

AN
ANALYTICAL AND COMPARATIVE
VIEW OF ALL RELIGIONS

NOW EXTANT AMONG MANKIND :

WITH THEIR INTERNAL

DIVERSITIES OF CREED AND PROFESSION.

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"THE MODERN TRAVELLER," ETC. ETC.

"For though there be that are called gods to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him."—1 Cor. viii. 5, 6.

LONDON:
JACKSON AND WALFORD,
18, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

1838.

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which the system is based, they could be intelligible and attractive only to the learned; and it must be admitted, that this school has to boast of many very eminent and pious men. The late Bishop Horsley, in his posthumous translation of the Psalms, has adopted, to a considerable extent, the Hutchinsonian (or Cocceian) principles of Biblical interpretation; and he repeatedly cites Mr. Hutchinson with respectful approbation, although, in philosophy, the learned Prelate was no Hutchinsonian. Notwithstanding this array of names, however, the whole scheme must be regarded as a theory resting upon no solid basis of evidence; and it is gradually fading away before more rigid and solid principles of philological analysis and Biblical hermeneutics.

3. The Millenarian controversy is as old as the second century, the notion of a Millennium having its real origin in Jewish Tradition. It was a favourite notion of the Talmudists, that the world would last seven thousand years, typified by the seven days of the week. As God created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh, so it was believed that he would work out the redemption of mankind in six millenniums, (a thousand years being with the Lord as one day,) and that the seventh would be a millennial sabbatism.* This allegorical interpretation of the Mosaic record of creation, though it receives no countenance from the Old Testament, was so established and favourite a tradition, that it passed into the Christian church, and was generally adopted by the early

* According to the Chronology of the Septuagint, which agrees with that of Josephus, and with the received opinion of the Christian church during the first six centuries, the world is now in its eighth millennium; and there is strong ground for believing that the Jewish Rabbies *put back* the time-piece which had measured the ages of the world, by falsifying the data in the Hebrew text. See Russell's Connection of Sacred and Profane History, vol. i. pp. 79—122. Ecl. Rev. (3d Ser.) vol. xi. p. 442. The early Christians, so far from shortening the period from the Creation to the coming of Christ to about 4000 years, yielding to the belief that the Sabbath of the world was at hand, extended that period to nearly 6000 years. Julius Africanus (A.D. 221) reduced it to 5500 years; and Lactantius, assuming that to be the year of Redemption, predicted, in 320, that two centuries from that time was the limit of the world's existence. It was not till circumstances had proved the fallacy of the Millenarian hypothesis, that an abbreviated chronology was adopted. According to Dr. Russell, the present year (1838) answers to A.M. 7279; Dr. Hales makes it 7249.

Fathers, who gratuitously identified it with the thousand years spoken of, Rev. xx. 1—7. Yet, that the Millennium of St. John could not be the same as the seventh and closing cycle of the Jewish tradition, might have been inferred from the representation, that it is to be succeeded by *another* period, during which Satan is loosed; an intimation quite irreconcilable with the Rabbinical notion of the Great Sabbath. The thousand years during which the dragon is to be bound, might therefore synchronize with some other chiliad of the series,—with the fifth or the sixth. Had not this passage been interpreted according to preconceived notions, it never could have suggested the Millenarian hypothesis. Before the middle of the second century, however, many wild and ridiculous notions, savouring altogether of Judaism, had become blended with the doctrine, which was thus rendered a stumbling-block to many, and even brought into suspicion the authority of the Apocalypse itself. These judaizing views appear to have been for the most part embraced by Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, and other early Fathers; while notions of a still more extravagant and even licentious kind are attributed to Cerinthus. Origen and his disciples distinguished themselves by standing up against this medley of Jewish notions with the Christian faith; but unfortunately, in doing so, they gave allegorical interpretations to all the ancient prophecies. To confute the allegorists, Nepos, an Egyptian bishop, about A.D. 240, wrote a work in defence of the Millenarian doctrine, agreeably to the Jewish ideas. This work was answered by Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria (about A.D. 247), in a work “On the Promises,” in which (according to Jerom) he “derided the fable of a thousand years and the terrestrial Jerusalem adorned with gold and precious stones, rebuilding the temple, bloody sacrifices, sabbatical rest, circumcision, marriages, lyings-in, nursing of children, dainty feasts and servitude of the nations; and again, after this, wars, armies, triumphs, and slaughters of conquered enemies, and the death of the sinner a hundred years old.”* From this passage we must infer, that such

* The passage is given by Lardner, Works, vol. ii. (8vo.) p. 703. “If we understand the Revelation literally,” says Jerom, “we must judaize; if spiritually

were the gross expectations of the Chiliasts of those days; and the opinions of Lactantius appear to have gone to this length in absurdity.* Dionysius was answered by Apollinaris, Bishop of Laodicea, who followed the Jewish ideas of the Millennium in their full extent; against whom Epiphanius wrote under the seventy-seventh heresy.

The same differences were renewed among Protestant divines subsequently to the Reformation. One party, "in imitation of the Papist divines, and upon the same foundation that crept in among Christians out of the school of the Jews, pretend that some allusions found in the Book of the Revelation, obliged them to apply all the oracles of the old Prophets to the Millennium. So that, without the least hesitation, they apply to the time of the Messiah, a great number of prophecies which had their accomplishment before the coming of the Lord. As the Jews afford them no small assistance upon those places of the Old Testament, so it happened, that they also embraced one part of the Jewish system with regard to the second coming of the Messiah. They adopted a temporal reign of the Messiah, a re-establishment of Jerusalem, of its temple, of its sacrifices, a kingdom of the Jews in the land of Canaan; and they pretend that these hypotheses, which had their rise in the bosom of the Synagogue, since it rejected the true Messiah, are sufficient means to make them embrace him, when he shall reveal himself to call all the nations of the world to his communion."† The greater part of the Protestant divines, however, rejected these notions, together with the opinion of Jerom (generally followed by the Romish divines), that the Ten Tribes never returned into their own country. But, to free themselves from this erroneous opinion, many of them

(or figuratively) as it is written, we shall seem to contradict many of the ancients, particularly Latins, Tertullian, Victorinus, Lactantius; and Greeks likewise."

* See Hamilton on Millenarianism, p. 295.

† To oppose the revival of this opinion, that of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius, and Apollinaris,—but which he deemed of very dangerous consequence,—the learned Dr. Allix wrote his "Confutation of the Hope of the Jews concerning the last Redemption," in the shape of Remarks upon the English Treatise of Rabbi Sahadias upon that subject. The remarks in the text are taken from the dedication of this highly learned and valuable treatise to the Bishop of Ely.

put an allegorical interpretation upon most of the oracles which relate to the return of the Ten Tribes, and of the Two Tribes under the empire of Cyrus and of his successors, that they might apply them to the times of the Gospel. Others, seeing that the terms of the prophecies relate to temporal advantages which the primitive Christians never enjoyed, adopted the opinion of Theodoret; that the oracles which the Jews at present refer to the time of the Messiah, had a literal accomplishment under Zerubbabel and his successors. The Millenarian notions were generally rejected by the Reformers in the sixteenth century, not merely as a speculative, but as a dangerous practical error. "For," remarks Michaelis, "the expectation of a kingdom, in which pure saints should rule over the unregenerate children of the world, began to excite a spirit of sedition; . . . and for this very reason, the Augsburg Confession condemns the doctrine of the Millennium in express terms. Further, according to the representations of the ancient Chiliaists, offerings and offering festivals were to be celebrated in this kingdom. But such notions are inconsistent with St. Paul's doctrine concerning the imperfection and abolition of the Levitical law."*

As these opinions are to be traced to a Jewish source, so their revival in modern times has originated in a desire to promote the reception of Christianity on the part of the Jews. This was the great design which the learned Mr. Mede had in view, in his "*Clavis Apocalyptica*" (1627), in which he combines the allegorical method of interpreting the Old Testament prophecies with the Rabbinical, adopting and defending the theory of a political restoration of the Jews, and a Millennial reign of the saints on earth. By modern Millenarians he is regarded as the father of their school of interpretation. Similar is the avowed object of the learned Jew or Jesuit, Ben Ezra, alias Lacunza, in his curious and elaborate defence of the Jewish doctrine of the Millennium, translated by Mr. Irving.† As Mr. Mede relies greatly upon the Targum, the Talmud,

* Marsh's Michaelis, vol. iv. p. 542.

† "The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty," 2 vols. 8vo. 1827. A notice of this work will be found in Ecl. Rev. (3d Series) vol. i. pp. 208—215.

and the apocryphal book of Tobit, so, Ben Ezra's strong-holds are, "the famous prophecy of holy Tobias," the prophecy of Baruch, and the second book of Maccabees; and he draws some of his most cogent arguments from the Canticles. In like manner, the second book of Esdras is cited by his Translator as inspired Scripture! The other principal advocates of the Millenarian theory are, Dr. T. Burnet, Bishop Newton, Dr. Gill, Dr. Priestley; and, in the present day, Mr. Irving and the Writers in the Morning Watch, Mr. Cuninghame, Mr. Nolan, Mr. Bickersteth, and other evangelical clergymen, who have, to a great extent, embraced the views of this prophetic school. The principal anti-millenarian writers are, Bishop Hall, Baxter, Dr. Whitby, Vitringa, Mr. Lowman, Dr. Allix, Mr. Scott the Commentator, Mr. Biddulph, Dr. Hamilton, Mr. Vint, and Mr. Gipps.* By Whitby, Vitringa, Lowman, and most of these writers, "the first resurrection," spoken of Rev. xx. 5, is understood of a spiritual resurrection; and the reign of the risen saints as being not on earth, but in heaven. But by many writers, both ancient and modern, the opinion has been maintained, that the Millennium is past. The strange hypothesis, that the phrase, "a thousand years," is to be understood of the brief period during which miraculous powers were exercised by the Church, and terminated with the first general persecution, was advanced by Andrew, Bishop of Cæsarea, A.D. 500; it has been advocated by Lightfoot, Usher, and others, and has been recently revived by Professor Lee of Cambridge. A different view has been taken by Grotius and other expositors, who held that the Millennium commenced with Constantine, and terminated at the capture of Constantinople. An acute American writer has recently endeavoured to identify the Apocalyptic Millennium with the most calamitous period of the Church;† but he conceives

* A tolerably complete list of writers on both sides is given by Mr. Bickersteth in his Practical Guide to the Prophecies, pp. 364—392.

† From A.D. 450 to 1453. Of course, Mr. Bush considers those whom the Prophet saw "on thrones," to be not the souls of the martyred, but their oppressors. So Witsius interprets. See Ecl. Rev. (3d Series) vol. ii. p. 101. In this article, the first resurrection is interpreted, not spiritually, but of an actual primum resurrection.

that an unlimited futurity of advancing prosperity awaits the Church on earth. This, however, it has been remarked, is but the Millenarianism of philosophy substituted for that of Judaism. Some expositors have extended the imaginary Millennium to a thousand years of days, or 360,000 years!*

As the Millenarian hypothesis has found zealous advocates, in almost every age of the church, among some of the most learned, eminent, and pious men of their day, it would be the height of presumption and uncharitableness to deny that the opinion is in itself one which may be held conscientiously and devoutly by individuals whose creed is scriptural, and whose views, in other respects, are free from any tincture of fanaticism. Yet, as a matter of historical fact, it is undeniable, that the prevalence of such opinions has always been attended with fanatical consequences. At Arsinoe in Egypt, the Millenarian delusion is said to have gained such ground among the Christians at the beginning of the third century, that "it banished from their thoughts the most important precepts of their religion:" and in alliance with the gross doctrines of Cerinthus, and the puerilities of Papias and Nepos,† it had the most

* The commencement of the past Millennium is fixed by Archbishop Usher, A.D. 4; by Grotius and others, A.D. 306. Johannes de Rupescissa predicted in 1349, that it would commence in 1370. Brightman fixed it in 1646. Alsted, the champion of the Millenarians at the beginning of the seventeenth century, asserted confidently that it would commence in 1694. Jurieu, in 1687, predicted that the approaching deliverance of the Church would, according to all appearance, take place between 1710 and 1716. Ness, in 1679, fixed, more cautiously, upon 1865, which is the period adopted by a living writer, Faber. John Archer, in 1642, fixed on 1700 for the commencement of Christ's personal reign. The Rev. John Mason, Rector of Water Stratford, Bucks, confidently asserted that the Millennium would commence in 1694; adding, contrary to Alsted's opinion, that it would be a personal reign of Christ on earth. So firm were his convictions, that he declared that he should never die; but his death took place before the close of that year. Beverley, in 1688, with equal confidence, fixed it in 1697. Bp. Lloyd endeavoured to prove to Queen Anne from Daniel and the Apocalypse, that in four years the popedom would be destroyed. Mede dated the commencement of the Millennium from 1716; Frere, from 1793; Dr. Hales removes it to 1880; Bp. Newton to 1987; Sir Isaac Newton to 2036.

† Ben Ezra divides the ancient Millenarians into three classes; the followers of Cerinthus and other heretics; the judaizing Millenarians, whose principal leaders were Nepos and Apollinaris, whose ideas were embraced by "innumerable followers;" and the catholic and pious, including Justin, Irenæus, and Lactantius. There is not the slightest evidence, however, that Nepos, whose piety and Biblical knowledge are eulogised by Dionysius, went at all beyond the last mentioned class.

unhappy effect upon the Church at large. In the tenth century, the prevailing notion, that the end of the world was at hand, contributed to produce and inflame the epidemic frenzy of the Crusaders. Since the Reformation, the notion of the saints smiting the ungodly and taking possession of the earth, has always had its advocates, from the German Anabaptists downwards; and "above all," Mr. Douglas remarks, "in times of civil changes, as when Venner, with his small but determined band, proclaimed the fifth monarchy, filled the whole of London with alarm, and fought with a courage which has never been surpassed, and scarcely ever equalled, except by some fanatic warriors among the early Moslems."* The Author of "an Examination of the Modern Claims to Miraculous Gifts," has also pointed out the instructive fact, that, "in almost all the claimants to inspiration for some centuries past, the great burden of their prophetic message has been, that the second coming of Christ, and the establishment of the Millennium, were just at hand; to which most of them have added, the doctrine of Christ's personal reign on the earth."† In the present day, Millenarianism has strikingly discovered its constant tendency to incorporate itself with dangerous error, in the bold and extravagant opinions of the Irvingites and other "Students of prophecy." The denial of the consciousness of the separate spirit,‡—the depreciation of evangelical preaching,§—the blasphemous attribution of evil to the Divine will and working,||—the Antinomian heresy,—the claim, on the part of more than one of its doctors, to inspiration,—and the crowning folly and impiety of one of their writers, that the day of judgement is past;¶—such are the opinions avowed by

* Douglas's "Errors of Religion," p. 290.

† Goode's "Modern Claims," &c. p. 198.

‡ See Ecl. Rev. (2d. Ser.) vol. xxx. p. 205.

§ "The doctrine of the atonement hath swallowed up every other doctrine, and become the great indulgence of ignorance and idleness." Irving's Fast Sermon, p. 18. "Satan will never be made to give up his reign by any preaching of the Gospel."—*Dial. on Prophecy*, iii. 176. "More truth is to be found in Popery, buried under the rubbish with which it has been smothered, than in Evangelicalism."—*Def. of Stud. of Prophecy*. See also Irving's "Last Days," *passim*.

¶ See Vaughan's "God the Doer of all things."

|| Thom's "Three Questions," p. 88. See Hamilton on Millenarianism, pp. 96, 334.

some leading Millenarians of our own time. The grosser errors alluded to would be strongly reprobated by the better men of the same prophetic school; still, they are found in intimate combination with the Millenarian doctrine.*

“The personal reign of Christ upon earth,” Mr. Douglas remarks, “rests upon no evidence.”† But to admit any article of belief without evidence, is to open the door to fanaticism. The most dangerous feature of Millenarianism is the erroneous method of Biblical interpretation to which it owes all its plausibility. If the doctrine be fallacious, the principles of interpretation by which it is maintained, are fallacious also, and must tend to sap the foundations of truth.

Every scheme of prophetic interpretation, however, conducts us to the conclusion, that “the night is far spent,” the day draws on; while it is not less clearly indicated, that there are “things that must first come to pass,” and that the end is not immediate. To the individual believer, indeed, death will be the end of prophecy, the great revealer of secrets; and we may well question the tendency of any views which interpose the gaudy illusions of earthly colouring between the eye of faith and the things which are unseen and eternal. But the expectations of the Church will have a practical influence upon her exertions. With an imaginary Millennium before her, she may even go to sleep, and dream of thrones and a long reign of secular prosperity. But, if she is “looking for and hasting towards the day of God,” then must she gird on her armour for the final conquest, under the animating assurance, that no other kingdom shall arise to dispute with “Him who is faithful and true” possession of the uttermost parts of the earth. Every thing in the aspect of the times calls upon Christians to advance, in the spirit of faith, to re-occupy the ground which has been lost to superstition and heathenism,

* An extraordinary migration of German Millenarians to Georgia, (where they believed that the personal reign of Christ would commence,) took place about twenty years ago, and terminated most tragically.—See *Pinkerton's Russia*, pp. 143—152.

† Not only so, but it seems directly at variance with those passages of Scripture which relate to Our Lord's exaltation and reign at the right hand of God. Psal. cx. Acts ii. 33, 34. Eph. i. 20—22. Heb. i. 3. x. 12, 13. Rev. v. 6.

and to proclaim throughout the ancient seats of infernal dominion the reign of the Lord. The empire of darkness is giving way on every hand. We need not look into the book of prophecy to ascertain that every pagan power exists but by the sufferance of the Christian world; every Mohammedan kingdom is wasting away; every form of anti-Christian corruption is losing ground; and new principles of social polity are displacing the ancient despotisms which maintained themselves by war, priestcraft, and oppression. But, lest the contemplation should seduce us into a forgetfulness of our transitory connexion with this sublunary state, the voice of Prophecy is heard, like a trumpet, sounding above all the din of political commotion, "Behold, he cometh with clouds. . . . He who testifieth of these things saith, Surely I come quickly."

V. *The Ecclesiastical Controversy.*—In the chapter upon the Anglican and Scottish Churches, the reader has had laid open to him the great debate upon church polity between the Prelatists and the Puritans, which commenced in the earliest days of the Reformation, and has been perpetuated by the advocates, respectively, of Diocesan Episcopacy and the Presbyterian Model to the present day. The controversy between the Presbyterian and Independent divines associated in the Westminster Assembly, has also been shown to relate to points of church polity which still divide the Presbyterian from the Congregational churches. In Scotland, the Presbyterians themselves have split into various subdivisions, entirely through disputes relating to the law of patronage, the prerogative of the State in church matters, and other nice questions. The Glassite or Sandemanian controversy, though partly of a theological, is chiefly of an ecclesiastical character. The controversy respecting terms of church communion, and of intercommunion between different churches, which has employed the pens of two such distinguished men as the late Robert Hall and Dr. Mason of New York, claims also to be mentioned as classing under the same head.* Lastly, we have to

* The controversy which gave occasion for Mr. Hall's masterly work on "Terms of Communion," has divided the Baptist denomination, almost from its