**they, and whence came they** (the questions  
are those ordinarily put when we seek  
for information respecting strangers ; but  
put here for the sake of furnishing the explanation.  
Both inquiries are answered in  
ver. 14)**? {14} And I said to him, My lord**  
(the address is one of deep reverence, as to  
a heavenly being. See the limits of this  
reverence in ch. xix. 10, xxii. 8,9), **thou  
knowest** (see Ezek. xxxvii. 3, from which  
the form of expression comes. The words  
must not, with Ebrard, be forced to mean,  
“I know well, but thou knowest better :”  
but must be taken in their simple acceptation,  
“I know not, but thou dost.” And  
this again need not mean that the Apostle  
had no thought on the subject, but that he  
regarded himself as ignorant in comparison  
with his heavenly interlocutor). **And he  
said to me, These are they that come** (not,  
as A. V., “that *came*:” nor again must the  
present be put prominently forward, that *are  
coming*, as if the number in the vision were  
not yet complete : still less is it to be taken  
as a quasi-future, “that *shall come*:” but the  
present tense is merely one of *designation*.  
Their description, generically, is, that “they  
are they that *come*, &c.”) **out of the great  
tribulation** (the definite article ought not  
to be omitted, as in A. V. It is most emphatic:  
“out of the tribulation, the great  
one.” And in consequence some have explained  
the words of that last great time of  
trial which is to try the saints before the  
coming of the Lord. But to limit it to  
this only, is manifestly out of keeping with  
the spirit of the vision. I would rather  
understand it of the whole sum of the trials  
of the saints of God, viewed by the Elder  
as now complete, and designated by this  
emphatic and general name: “all that tribulation”),  
**and they washed their robes**(the past tense is that so often used of the  
course of this life when looked back upon  
from its yonder side: they did this in that  
life on earth which is now [in the vision]  
past and gone by) **and made them white**(the references are full of interest) **in the  
blood of the Lamb** (i.e. by that faith in the  
atoning blood of Christ of which it is said,  
“*cleansing their hearts by the faith*,”  
Acts xv. 9: and 1 John i, 7, “the blood  
of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth us from all  
sin.” See also Eph. v. 25—27. Observe,  
we must not separate the two acts,  
washing and making white, as Hengstenberg  
does, interpreting the former of the  
forgiveness of sins, the latter of sanctification:  
the latter is only the result of the  
former : they washed them, and by so doing  
made them white. The act was a life-long  
one,—the continued purification of the  
man, body, soul, and spirit, by the application  
of the blood of Christ in its cleansing  
power). {15} **On this account** (*because* they  
washed their robes white in Christ’s atoning  
and purifying blood: for nothing that has  
spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, can  
stand where they are standing: compare  
again Eph. v. 27: none will be there who  
are not thus washed) **they are before the  
throne of God** (in the presence of His  
throne: seeing Him [Matt. v. 8; 1 Cor.  
xiii. 12] as He sees them), **and they serve  
Him by day and by night** (“this,” says  
Bede, “is a way of expressing eternity in  
our human language”) **in His temple**(as His priests, conducting the sweet  
praises of that heavenly choir, ver. 10, and  
doing what other high and blessed service  
He may delight to employ them in): **and  
He that sitteth on the throne shall spread  
His habitation over them** (it is exceedingly  
difficult to express the sense of these glorious  
words, in which the fulfilment of the  
Old Test. promises, such as Levit. xxvi.