

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 4TH, 1866, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.”—Revelation xvi. 17.

THE regions described in this chapter are the regions of sin and Satan, and into those regions the wrath of God must certainly come. And the whole of the first part of our text is made up of a representation of universality; the air, the atmosphere, is universal; there is no place on sea or land where the atmosphere is not; and therefore, if the atmosphere be filled with the wrath of God, then death must be the consequence to all; there is no possibility of escape. And these seven angels I take to mean the ministers of the gospel in their ultimate testimony; and every prophet and every apostle hath proclaimed that universality of judgment which is to take place at the last, when the earth and the works therein shall be burned up, the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the heavens shall pass away with a great noise. So that we are to understand the angel pouring out the vial here to mean the ministers or messengers of God doing so testimonially; what the Lord's prophets have spoken they have spoken by his Spirit, and what the apostles testified they testified by the Spirit of God; and the Lord confirmeth the message of the truth, the testimony of his messengers, so that not one word thereof can fall to the ground. We are therefore, I think, to take the air here as representing the universality of sin and Satan in this world. And we have plenty of proof that, with all the discoveries we have made as to tribes, and castes, and colours, and islands, and continents, we have never yet discovered one tribe or race of men that are not sinners; but on the contrary, the very first thing that has struck all our navigators has been the depravity of the people they have discovered. Sin, therefore, is indeed universal. In Adam all died, in Adam all became sinners; by the disobedience of one judgment came upon all men, without exception. Here, then, our text, taking this view, hath a very solemn meaning, and presents to us three things to attend to this morning. If I am right in what I have said—that this vial of wrath being poured into the air represents the universality of the judgment that must take place at the last,—if I am right in this, then our text will present itself thus:—Here is, first, *something to escape*. Secondly, here is *a voice to be listened to*,—“Thore
VOL. VIII.—No. 376.

came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne." Lastly, here is *a decision to be arrived at.*

First, then, here is *something to escape.* And, in order to point out what there is to escape, I cannot do better than notice at least five of the angels out of the seven, besides the one spoken of in our text. The river Euphrates we have already noticed; we have observed, concerning that, that as the Babylonish empire represented the world, so the river Euphrates represented the world in its irreligious and religious aspect, and we showed how that was now, in time, dried up to the people of God, and that they were led, therefore, out of the mystic Babylon to seek a refuge in Christ Jesus the Lord. Let us now just trace out these vials, and then let us see if we can find in the Holy Scriptures a remedy for each. Now mark, first it is said, "The first angel went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image." I will not here trouble you with history upon this, because there is plenty in times past to show how the worshippers of the beast and his image have been subjected to temporal and to terrible judgments. Now, then, here is an earth which is a part of the region of Satan where the vial is poured out testimonially; and we have to escape this earth where this judgment is to come, so that we may live where the judgment is not, and that when we die we may be found where the judgment is not, and that when we rise from the dead we may rise where the mercy is, where the judgment is not. Now, then, what is the remedy? what is the way, or which is the way of escape from this earth that is cursed, Satan's region? We go to the 3rd chapter of the Colossians, and there we have a remedy against this judgment, against this part of the judgment to come. The apostle there saith, "If ye then be risen with Christ," mark that, "risen with Christ;" that is a very beautiful representation; you can rise above your sins only by Jesus Christ's blood pardoning you; you can rise above condemnation only by his righteousness raising you above that condemnation; you can rise above your bondage, and doubts, and fears, only by Jesus Christ making you free; you can rise above that earth that is cursed, and go into that new earth where there is no curse, only by Jesus Christ, who was made a curse for us, and has put the curse away. "If ye then be risen with Christ," as though the apostle should say, Prove that you are risen with Christ. And then he explains to us how we are to prove it, "Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God;" and if you ask what those things are, why, then the answer, and a very concise answer it is, would be this:—first, a fulness of joy, that is, where Christ is, for Christ is in God's presence, and there is a fulness of joy, and we are to seek that fulness of joy; and at God's right hand there are pleasures for evermore; all other pleasures must come to an end, but the pleasures there are for evermore. Now, then, if you are risen with Christ, prove it by seeking those things, "Set your affections on things above;" and that makes the seeking more pleasant. You know when a man comes out of the world into a profession of religion, and leaves his heart behind, he is pretty sure to go back after it again; and hence it was with the Israelites—they came out of Egypt, many of them, but they did not bring their hearts with them, and so they went back again after them. But when a man comes out of the world by the grace of God, he not only brings his heart with him, he does something more than that—he sends his heart before him; he sends his heart off to Jesus Christ, he sends his heart off to God, and he can sometimes sing in this feeling,—

"Thou hast my heart"—

and he will never give it you back again, you may depend upon it,—

"Thou hast my heart, it shall be thine,
Thine it shall ever be."

Thus, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also; and your heart is already in heaven; you will seek to get to heaven. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead;" dead to that earth where the curse is to come, you are dead to the law, dead to sin, there is a separation wrought between you and the earth where the curse is; "ye are dead, and your life is hid"—now mark how careful the apostle is; if he had stopped there, and said, "Ye are dead," then people not understanding it would have said, Why, this is a dead religion; we were dead in sin, and we are dead now; it is all dead together; do you call these good tidings? But stop; let me make a remark; while you are dead, it is only in this relative sense; you are dead to your old Adam state, you are dead to your law state, and dead to that world where the curse is; but you have a better life in the place thereof; "for your life is hid with Christ in God;" and there is no danger of that life being lost, for Christ is that life, and therefore he cannot be lost; and when he can be lost, then your divine life will be lost. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear," mark that, "then shall ye also appear with him in glory." Thus, then, you see the importance here of Christ being our life. I must just make one remark upon that;—people who make their own doings their life, and who make their own supposed holiness or goodness their life, why, that would appear against them at the last day; but if Jesus Christ be your life, "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." This, then, is the remedy. None of you can doubt this, it is a self-evident truth, that this earth is cursed, and all that are in it are cursed, all of us by nature are children of wrath, and under the curse; and the way of escape is this rising with Christ, this setting our affections on things above, and not on things on the earth, and thus we are dead to the world, dead to the law, but alive unto God through our Lord Jesus Christ. So, then, the angel may pour out wrath, but it will not reach us. And I may perhaps here just remark that as you read through these vials that are poured out, you do not find that one of them lighted upon a child of God, but upon those that worshipped the beast and his image. The Lord will deliver his people, and fulfil the blessed words, that "he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty; no plague shall come nigh thy dwelling." Our God is our dwelling-place, where no plague can come.

"And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea, and it became as the blood of a dead man." I will go to the 2nd chapter of the Lamentations of Jeremiah and the 13th verse for an explanation of this; for, mind, I am only speaking according to my humble judgment, ever wishing every one of you to think for yourselves. Now, then, what sea is this, what mystic sea is this, which is to become as the blood of a dead man? Not the sea literally, because John is not here speaking of literal, but of mystic things; spiritual on the one hand, and the converse of that on the other. 13th verse of the 2nd of Lamentations: "Thy breach is great like the sea; who can heal thee?" This sea, therefore, is a sea of separation from God, and this sea of separation from God is cursed, and is said to become as the blood of a dead man. Now it is a solemn truth, and one shudders to utter it, but a great part of the population of the globe revel in this sea; it is their sea of love, in which all their pleasures roll; it is their sea of delight; an ungodly world rejoices that it is without God, that it makes no profession of religion; the language of the whole of them is, "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." We are all in this sea by nature of separation from God, and if God had not sent the ships of Tarshish, meaning ships that go long voyages, the glorious truths of the gospel, found us out, fished us up, and taken us

into the ship of truth, we should still have been revelling in the sea of separation from God, little thinking that we were in a state wherein everything that belonged to our comfort must one day become as the blood of a dead man—ininitely and indescribably loathsome. You read that the Egyptians should loathe to drink of the river; and so the ungodly man, he must drink to all eternity of his deadly crimes, of his deadly sins, of his deadly doings. "It became as the blood of a dead man." Here, then, is the sea of separation from God. I wish I could stop here, but I must go further; not only doth the profane world boast and glory in the sea of separation from God, but how many thousands that profess to belong to God boast and glory in the sea of separation from the truth! Thank the Lord, says one, I am not one of those election people. Thank the Lord, says another, I am not one of those predestination people. Thank the Lord, says another, I am not one of those high doctrine people. Thank the Lord, says another, I am not one of those book of life people. They know not what they say. At the last great day, when the testimony of the seventh angel shall be executed, the wrath of God shall take effect universally; then will come the proclamation, "All shall be cast into the lake of fire whose names are not found written in the Lamb's book of eternal life. Oh, happy for us, then, to be brought out of that sea of separation and to be joined to the Lord.

Let us see, then, particularly—very particularly,—what is the remedy for this part. Go to the apostle's words; "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." That is the very thing I was afraid of a little when I was in a state of nature; I had my qualms at times that my trespasses would be, by the Judge of all, imputed to me, and even then I knew that he would be just in so doing. But when conviction seized my mind, I saw sin somewhat in God's light,—in the light of his truth, and especially in the light of his eternal law, that law which no man when God speaketh it home can endure, but falls under it, from the conviction that that law is spiritual, and that the poor creature—the sinner—is carnal, sold under sin; ah! when I saw that, I saw it would be a tremendous thing for me if God imputed my sins to me. I know men may impute them to me, I do not mind that; they will have to be themselves subjected to judgment, they will not be able to carry out the judgment: and Satan may impute them to me; I do not mind that; he will not be the judge, he will have to be subjected to judgment himself; professors may impute them to me; I do not mind that, if the Lord will not impute them to me: my conscience may impute them to me; I do not mind that, if the Lord will not impute them to me. See the difference; "not imputing their trespasses unto them;" no. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." It is in Christ; you that believe in Christ, you that rest upon what Christ has done; you that have no other refuge, and can call the Lord in solemnity to witness that you have no other hope, that you have no other refuge, and that you feel in your mind a love rise to God in thus imputing your sins to Christ, or, at least, from the hope you have that he did impute your sins to Christ, and Christ hath put them away, and if the Lord doth not bring them back again, why, then they cannot be found. So, then, God in Christ, here is the remedy. Now can we say, how many of us this morning can say that we do love God in that revelation he has made of himself in and by his dear Son; that we do love Jesus Christ in this mighty sacrifice of himself, putting away our sin? we like to see him here on our behalf; we like to see him in the manger; we like to see him in his life, and in his death, and in the grave, and in his resurrection; we like to see him reappearing to his disciples; we like to see him in his ascension, in his intercession, and we anticipatively like to see him in his coming at the last. So, then, saith the apostle, "and for them

also that love his appearing." Thus, then, reconciliation to God is the way of escape from the sea of separation.

"And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers." Now I think there can be no difficulty in understanding this. Here, historically speaking, you have intestine war; rivers that flow through the internal parts of the country—intestine and civil war. How wonderfully and solemnly was this fulfilled in the destruction of the Jewish nation! I might go on to speak of what Rome pagan underwent, and what Rome papal has also undergone, though nothing in comparison of what it yet has to undergo. Let us see if we can understand what is meant by the rivers. I think the rivers mean the internal consolations, and comforts, and wealth, and so on, of the people. And there is no war, you well know, so harmful and bad as civil war. Now it is a remarkable fact, that during the five years that the Roman armies were employed by the power of God to minister judgment to the Jews, they never ceased their operations half a day without the Jews beginning immediately to devour each other, and to destroy each other, and fight against each other. So that here was the vial of wrath poured out upon the internal; there was no peace in any house in the land; there was no peace in the city. Josephus has given us a detailed account, a photograph almost, of the horrors of that scene—intestine war. And so Milton somewhere says,—

" Devil with devil lost firm concord hold ;"

but I question whether there is any concord in hell. The rivers, therefore, will mean the internal or social pleasures; so whatever social pleasures we have must by-and-bye be cursed; God will take them away; he will turn them into bitterness, and lamentation, and woe; that is, if we are hostile to him. And hence the angel here saith, "Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink." And so the Jews, they slew the Saviour, they slew his apostles, and slew many of his people; and what saith the Saviour? That "all the righteous blood that has been shed upon the earth shall come upon this generation." Here the wrath of God was poured out upon the rivers,—the interior. Well, you say, where is our escape from this? Turn to the 46th Psalm; there we shall see the way of our escape. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;" though the old Jerusalem be thus subjected to all these judgments. "There is a river," that will ever flow, "the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High." See Rome pagan, Rome papal, the ungodly world at large, where the judgment of God will find its way to every family, to every individual. Now see the reverse; come to Zion, and what is there there? No breaking in, no going out, no complaining in the streets; the garners filled, affording all manner of store; the sons as olive plants, the daughters as cornerstones, polished after the similitude of a palace. "Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, nor one of the cords thereof ever be broken;" all shall be tranquil, all shall be peaceful, not an evil nor an adversary occurrent. Happy is the people that is in such a case; yea, happy is the people whose God is the Lord. Thus, then, Noah was warned of God of things not seen as yet; and I trust many—most, I hope, to whom I am speaking this morning—have been effectually warned of God to seek those things that are above, and to seek reconciliation to God, and to seek a place in that city whose internal rivers will never be other than what they are, waters of eternal life, and where sociality will never break up, and will never be interrupted, where the Lamb and his bride will live an eternal life of con-

stant happiness. The charm of oneness between Christ and the church will never, no, never be broken; she will be to him as fair, and clear, and near, and dear after myriads of ages have rolled on, and he the same to her; the old ages gone, mortality swallowed up, and she appearing in reality indeed fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners. How feeble is language to set forth on the one hand the awfulness of being left to the judgment of God, and on the other hand the blessedness of the hope of salvation!

“And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire;” that is, men that were enemies to God worshipped the beast and his image. Now the sun here means the government, and you will find all bad governments end in tyranny. Luther never could, speaking after the manner of men, have done what he did, but the Roman Catholics themselves were so oppressed by the government, their sun so scorched them, that even for the sake of getting a better government they would somewhat side with him. And Henry VIII., though his motive was as base as the devil himself, never could have wrought the revolution he wrought in England, had it not been that the sun of the papal government so scorched the English people; and they have been in all ages about the last under heaven that like to be scorched, or like to be oppressed. There is something in the very atmosphere of our sea-girt isle that seems to inspire freedom, a love to freedom, a love to decision; and hence the English character in many of its traits stands unrivalled by any nation upon the surface of the globe. Therefore it is that through the grace of God, and the providence and goodness of God, we have come from under that government that scorched us, and are brought under a better government, even politically; and we bless the Lord for it, and pray for the prosperity and continuance thereof. But we must take higher ground than this. This ecclesiastical government scorched; and so they would Romanise the Church of England if they could, and turn that into a scorching sun. Where is your remedy, say you, then? How will you get away from this scorching? Here it is; last chapter of Malachi, “Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise, with healing in his wings;” not scorching in his wings, not to oppress you, not to take your strength away, not to burn up the flowers of your garden, not to scorch your trees, not to set your houses on fire, but “with healing in his wings.” Jesus rises in all the perfection of his mediatorial glory, and the rays issuing from his person are the rays of pardoning mercy, the rays of justifying grace, the rays of healing power, “with healing in his wings.” This scorching sun is like king Saul; he scorched the people, oppressed them, and they were discontented—I do not wonder at it,—and in debt, and in distress, and so they came to David; and David did not scorch them, he healed them, defended them, worked out their liberty, became thus a captain over them. Then happy the man that feels he dare not put his immortal soul under the government of any human system, under the government of any man, nor under the government of any set of men. Be a man, be an individual; feel that you are an individual, that you are a little world in yourself, that yourself is everything, and that yourself is of infinite value to yourself. What care others for you in comparison of the care which, if in your right mind, you have for yourself? Do you then feel that you dare not trust your precious soul under the government of any but Christ Jesus, and that thou dost desire that he, as the Sun of righteousness, may rise on thy soul, and that thou mayest realize what is said in the 60th of Isaiah, “Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee”? Thus we get away from the earth that is cursed, into the regions where there is no curse; thus we get away from the sea of separation, and come into the land of reconciliation; thus we get away from intestine war, and come into that city wherein peace shall for ever reign;

thus we get away from the scorching sun of ecclesiastical government, and come under the healing rays of him who hath said, "I am meek and lowly in heart; my yoke is easy, my burden is light; ye shall find rest unto your souls." There is no king, so meek-hearted, there is no king so much one with his people as is Jesus Christ; his heart never was and never will be lifted up above his brethren. Know ye not, brethren, how David in the Psalms—I am sure you must have noticed it, because it is so very conspicuous,—how David in the Psalms again, again, and again glories in God as his King? how David had in his mind the 17th of Deuteronomy, wherein the king they were to have is represented; he would take that as representing the coming Messiah, and would glory thus in the King of Israel. And Zechariah saith, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion,"—not rejoice a little, but rejoice greatly;—"shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee, he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass." Rejoice greatly. Here, then, is that Sun of righteousness that healeth all our wounds; and as I have said, and say again, there is no king so much one with his people as is Jesus, for he hath done to make himself one with them what no earthly king could do; he hath not only taken their nature but he has taken their sins; he has not only taken their sins but he has taken their law-slavery, worked out and brought in everlasting righteousness; he has met all their foes, and single-handed conquered the whole, crushed the whole, left not one unconquered adversary; so that all the powers we have to war with are already virtually conquered; and thus he giveth us the victory by our Lord Jesus Christ.

"And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast;" his ecclesiastical seat; called one, but it may be a hundred. Then, say you, if it is a hundred, how can it be called one, for they differ among themselves? Yes, so did the people that crucified Jesus Christ; the Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Herodians, Romans, Jews, Gentiles,—they all differed among themselves, but they all agreed in one thing, and that was to crucify Christ. And so all the ecclesiastical powers now of men's devising, however they differ among themselves and in name, they all agree to hate the truth of God, that truth being the representative of the blessed God. "And his kingdom was full of darkness." Why, even at present the Pope is rather uneasy at parting with a few soldiers. Just look at it; there is a religion for you! a king going to withdraw a few soldiers, and the Pope feels as though his kingdom was now full of darkness. There is a religion for you; pretty religion, certainly! So with the church minister; why, the countryman was right enough, when the minister said, "John, where are you going to this morning?" "Going to preach the gospel, sir." "Ah, we must stop you Dissenters." "There are three ways," saith John, "in which you can be stopped: take your gown from you, you must not preach; take your book from you, you could not preach; take your pay from you, you would not preach." And thus, if you take these temporal powers away, their kingdom becomes full of darkness; soon darkened, soon blasted. Well, then, I say, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate." Say you, Where shall I go to? Go to the 1st chapter of Hebrews, "Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness"—for thy people, bringing them into the same—"and hated iniquity"—for thy people, bringing them, in their measure, into the same feeling, out of that iniquity, and—"all thy garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces," whereby thy presence is fragrant; thou art that sun that will never go down. And thus, by the reign of mediation, "the Lord will be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory." Can our kingdom ever be darkened? No; for "the Lord God Almighty doth lighten

it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." I am not at all afraid of Jesus losing his brightness, losing his glory; I am not at all afraid of this; I am quite sure that he will be as bright in his shinings, as I have said before, after myriads of ages have rolled over as he is now; he is indeed the bright and morning star. Here is a kingdom, then, full of light. The apostle might well say, "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness;" not only from the darkness, but the power; it has lost its power over us; the darkness can no longer persuade us out of the way of truth; the way of truth is made so plain to us, we shall not err therein; "and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins," according to the riches of his grace. Happy and blessed place! Thus we escape, then, the government of Satan by that grace that reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.

Passing by, as I said before, the Euphrates, because I dwelt upon that in a previous sermon, and as your time is all but gone, I must not meddle with the latter part of our text this morning—the voice and the decision, "The seventh angel poured out his vial into the air;"—in the little space I have left it is impossible for me to do anything like justice to such words as these, therefore I will not attempt it, but make just one or two remarks. The angel poured out the vial of God's wrath into the air, and the wrath of God being in that air, I think, must be understood relatively and ultimately. If there is a wicked and profane man, and God gives that man a conviction of what he is, he can no longer breathe an ungodly atmosphere; he feels that the wrath of God is there, feels that the curse of heaven is there, feels that everything is there awful to the last degree. The Lord brought me into the promised land—the 54th chapter of Isaiah; that is a very mountainous chapter, a very yea and amen chapter, a very new covenant chapter; there the Lord declareth that he will not be wroth with us, nor rebuke us; and the 8th verse of that chapter brought my soul into that country, and I have been living there ever since. I could run through troops, fly like an eagle, sing like a lark, dive like a fish—I could do anything almost then. There I found a healthy and a glorious country, and though I have had kind and pious invitations since that day to come down into some of the low countries, I have not listened to them, for I know there are poisonous vapours there. I like to remain in this country; the Lord hath said, "Thou shalt live in that place," and I have been living in that 54th of Isaiah now for forty years nearly. And if you were to wake me up in the middle of the night, and ask me to preach a sermon at a moment's notice, let it be from the 54th of Isaiah and I am ready. Here I felt that I was in a pure clime; here I could breathe a pure air in a free-grace country; here the promise is yea and amen; here the morning is without clouds; here there is everything that suits my soul, and enables me to realize the glorious presence of a gracious covenant God. Oh, then, happy for us if we are driven out of those poisonous atmospheres that are under the curse of heaven, and brought into a new earth and a new heaven, that mountainous country of eternal truth where we can look around, and in the light of the morning spread upon the tops of the mountains see what was going on from eternity, we can see what is going on in time, we can see what shall go on to all eternity.