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THE SACKCLOTH PERIOD OF THE CHURCH.

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The visions of the Apocalypse are highly-wrought symbolical pictures, whose interpretation Dr. Schaff calls "the cross of crosses of commentators, which will not be fully comprehended until we see them in the light of the millennium." There are three distinct systems of interpretation: the Preterist, which maintains that the prophecy was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of the pagan Roman empire; the Futurist, which insists that it is all yet to be fulfilled in the second coming of Christ; and the continuous Historical, which finds prophecies of past events, of others just now occurring, and of others still which will come in a more distant future. Some historical expositors say it is rather a graphic delineation of the principles and modes of the divine government, and an announcement of the aims and means of the providential administration of the Church and the world, than a narration of the successive events of history. It is proposed, in a series of papers, to outline the historical interpretation of the more prominent revelations of this wonderful Book, so as to show the agreement of the prophetic symbols with the historical records of the past or their probable fulfilment in the future. The Church in sackcloth for 1,260 days will claim our attention in this article.

I. *The symbolic representation of this period must be examined.* There is a graphic epitome of this era in Rev. xi: 3—"And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth"; and verses 4-10 describe the witnesses, the powers they exert, the enemy which overcomes them, their death, and the triumph of the victors over them. Chapter xii: 1-6 pictures a woman of glorious character travailing to bring forth, but for the same length of time assailed by a monster and driven into the wilderness, her child that was to rule the nations having been "caught up to God and to His throne." These two chapters are generally thought to delineate the same era from different standpoints, and with distinct but analogous symbols. Dean Alford, on the 11th chapter, says: "It is manifestly and undeniably of an *anticipatory* character; it is not and cannot be complete in itself. . . . We are necessarily carried on by the very terms of our compendious prophecy into the midst of another prophecy far more detailed and full of persons and incidents; of one which has its 'great city,' its 'temple of God,' its 'worshipers in it,' its 'testimony of Jesus,' and other coincident particulars. What inference does a sound principle of interpretation force upon us? What, if not this—that our present compendious prophecy, as in the particular of the beast that comes out of the abyss, so in its other features must be understood as giving in summary, and introducing, that larger one? and consequently

that its terms are to be understood by those of that larger one, not servilely and literally where they stand? We cannot understand this prophecy at all, except in the light of those that follow; for it introduces by anticipation their *dramatis personæ*."

This view agrees with the fact that the seals, the trumpets and the vials, each in a distinct aspect, going over almost the same period of time, set forth the providences of Jesus as they usher in the millennial glory of the Church; but the one views the grand agencies employed by the Mediator, another traces the divine judgments on the empires of the Romans, the Saracens and the Turks, while the third declares the terrible plagues by which the complex Church-State system, the Roman antichrist, is destroyed. It is also confirmed by the three parts of the eleventh chapter, each like an index in its concise brevity. The 1st and 2d verses indicate an apostate state of the Church, in which a divine provision is necessary to distinguish the true, and the false, the precious and the vile—evidently the Reformation era, when the Scriptural Confessions and Catechisms, the "reed like unto a rod," were prepared to expose the errors of Rome, and justify separation from her corrupt fellowship. Then verses 3-10 go back to describe the resistance made to the defection which debases the "temple of God," the "holy city," into that "great city which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified," by which for 1,260 prophetic days the faithful witnesses of Christ are kept in sackcloth and then slain. And verses 11-19 take up again the providential gift of the reed, and its authorized application as a measure to the temple, altar and worshipers, and point out the results as a resurrection of the witnesses, their triumphant ascent to heaven, their gradual overthrow of all enemies, and their final triumphant occupancy of the temple in which God would appear in glory without a separating veil, and send forth His light and truth to the ends of the earth. Let us, then, examine the symbols of chapter xi: 3-10 and chapter xii: 1-6, and by a careful comparison show that the two visions, like the dream of Pharaoh interpreted by Joseph, are two delineations of the same period of sorrow, suffering and shame for the true Church of Christ, brought in by Satan's deceptions deluding her members into error, apostacy and hate.

The symbols of the eleventh chapter reveal the Church in a struggle for existence in purity, and her perpetuation through a seed begotten by the Gospel. For, as Jerusalem was the seat of Israel's government and worship, it was eminently *the city*. And as the temple on Mt. Zion was its chief glory, and the large assemblies in it were frequent, and almost exclusively for public worship, its religious character was prominent; and by a common figure of speech Jerusalem, Zion, the city, came to be the names used for these assemblies, the Church. Paul, in Heb. xii: 22, 23, describes the New Testament Church by all these names, and Christ calls the collective body of His people, Matt. v: 14, "a city set on a hill." The "two witnesses" are still the Church, but in a moral conflict. They are only "two," a sufficient number to convict of crime, a reclaiming minority "withstanding" the prevalent apostacy, but too few to stay the tide of wickedness, Eccl. iv: 9-12. As in Isa. xliii: 9-12, Luke xxiv: 48 and Acts i: 8, they are Christ's special advocates, the church militant in the face of ignorance and hostility, faithfully pleading for truth and purity. This is symbolized more clearly in the added figures: "The two candlesticks," chapter i: 20, the Church holding up the light-bearing ministry, and "the two olive trees," Zech. iv: 11-14, or the two anointed ones

who furnish the oil for the light, are clearly understood by David's words in Ps. lii: 8, when withstanding the cruel assaults of Saul and Doeg, "I am as a green olive tree in the house of God;" and by his comparison, Ps. cxxviii: 3, of the children of a God-fearing man to olive plants. And all these figures imply intelligent perception of God's truth, faithful exhibition of His claims, and persistent resistance to gathering darkness and sinful rejection of Christ. They are "in sackcloth" because they mourn vain effort, Isa. xlix: 4, the decay of divine worship, Joel i: 13, and the prevalence of idolatry and antichristian apostacy, Lam. ii: 6-10. But now the enemy, in victorious conflict with the witnesses, is called a "beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit," a diabolical power which gets possession of the Church, and makes her streets the theatre of his bloody and relentless war upon the faithful remnant. Against this enemy the witnesses "finish their testimony;" or give full proof of its antichristian character, and pronounce its sentence of doom. The result is the slaying of the witnesses and the exposure of their dead bodies to shame for three days and a half: a violent repression of faithful believers by an exultant foe, which, with Jezebel fury, suppresses all testimony against itself. And now the Church of Christ, as in the Psalmist's day, Ps. lxxiv: 3-9 and cxxxvii: 1-4, hears only the tread of Gentile feet in her courts, the hush of death is upon her pure worship, and none of her sons openly proclaim the Gospel of Christ.

The symbols of the twelfth chapter are frequently combined, as in Isa. xxxvii: 1, 2, Jer. iv: 8-31, and xlviii: 32-42, and xlix: 1-22, with "sackcloth," and are only a more definite revelation of the same sad event. The "harlot woman" in chapter xvii: 18 is identified with "the great city;" and the figure is so common in the prophets both as "bride" and "harlot," and here as a "mother," that it is indisputably the Church of Christ. She is "clothed with the sun," the light and righteousness of Christ, "the moon under her feet," the ordinances of divine grace her path and the means of her progress, and "on her head a crown of twelve stars," is directed by a ministry who preach the doctrine of the Apostles and maintain a divinely instituted faith and order. She is "travailing in birth," which is, in Isa. lxvi: 7, 8, and Gal. iv: 19, the figure of earnest effort to convert men; in Isa. liii: 11 it is self-sacrifice for this object, and in Isa. xxvi: 16-18 and Micah iv: 9-11 it represents vain effort and sorrow when led captive and seeking deliverance; and here joined with the birth of "a man-child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron," it clearly expresses painful toil in fulfilling the apostolic commission, Matt. xxviii: 18-20, with the sad consciousness that it was "casting pearls before swine," to her own loss and injury, and all in vain save to bring the doom of Isa. lx: 12 on the willful despisers. Some think Constantine, who made Christianity the religion of the empire, was the man-child; but his character and that event alike forbid it. Others refer this to the birth and death of Christ; but these were not possibly among "the things which shall be hereafter," of which John was now writing. It is the children of God, "born in Zion," in, by and for whom Christ rules the nations; since the prediction of His universal dominion, in Dan. vii: 14, is in ver. 27 fulfilled when it is given to "the people of the saints." This child is "caught up," a word which means to *take away by violence, to devour*. It occurs in Matt. xi: 12, John x: 12, and 1 Thess. iv: 17, to express the violent capture of a city, the wolf catching the sheep, the death of those that "are alive and remain" at the judgment day; and here denotes a violent removal of "the righteous seed" who would take the na-

tions for Christ. The enemy is the "great red dragon," the Devil or Satan, "in heaven," the ecclesiastical sphere, as in Job i: 6 and 2: 1, deceiving or destroying the children of the righteous by his wiles and power in a corrupt Church. The flight into the wilderness, where she is fed for 1,260 days, is the seclusion and protection which, in the face of overwhelming opposition, save the Church from utter extinction through a period which closes without a visible child to perpetuate her name.

Thus in these two chapters we find the same five elements: 1. A powerful enemy of the truth and purity which enters into the very sanctuary of God. 2. The continuance of a faithful few who "keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." 3. Their maintenance of the truth in suffering and sorrow until, in the face of the fully developed mystery of iniquity, they finish their testimony by exhibiting the true child and heir, and by branding the intruder on the inheritance as the Antichrist. 4. The prevalence of the enemy, by seduction and violence, until all opposition is silenced, and "the gospel of the kingdom" is no longer preached. 5. The conflict continues for 1,260 days. But with this agreement in their main features, there are diversities which mutually supplement each other, and complete the portraiture of this period. Especially the eleventh chapter points to defection and apostacy in the Church itself, which are met by heroic though ineffectual utterance of the divine testimony; while the twelfth chapter shows her exposed to external persecution and violence by a dragonic civil power.

II. *Let us examine the time during which the sackcloth continues.* In the Revelation the times as well as the events are veiled under symbols. But the "times and seasons" are still more hidden by the imperfection of historical records, and by the confusion of dates through ignorance of the solar system, the use of different eras, measures of time and ways of calculating them. Still, science has untangled some of these knots and thrown light upon others, so that, while the uncertainty is perhaps too great for the natural man, faith through the mists can "understand the words" as Daniel did for his consolation and encouragement. The key to the question, "How long shall be the vision?" is given by Ezekiel iv: 5, 6, where God says: "For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days; . . . I have appointed thee *each day for a year.*" This year-day principle of interpretation is here required by analogy because the numbers are associated with symbolical events that cannot be literally understood; they are expressed in language different from the ordinary indications of time; and the "seventy weeks" of Daniel, who employs also the other terms used in Revelation, were wholly fallacious as a literal space, but when counted "a day for a year" were exactly verified by the coming and death of Christ. Understood thus, the period of the sackcloth clothing and seclusion in the wilderness is 1,260 years.

But when did this period of dominant error and corruption in the Church begin? The absence of definite information in the context suggests that it began soon after the Apostle wrote, and that the sinners of that favored age were treated as Christ says (Mark iv: 12), "That seeing they may see, and not perceive"; or as he quotes from Isaiah, "He hath blinded their eyes." In chap. xi: 2 the Gentiles are said to "tread under foot the holy city," manifestly pointing to a time when unconverted heathen possess, control and afflict the Church. In ver. 7 the final blow on the witnesses, at the close of the period, is inflicted by "the beast that as-

cendeth out of the bottomless pit," which is fully described in chap. xvii. and is unmistakably Papal Rome, the last and ten-horned form of the Empire. But the 12th chapter leaves out of view the power which "caught up" the man-child, and describes the monster that begins the assault upon the woman as a Dragon, the Old Serpent, the Devil and Satan, three *aliases* which reveal its character, and show that it is one of the successive world-powers used by that fallen angel to tempt and destroy the Church of Christ. While there is identity as to place and character between the Dragon and the Beast out of the pit, chap. xiii: 2-4 compared with xvii. show that the Dragon in point of time precedes the other and transfers his power to him. Yet they are separated by a "wounded head," the Christian Empire, which was an apparent deathblow to Dragon power, but which by anti-Christian decline soon gave it new vitality and entire healing under the 8th head, which "is of the seven." In the description of this Dragon power there are these marks of time: 1st. "The crowns are upon his heads," and not "upon the horns," as in xiii: 1, which evidently identifies it with Imperial Rome yet undivided, or not later than the sixth century. 2d. It is called a "great red dragon," manifestly as the prophets designated nations, and as still the United States, Britain, and Russia are named by the Eagle, the Lion and the Bear, which are their national ensigns. The Eagle was on the Roman standard till the beginning of the third century, when a Dragon, covered with a purple-red cloth and carried on a pike-staff, was substituted for it. This was again changed when the Empire became Christian; so that we must look for this Dragon assault under the Pagan Empire. 3d. The last act ascribed to him is in ver. 4, "his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven." The verb "drew" is used in John xxi: 8 for "dragging" fish in a net, and in Acts 8: 3 and 14: 19 and 17: 6 for persecuting violence. The "stars of Heaven," Rev. 1: 20, are Christian ministers. The "third part" is used in the first four trumpets, chap. viii., to express the extent or locality of these judgments; and by general consent of expositors relates to a nominal division of the Empire before its conversion, caused by the existence of three rival Emperors, Constantine, Licinius, and Maximian. This "casting down of the third part of the stars" may well be applied to the Diocletian edict of A. D. 303, which excluded the Christians from all offices, ordered their churches to be pulled down, and their sacred books to be burned, and led to a general and indiscriminate massacre of all such as professed the name of Jesus. Though only partially enforced in Europe and Asia, it was so effectually executed by Maximian in Africa against the ministry and people that "the imperial murderers boasted that they had extinguished the Christian name and religion." This is still called by the Copts and Abyssinians of Africa as "the era of martyrs." As this "tail" stroke of the Pagan Head ended in A. D. 311, when the symbols of Paganism went down in blood with the defeat and death of Licinius, we must look for the "appearance" at an earlier date. And 4th, when the dragon appeared the woman was still clothed with the glory of the sun, moon, and stars, ch. xii: 1, and had not yet suffered the terrible eclipse which we shall see began to cast its shadow on her early in the third century, and by A. D. 254 had left her only a remnant, who labored by "the beaten oil" of the sanctuary to drive back the ever-increasing darkness and corruption of the heathenized majority.

III. *The historical verification of this as the true period.* The Church of Christ began very early to be corrupt in doctrine, government, worship

and discipline. The Apostle John, in his first Epistle, says, "Even now are there many Antichrists." In the second century the Gnostics corrupted the doctrines of the Gospel by the tenets of the Oriental philosophy; the Ebionites denied the divinity of Christ; the Montanists claimed inspiration for their leader and put his writings on a par with the Holy Scriptures; and many other corrupt opinions began to make headway. But in the third century, especially between A. D. 240 and 265, error in doctrine and corruption in practice, the very germs of the antichristian apostacy, were living and strong, if not dominant, in the Councils of Carthage, Iconium, Alexandria and Rome. Baptism was corrupted by the introduction into its administration of sponsors, the sign of the cross and anointing with milk and honey; a magical power was attributed to it; it was deemed essential to salvation; and Stephen, the Bishop of Rome, excommunicated the African bishops and refused communion with the Asiatic Christians because they held the baptism of heretics to be null. The Lord's Supper began to be administered with great pomp, was refused to those who were in "a penitential state," and was administered to infants as essential to salvation. Prayers were offered for the dead, the doctrine of a Purgatory, in which imperfect sanctification was completed, was preached, the authority given to tradition made void God's law, celibacy and asceticism in the clergy were held in esteem. The ministry were greatly deteriorated in learning, in faith and in their manner of life, and were blind leaders of the blind in the introduction of heretical doctrines and the rites of heathen worship into the Church of Christ. The Bishops were called "chief priests" and, Diotrophes-like, sought pre-eminence in dignity, and, under pretence of sanctity, lived in celibacy but maintained as concubines an order of women who had vowed perpetual chastity.

This declension in truth and purity was the result of the hasty admission of Pagan converts into the Church, and was accelerated by the persecutions and tolerations of Pagan Emperors, perhaps by the latter more than the former, as in the fable the Sun was more potent with the traveler than the North Wind. But scarcely had a lenient reign induced a partial subserviency to the imperial will, than some cruel edict compelled it to become full and universal under pain of death. In this century the Law of Severus condemned to death all Pagans who should embrace Christianity; and the order of Maximian to seize and put the bishops to death inaugurated indescribable barbarities. In A. D. 249 Decius Trajan commanded his prætors, upon pain of death, to extirpate all Christians or compel them to return to Paganism; in consequence vast numbers of the faithful followers of Jesus were slain, and multitudes renounced the faith, offered sacrifices to the gods, and yet retained their relations to the Church and leavened it with their cowardly spirit and heathen conformity. A controversy arose over the restoration of those who had lapsed to Paganism; some would not count them as offenders, others would require a confession of sin, and a few would exclude them wholly. The result was that for the most part they were restored without due censure or the renewal of their vows to fidelity; even Cyprian, who afterwards heroically died as a martyr, yielded his stricter views in deference to the primacy of Cornelius, the Bishop of Rome, who usurped authority to relax the discipline of the Church. Against this laxity the Novatian protest was uttered in A. D. 254, and was followed by their separation from the church and the organization of a sect based on the view that Heb. vi: 4-6 forbade the restoration of Christians to Church privileges after having once fallen into sin. Thus, as often, one extreme drove to

another, and between them truth and righteousness disappear. This relaxation in discipline was followed in A. D. 257 by the Decree of Valerian, who, instigated by his bigoted pagan minister, Macrianus, banished the Christian ministers and forbade Christians to assemble for any purpose; and in all parts of the Empire there was a cruel slaughter of private Christians, and many of the noblest ministers, among them Cyprian of Carthage and Sixtus of Rome, were brutally put to death. Through these years of persecution the Platonic philosophers had brought all their learning and eloquence to bear upon Christians, induced many to abandon their religion, and still more to accept their pagan tenets with the doctrines of Christianity, and succeeded in introducing mystical interpretations of Scripture which explained away the doctrines of the Apostles as mere allegories, and in making their principles almost universal in spite of a few able and zealous opponents. By this prevalent decay of pure and undefiled religion the witnesses of Jesus "lie all night in sackcloth"; they are "in pain and labor to bring forth; for now they shall go forth out of the city, and shall dwell in the fields, they shall go even to Babylon; there shall they be delivered."

This *sackcloth travail* of the Church continued long to grow worse and worse. The conversion of the empire under Constantine in A. D. 323, though a terrible overthrow to Paganism, was more nominal than real, an outward acceptance of the name and forms of Christianity by unconverted millions of pagans. If the Church had been pure and true to her mission, the world would have been evangelized; but instead the Church rapidly became paganized. By the seventh century the Empire, successively overrun by the Goths, the Vandals and the Huns, had been divided into ten parts, each with an independent civil ruler; but all united in common obedience to the Bishop of Rome as a Spiritual Head. Under this Papal rule the Church soon became a "Sodom and Egypt," openly wicked, cruelly despotic and arrogantly blasphemous. Yet all the time a few faithful ones resisted the apostacy. Wickliffe, by his translation of the New Testament and his Scriptural preaching and writings, shed the light of "a morning star" upon the dark night, and illumined England by the flames to which his bones and his writings were condemned by his Popish enemies. But in the latter part of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century, when "the mystery of iniquity had come to the full," the witnessing Lollards, Albigenses and Waldenses "finished their testimony" by denouncing the Church of Rome as the Antichrist, and rebuking all her unscriptural abominations in their pulpits and by their pens. *The Noble Lesson* and *The Treatise of Antichrist*, in which the hideous enormity of Rome's Antichristian abominations are exposed, are still preserved as monuments of their fidelity. But these noble utterances only awakened more bitter hate, and the fires of persecution burned more fiercely under professed Christian bishops and kings than ever under pagan Emperors, and were not quenched until Christians could not be found to burn. Huss and Jerome and their godly companions won the martyr's crown, and died in faith that out of their ashes God would raise a nobler seed and more effective witnesses; but without any one immediately to succeed them in their work.

The witnesses are now slain; the man-child, whose birth-cry had been a summons to the apostate Church to "repent and do the first works," and to the nations to "kiss the Son," is "caught up to God and to His throne." And now at the Lateran Council, on May 5th, 1514, an orator

exclaims to the Pope in triumph : "There is an end of resistance to the Papal rule and religion, there is no one to oppose ; all Christendom is subjected to its Head—that is, to thee." The silence of death now reigns in every street of the Papal Empire ; there is no voice of testimony against the dominant iniquity for three years and a half, until October 31, 1517, when Luther nailed his theses to the church door at Wittenberg and raised anew the banner of Christ's testimony inscribed with the doctrine of Justification by Faith. If we count from the Novatian Protest in A. D. 254, and the decree of Valerian A. D. 257, when by craft and violence "the heathen came into God's inheritance and defiled His holy temple," we have just 1260 years in which a suffering remnant labored in all but hopeless sorrow, and died without effecting deliverance—Ps. lxxix: 1-4. All that time they fought a losing battle, and at the close "there was none to bury them"; they sowed in tears and had no reaping time. But now the lowest depth of the Church's humiliation has been reached ; thenceforward, though still "in a cloud" and in conflict with varying success for a time, the witnesses have power and prevalence : fire out of their mouth devours their enemies, they turn water into blood, and smite the earth with all plagues as often as they will. The man-child has come back from God and his throne, begins to rule the nations with a rod of iron, and with Michael and his angels wages terrible but successful warfare to a glorious victory. But before considering the Church's triumph we must trace her career through another phase of the enemy's power.

THE SALVATION AND DEATH OF INFANTS.

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It seems proper to state briefly the doctrine of Scripture in relation to the salvation of children dying in infancy. A large number of the human family die in childhood, probably not less than *one-fourth of all that are born into the world*; and it is calculated that "one-half of all that are born die before they have reached the full standing of members in the Christian Church." What is the state in death?—what the final condition of this vast number?—are inquiries not only prompted by an earnest curiosity, but to which also a regard to the Divine glory and a consideration of the immortal spirit demand an answer. The anxieties of Christian parents on this subject, too, require to be at least alleviated if they cannot be fully satisfied ; and in cases where tender loved ones are removed by death from the embraces of fond parents, and where death has made frequent inroads among the infantile members of a family, the inquiry assumes a peculiarly solemn and absorbing interest.

The subject of Infant Salvation has been injuriously treated, not only by Socinians and Pelagians, who reject other fundamental doctrines of the gospel, but likewise by others whose sentiments are generally considered evangelical. Some of the most eminent English divines, both ancient and modern, who strongly repudiate the Popish dogma of Baptismal Regeneration, teach that infant children are in a state of salvation, as having "*prevenient grace*," or a "*holy infantile disposition*;" others, that all in-