§v.] SYSTEMS OF INTERPRETATION. [inrropuctioy.   
   
 vials run on to the time close upon the end. At the termination of   
 each series, the note is unmistakeably given, that such is the case. Of   
 the seals we have already spoken. As to the trampets, it may suffice to   
 refer to ch. x. 7, xi. 18: as to the vials, to their very designation “these   
 last,” and to the declaration “they are past,” of ch, xvi. 17. Any   
 system which does not recognize this common ending of the three, seems   
 to me to stand thereby convicted of error.   
 23. Another such absolute requirement of the sacred text is found in   
 the vision of ch, xii. 1 ff. In ver. 5, we read that the woman “ brought   
 forth a male child, who shall rule (shepherd) the nations with a rod of   
 iron: and her child was eaught up to God and to His throne.” All   
 Scripture analogy and that of this book itself (compare ch. xix. 15)   
 requires that these words should be understood of our incarnate Lord,   
 and of no other. Any system scems to me convicted of error, which   
 is compelled to interpret the words otherwise.   
 24. Another canon of interpretation has seemed to me to be deducible   
 from the great care and accuracy with which the Seer distinguishes   
 between the divine Persons and the ministering angels. Much con-   
 fusion is found in the apocalyptic commentaries from this point not   
 being attended to. “Is such or such an angel Christ Himself, or not ?”   
 is a question continually meeting us in their pages. Such a question   
 need never to have been asked. An angel, throughout the book, is   
 strictly and literally an angel: never our Lord, never one of the sons of   
 men. This holds equally, I believe, of the angels of the seven churches   
 and of the various angels introduced in the prophetic vision,   
 25. Other rules and requirements of the same kind will be found   
 mentioned in the Commentary itself. It may be well to speak of some   
 other matters which seem worthy of notice here.   
 26. The apocalyptic numbers furnish an important enquiry to every   
 Commentator, as to their respective significance. And, in general terms,   
 such a question can be readily answered. The various numbers seem   
 to keep constant to their great lines of symbolic meaning, and may,   
 without any caprice, be assigned to them. ‘Thus seven is the number   
 of perfection: seven spirits are before the throne (ch. i. 4; iv. 5): seven   
 churches represent the church universal: the Lamb has seven horns and   
 seven eyes (v.6): in the several series of God’s judgments, each of   
 them complete in itself, each of them exhaustive in its own line of   
 divine action, seven is the number of the seals, of the trumpets, of the   
 thunders, of the vials.   
 27. Four, again, is the number of terrestrial extension. Four living-   
 beings are the celestial symbols of creation (iv. 6 fi): four angels stand   
 on the four corners of the carth, holding the four winds of heaven (ch.   
 vii. 1): four seals, four trumpets, four vials, in each case complete the   
 judgments as far as physical visitations are concerned: four angels are   
 353,