God who designed it.

A Change of Vision.

It must have been a great relief to the Apostle, after all that he had seen in prophetic vision, of upheaval and disaster, of fearful conflict and Divine judgments, consequent upon the breaking of the Seven Seals, now to survey the scene of unclouded glory, which he describes in the latter part of chapter 21 and the beginning of chapter 22. One of the seven angels who had taken his part in emptying the bowls of Divine wrath at the last pre-Millennial judgment on the foes of God, comes to give a message of joy and cheer to the wondering seer. It was one of those same angels that had shown him the vision of the other woman, the corruptress of the world (chap. 17. 1-3). Then the invitation was, "Come hither I will shew thee the judgment of the great harlot;" now it is, "Come hither I will shew thee the Bride, the wife of the Lamb" (21. 9). Then the Apostle was carried away in the Spirit into a wilderness, an appropriate locality for that vision of evil; now he is carried away to a great and high mountain, suggestive of strength, stability, and permanency. We must mount to lofty heights to see the glory of God. It was when Moses and the elders of Israel had come up into the Mount that they saw the glory of the Lord. The dazzling splendour of Christ's transfiguration was to be seen, not down on the plains of earth, but on the mountain's height. John was invited to behold the Bride; the angel showed him a city, "that great city, the holy Jerusalem." How

striking is the parallel to the vision of the evil woman! She, too, was presented as a city, "the great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth." That was Satan's anticipative imitation of the pure and virtuous woman, the Bride of the Lamb, the heavenly city.

Concerning Christ and the Church.

We have to go back to the beginnings of human history to see the first intimation of this combination of symbols. Let us see what the Genesis record states about the formation of Eve in this respect. In the Hebrew of Genesis 2. 22, the word which means "to make" is purposely set aside and a word denoting "to build" is chosen instead: "the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man builded He into a woman, and brought her unto the man" (see r.v. margin). Here then is the application of the metaphor of building to the formation of her who was created to be a helpmeet for Adam, language anticipative of the words of Christ Himself long after: "I will build My Church" (Matt. 16. 18). In the Epistle which especially sets forth the union of the Church with Christ, the same two figures are employed. The Apostle Paul, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, uses the metaphor of the city in reference to the Church, in chapter 2. 19, and then depicts it, in chapter 5, as the Bride of Christ, the object of His love. For her He "gave Himself up . . . that He might present the Church to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." The Apostle dwells upon the union of husband and wife (chap. 5. 25-32) to complete his illustration of the union between Christ and the Church.

Here then, in Revelation 21, the Bride, the Lamb's wife, a symbolism suggestive of the closest relationship and the most intimate love, is also seen as "the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, having the glory of God" (v. 10), an organized community, enjoying fellowship and association under the authority of the Lord. The next words have frequently been understood as if they referred directly to the light of the city; that is because the word *phōster*, which means

"light-giver," has been translated "light." The margin of the Revised Version "luminary," gives the correct rendering. Christ Himself is in view. He it is who is described in the statement, "her Light (-giver) was like unto a Stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal." He is the source of her light. The city owes all her glory to Him. He is the precious Stone. The jasper sets forth the various traits of His character in their perfect combination.

The words "clear as crystal" represent one verb in the original, and may be translated more literally "crystallizing;" that is to say, the Stone is described not merely as clear as crystal itself, it has a crystallizing power. Christ imparts beauty to His redeemed, He makes His Church resplendent with His own glory. In shining out upon Creation she reflects His light, setting forth His character and attributes.

The Lamb and the Stone.

The association of the figurative use of the Lamb and the Stone, in reference to Christ, is frequent in Scripture. All that in His relationship to the Church He is as the Stone, emblematic of strength and stability as a foundation, as well as of ornamental splendour, is due to His sacrifice at Calvary as the Lamb of God. The reader will find profit in comparing in this respect the following Scriptures, which are but few among many: 1 Samuel 7. 9, 12, which narrates how Samuel first took a sucking lamb for the whole burnt offering, as a preparation for victory over the Philistines, and then, after the conflict, a stone, to which he gave the name Ebenezer, as a celebration of victory accomplished; Psalm 118. 22-27, where the Psalmist sings both of the sacrifice to be bound to the altar and of the stone which is become the Head of the corner. So in 1 Peter 1. 19, with 2. 4-7, where the Apostle first speaks of the value of the precious blood of Christ as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot, and then of His preciousness as the Chief Corner Stone. Again, the Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 2. 13, 30, speaks of the union of believers both Jew and Gentile in being

made nigh together by the blood of Christ, and then represents them as being builded together upon the same foundation, "Christ Jesus Himself being the Chief Corner Stone."

The Wall and the Gates.

The 12th verse of Revelation 21 continues the description of the City, and the words, "having a wall great and high," are to be connected with the beginning of verse 11. The wall is emblematic of defence and security. There are twelve gates with twelve angels standing at them. The angels are associated with the Church, though they never could form part of it. They have, for almost two thousand years, been learning by means of the Church the wisdom and grace of God (Eph. 3. 10 with 1 Cor. 11. 10), and throughout the Millennium they will rejoice in witnessing the glories of the completed union between Christ and His Bride.

On the gates are written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. In Eastern cities the gate was the place where the elders sat to administer judgment. The name on the gate was not descriptive of the city itself, but of a locality outside it, suggesting that the said locality was under the influence of the city. Thus in the earthly Jerusalem, for example, there are the Jaffa Gate and the Damascus Gate. That the names of the tribes of Israel are on the gates of the Heavenly City signifies that judgment over Israel will be administered by some who form part of the Church. This is just what our Lord told His apostles. "When the Son of Man," He said, "shall sit on the Throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19. 28). The thrones of the apostles will not be literally and materially set up on the earth in the Millennium, for they themselves are part of the Church. Their authority will therefore be exercised from the heavenlies.

There are three gates on each of the four sides of the City, for in the Millennium with Israel ruling over the whole world, the influence of the Church will proceed in every direction. Again, the wall has twelve founda-

tion stones, and on them are the names of the twelve apostles. This is not a matter of the administration of judgment, but of the foundation of the city itself, for the Church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets; that is to say, on the foundations of Divine truth laid by them (Eph. 2. 20). These foundations are adorned with all manner of precious stones, symbolic of the glories of the Lord Jesus and of the Church in association with Him, as set forth in other Scriptures.

The adornment is not something additional to the foundation stones, as in the case of ordinary buildings, but forms an essential part of the foundation itself. The glories of the Lord, made known by the truths of Holy Scripture, will be revealed in perfection in the very Church herself as well as through her instrumentality.

The Measurement.

The city, the gates, and the wall were measured with a golden reed, indicative of a righteous and infallible judgment. But more than this, the very fact of the measurement indicates the preciousness to God of that which is measured. Compare chapter 11. 1, which describes the measurement of the Temple of God in Jerusalem, and the altar and the worshippers, all as being precious to God and set apart for His service and glory amidst the confusion of earth at that time. See again Psalm 16, where Christ, speaking of the saints as His "goodly heritage," says that "the measuring lines are fallen unto Him in pleasant places," a statement expressive of the infinite value to Him of His redeemed people (v. 6).

The angel measured the city "as far as twelve thousand furlongs." It is not necessary to understand by the preposition *epi*, "as far as," that the measurement is incomplete, though that may possibly be so, especially if the suggestion is that an angel cannot comprehend all the glories of the Church. The preposition may, however, simply serve to emphasize the enormous dimensions of the city. The length and breadth and height of it are equal. Probably, in the vision given to John, the city

was in the shape of a pyramid. In verse 17, which describes the height of the wall as 144 cubits, and this as being "the measure of a man, that is, of an angel," there is perhaps a suggestion that an angel can comprehend all that is conveyed by the wall, the protective out-works of the city, in contrast to the infinite wonders of God's grace as set forth in the structure of the city itself. A finite mind, whether of man or angel, can grasp the one, the other is comprehended only by God.

Its Temple.

The city itself is "of pure gold, like unto pure glass" (v. 18, R.V.), while the street of the city is "like unto pure gold, as it were transparent glass." The gold exhibits the glory of Divine righteousness. The city and the street are not only free from defilement, but therein are seen all the perfections of God's character as exhibited in Christ. There is no temple in the city, "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple thereof." There is no need to enter a sanctuary, for there God is publicly seen in Christ. For this reason no created light, as of the sun or moon, is required; the uncreated light of God irradiates the city. "The lamp thereof is the Lamb." That is to say, the light that shines does so as the outcome of the sacrifice of Calvary. The nations of earth will walk by the light of it (R.V., margin), and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. They cannot bring their material wealth into it, for it is heavenly, but they will acknowledge its glory, submit to its rule, and pay homage to Him whose city it is.

Entrance Into It.

All who have resurrection bodies, apart from those who constitute the Church itself, will have free entry into the city; that is to say, there will be complete fellowship between those who symbolically constitute the city itself and those who have access to it. To use the somewhat imperfect illustration of an earthly city, there are those who, as its permanent residents, constitute its citizenship, and those who, as visitors, enjoy associa-

tion with and the privileges of the citizens themselves. Those who have the right to enter into the heavenly city, that is to say, those who in resurrection life enjoy fellowship with the Church, have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life (v. 27).

The River and the Tree.

It is a pity that a break was made by introducing chapter 22 here. The first five verses of the 22nd chapter are a completion of the 21st. The Apostle is now shown "a river of water of life, bright as crystal," which proceeds from the Throne of God and of the Lamb. This is apparently symbolical of all the blessings that come from the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit. Where God's Throne is from thence flow streams of water, for He who is universally Sovereign is the source of every blessing (see Ezek. 47. 1; Joel 3. 18; Zech. 14. 8). "There is a river the streams whereof make glad the city of God, the Holy Place of the Tabernacles of the Most High" (Psa. 46. 4). Wherever the sovereignty of God is acknowledged, and wherever God Himself is worshipped, there His worshippers receive blessing. The river refreshes the city itself. Jesus said, "the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life" (John 4. 14). The river also flows on to minister refreshment to others, and so it will be the joy of the Church to be the channel of blessing to all the subjects of the wide Kingdom of God.

On both sides of the river is the Tree of Life yielding fruit every month. All spiritual fruit comes from Christ. He is the Tree of Life. There will be no Cherubim to guard the way. The Tree will be of free access to all—it grows on either side of the river. The Divine restrictions necessarily laid down in Eden, and the curse pronounced when man fell, will be for ever removed. The fruit of the Tree will impart delight and refreshment to all those who constitute the city, and to all who have access to it, for Christ will for ever continue to minister of Himself to all His saints in glory. The leaves of the Tree will be for the healing of the nations, so that from

Christ Himself, through the instrumentality of the heavenly city, the nations of earth will not only receive their administration and their light, but also the undoing of the works of the Devil and all the havoc he has wrought among them.

His Name in Their Foreheads.

The servants of God and of the Lamb "shall do Him service and see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads." Their capacity to serve them will depend upon their faithfulness now, and their sphere of service then will be determined by their rewards for service rendered now. There will be unbroken communion between Him and them, and they will unfailingly show forth His glory, presenting in perfection all the traits of His character. Those who look upon them will at once recognize Christ in them. Finally, those who constitute the city will reign with Christ for ever and ever.

This beautiful city then, with all that is set forth in the symbolism of this passage, is "the Bride, the Lamb's wife." She it is who is to share His sovereign power. How striking the contrast in this closing prophecy of her reign with Him for ever and ever, to what is set forth in the case of the woman in chapter 17, who sought to reign, and so successfully for a time, in her self-assumed pride and glory, over the kings and the inhabitants of the earth! May the wonders of our soon-to-be-realized glory in union with our blessed Lord and Redeemer, as set forth so vividly in this final vision of Holy Scripture, stimulate us the more earnestly to look for, and the more ardently to love, His appearing, and the more devotedly to present ourselves to Him for the service here of Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us, that He might hereafter present us to Himself, "without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing."

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