

Papers on the Lord's Coming.

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INTRODUCTORY

The attentive reader of the New Testament will find in its pages three solemn and weighty facts presented to his view; namely, first, that the Son of God has come into this world and gone away; secondly, that the Holy Ghost has come down to this earth, and is here still; and, thirdly, that the Lord Jesus is coming again.

These are the three great subjects unfolded in the New Testament Scriptures; and we shall find that each of them has a double bearing: it has a bearing upon the world and a bearing upon the Church; upon the world, as a whole, and upon each unconverted man, woman, and child in particular; upon the Church, as a whole, and upon each individual member thereof, in particular. It is impossible for any one to avoid the bearing of these three grand facts upon his own personal condition and future destiny.

And be it noted, we are not speaking of doctrines — though, no doubt, there are doctrines — but of facts, facts presented in the simplest possible manner by the various inspired writers employed to set them forth. There is no attempt at garnishing or setting off. The facts speak for themselves; they are recorded and left to produce their own powerful effect upon the soul.

1. And, first of all, let us look at the fact that the Son of God, has been in this world of ours. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” “The Son of God has come.” He came in perfect love, as the very expression of the heart and mind, the nature and character of God. He was the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His Person, and yet a lowly, humble, gracious, social man; one who was to be seen, from day to day, about the streets; going from house to house; kind and affable to all; easily approached by the very poorest; taking up little children in His arms, in the most tender, gentle, winning way; drying the widow's tears; soothing the stricken and sorrowing

heart; feeding the hungry; healing the sick; cleansing the poor leper; meeting every form of human need and misery; at the bidding of all who stood in need of succour and sympathy. "He went about doing good." He was the unwearied servant of man's necessities. He never thought of Himself, or sought His own interest in any one thing. He lived for others. It was His meat and His drink to do the will of God, and gladden the sad and weary hearts of the sons and daughters of men. His loving heart was ever flowing out in streams of blessing to all who felt the pressure of this sin-stricken, sorrowful world.

Here, then, we have a marvellous fact before our eyes. This world has been visited — this world has been trodden by that blessed One of whom we have spoken — the Son of God — the Creator and Sustainer of the universe — the lowly, self-emptied and loving, gracious Son of Man — Jesus of Nazareth — God over all blessed for ever, and yet a spotless, holy, absolutely perfect man. He came in love to men — came into this world as the expression of perfect love to those who had sinned against God, and deserved nothing but eternal perdition because of their sins. He came not to crush, but to heal — not to judge, but to save and to bless.

What has become of this blessed One? How has the world treated Him? It has cast Him out! It would not have Him! It preferred a robber and a murderer to this holy, gracious, perfect Man. The world got its choice. Jesus and a robber were placed before the world, and the question was put, "Which will you have?" What was the answer? "Not this man, but Barabbas." "The chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas" (Matt. 27: 20-21). The religious leaders and guides of the people — the men who ought to have led them in the right way — persuaded the poor ignorant multitude to reject the Son of God, and accept a robber and a murderer instead!

Reader, remember, you are in a world that has been guilty of this terrible act. And not only so, but unless you have truly repented and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, you are part and parcel of that world, and you lie under the full guilt of that act. This is most solemn. The whole world stands charged with the deliberate rejection and murder of the Son of God. We have the testimony of no less than four inspired witnesses to this fact. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all bear record that the whole world — the Jew and the Gentile — kings and governors, priests, and people — all classes, sects, and parties, agreed to crucify the Son of God — all agreed to murder the only perfect man that ever appeared on this earth — the perfect expression of God — God over all blessed for ever. We must either pronounce the four evangelists to be false witnesses, or admit that the world as a whole, and each constituent part thereof, is stained with the awful crime of crucifying the Lord of glory.

This is the true standard by which to measure the world, and by which to measure the condition of every unconverted man, woman, and child in the world. If I want to know what the world is I have only to reflect that the world is that which stands charged before God with the deliberate murder of His Son. Tremendous fact! A fact which stamps the world, in the most solemn manner, and places it before us in characters of appalling blackness. God has a controversy with this world. He has a question to settle with it — an awful question — the mere mention of which should make men's ears to tingle and their hearts to quake. A righteous God has to avenge the death of His Son. It is not merely that the world accepted a vile robber and murdered an innocent man; this, in itself, would have been a dreadful act. But no; that innocent man was none other than the Son of God, the beloved of the Father's heart.

What a thought! The world will have to account to God for the death of His Son — for having nailed Him to a cross between two thieves! What a reckoning it will be! How red will be the day of

vengeance! How awfully crushing the moment in the which God will draw the sword of judgment to avenge the death of His Son! How utterly vain the notion that the world is improving! Improving! — though stained with the blood of Jesus. Improving! — though under the judgment of God for that act. Improving! — though having to account to a righteous God for its treatment of the beloved of His soul, sent in love to bless and save. What blind fatuity! What wild folly! Ah, no! improvement there can be none till the besom of destruction and the sword of judgment have done their terrible work in avenging the murder — the deliberately planned and determinedly executed murder of the blessed Son of God. We cannot conceive any delusion more fatally false than to imagine that the world can ever be improved while it lies beneath the awful curse of the death of Jesus. That world which preferred Barabbas to Christ can know no improvement. There is naught before it save the overwhelming judgment of God.

Thus much as to the weighty fact of the absence of Jesus, in its bearing upon the present condition and future destiny of the world. But this fact has another bearing. It bears upon the Church of God as a whole, and upon the individual believer. If the world has cast Christ out, the heavens have received Him. If man has rejected Him, God has exalted Him. If man has crucified Him, God has crowned Him. We must carefully distinguish these two things. The death of Christ, viewed as the act of the world — the act of man — involves naught but unmitigated wrath and judgment. On the other hand, the death of Christ, viewed as the act of God, involves naught but full and everlasting blessedness to all who repent and believe. A passage or two from the divine Word will prove this.

Let us turn for a moment to Psalm 69, which so vividly presents our blessed and adorable Lord suffering from the hand of man, and appealing to God for vengeance. “Hear Me, O Lord; for Thy loving kindness is good: turn unto Me according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies. And hide not Thy face from Thy servant; for I am in trouble: hear Me speedily: draw nigh unto My soul, and redeem it: deliver Me, because of Mine enemies. Thou hast known My reproach, and My shame, and My dishonour: *Mine adversaries are all before Thee*. Reproach hath broken My heart, and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave Me also gall for My meat, and in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink. Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out Thine indignation upon them, and let Thy wrathful anger take hold of them” (verses 16-28).

All this is deeply and impressively solemn. Every word of this appeal will have its answer. Not a syllable of it shall fall to the ground. God will assuredly avenge the death of His Son. He will reckon with the world — with men for the treatment which His only begotten Son has received at their hands. We deem it right to press this home upon the heart and conscience of the reader. How awful the thought of Christ making intercession against people! How appalling to hear Him calling upon God for vengeance upon His enemies! How terrible will be the divine response to the cry of the injured Son!

But let us look at the other side of the picture. Turn to Psalm 22, which presents the blessed One suffering under the hand of God. Here the result is wholly different. Instead of judgment and vengeance, it is universal and everlasting blessedness and glory. “I will declare Thy name unto My brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee. Ye that fear the Lord, praise Him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify Him; and fear Him, all ye the seed of Israel. . . . My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation; I will pay My vows before them that fear Him. The meek shall eat and be satisfied; they shall praise the Lord that seek Him; your heart shall live for ever. All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee. For the kingdom is the Lord's; and He is the governor among the nations. . . . A seed shall serve

Him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that He hath done this” (verses 22-31).

These two quotations present, with great distinctness, the two aspects of the death of Christ. He died, as a martyr, for righteousness, under the hand of man. For this, man will have to account to God. But He died, as a victim, for sin, under the hand of God. This is the foundation of all blessing to those that believe in His name. His martyr-sufferings bring down wrath and judgment upon a godless world: His atoning sufferings open up the everlasting wellsprings of life and salvation to the Church, to Israel, and to the whole creation. The death of Jesus consummates the world's guilt; but secures the Church's acceptance. The world is stained, and the Church *purged*, by the blood of the cross.

Such is the double bearing of the first of our three great New Testament facts. Jesus has come and gone — come, because God loved the world — gone, because the world hated God. If God were to ask the question — and He will ask it — “What have you done with My Son?” What is the answer? “We hated Him, cast Him out, and crucified Him. We preferred a robber to Him.”

But, blessed for ever be the God of all grace, the Christian, the true believer, can look up to Heaven and say, “My absent Lord is there, and there for me. He is gone from this wretched world, and His absence makes the entire scene around me a moral wilderness — a desolate waste.”

He is not here. This stamps the world with a character unmistakable in the judgment of every loyal heart. The world would not have Jesus. This is enough. We need not marvel at any tale of horror now. Police reports, grand jury calendars, the statistics of our cities and towns need not surprise us. The world that could reject the divine personification of all human goodness, and accept a robber and a murderer instead, has proved its moral turpitude to a degree not to be exceeded. Do we wonder when we discover the hollowness and heartlessness of the world? Are we surprised when we find out that it is not to be trusted? If so, it is plain we have not interpreted aright the absence of our beloved Lord. What does the cross of Christ prove? That God is love? No doubt. That Christ gave His precious life to save us from the flames of an everlasting hell? Blessedly true, all praise to His peerless name! But what does the cross prove as regards the world? That its guilt is consummated, and its judgment sealed. The world, in nailing to the cross the One who was perfectly good, proved, in the most unanswerable manner, that it was perfectly bad. “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth Me hateth My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated Me without a cause” (John 15: 22-26).

2. But we must now glance for a moment at our second weighty fact. God the Holy Ghost has come down to this earth. It is now over nineteen long centuries since the blessed Spirit descended from Heaven; and He has been here ever since. This is a stupendous fact. There is a divine Person on this earth; and His presence — like the absence of Jesus — has a double bearing: it has a bearing upon the world, and a bearing upon the Church — upon the world as a whole, and upon every man, woman and child therein; upon the Church as a whole, and upon every individual member thereof in particular. As regards the world, this august witness descended from Heaven to convict it of the terrible crime of rejecting and crucifying the Son of God. As regards the Church, He came as the blessed Comforter, to take the place of the absent Jesus, and comfort by His presence and ministry the hearts of His people. Thus, to the world, the Holy Ghost is a powerful *Convicter*; to the Church He is a precious *Comforter*.

A passage or two of holy Scripture will establish these points in the heart and mind of the pious reader who bows in lowly reverence to the authority of the divine Word. Let us turn to chapter 16 of John's

Gospel. “But now I go My way to Him that sent Me; and none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will *convict* (*elegxei*) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. Of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (verses 5-11).

Again in John 14 we read, “If ye love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (verses 15-19).

These quotations prove the double bearing of the presence of the Holy Ghost. We cannot attempt to dwell upon this subject in this brief introduction; but we trust the reader may be led to study it for himself, in the light of holy Scripture; and we are persuaded that the more he thus studies it, the more deeply he will feel its interest and immense practical importance. Alas! that it should be so little understood; that Christians should so little see what is involved in the personal presence of the eternal Spirit, God the Holy Ghost, on this earth — its solemn consequences as regards the world, and its precious results as regards the assembly as a whole, and each individual member in particular.

Oh! that God's people everywhere may be led into a deeper understanding of these things; that they may consider what is due to that divine Person who dwells in them and with them; that they may have a jealous care not to “grieve” Him in their private walk, or “quench” Him in their public assemblies!

THE FACT ITSELF

In approaching this most glorious subject, we feel that we cannot do better than to lay before the reader the distinct testimony of holy Scripture to the broad fact itself, that our Lord Jesus Christ will come again — that He will leave the place which He now occupies on His Father's throne, and come in the clouds of heaven, to receive His people to Himself; to execute judgment upon the wicked; and set up His own everlasting and universal kingdom.

This fact is as clearly and fully set forth in the New Testament as either of the other two facts to which we have already referred. It is as true that the Son of God is coming from Heaven, as that He is gone to Heaven, or that the Holy Ghost is still on this earth. If we admit one fact, we must admit all: and if we deny one, we must deny all; inasmuch as all rest upon precisely the same authority. They stand or fall together. Is it true that the Son of God was refused, cast out, crucified? Is it true that He has gone away into Heaven? Is it true that He is now seated at the right hand of God, crowned with glory and honour? Is it true that God the Holy Ghost came down to this earth, fifty days after the resurrection of our Lord; and that He is still here?

Are these things true? As true as Scripture can make them. Then just as true is it that our blessed Lord will come again, and set up His kingdom upon this earth — that He will literally, and actually, and personally come from Heaven, take to Himself His great power and reign from pole to pole, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

It may perhaps seem strange to some of our readers that we should deem it needful to undertake the proof of such a plain truth as this; but be it remembered that we are writing on this subject as though it were perfectly new to the reader; as if he had never heard of such a thing as the Lord's second coming;

or as if, having heard of it, he still calls it in question. This must be our apology for handling this precious theme in so elementary a manner.

Now for our proofs.

When our adorable Lord was about to take leave of His disciples, He sought, in His infinite grace, to comfort their sorrowing hearts by words of sweetest tenderness. "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I *will come again*, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14: 1-3).

Here we may have something most definite. Indeed it is as definite as it is cheering and consolatory. "I will come again." He does not say, I will send for you. Still less does He say, "You will come to me when you die." He says nothing of the kind. To send an angel, or a legion of angels, would not be the same thing as coming Himself. No doubt it would be very gracious of Him, and very glorious for us, if a multitude of the heavenly host were sent, with horses of fire and chariots of fire, to convey us triumphantly to Heaven. But it would not be the fulfilment of His own sweet promise. And most surely He will do what He promised to do. He will not say one thing and do another. He cannot lie or alter His Word. And not only this, but it would not satisfy the love of His heart to send an angel or a host of angels to fetch us. He will come Himself.

What touching grace shines in all this! If I am expecting a very dear and valued friend by train, I shall not be satisfied with sending a servant or an empty cab to meet him; I shall go myself. This is precisely what our loving Lord means to do. He is gone to Heaven; and His entrance there prepares and defines His people's place. Amid the many mansions of the Father's house, there would be no place for us if our Jesus had not gone before; and then, lest there should be in the heart any feeling of strangeness at the thought of our entrance into that place, He says, with such sweetness, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there ye may be also." Nothing short of this can fulfil the gracious promise of our Lord, or satisfy the love of His heart.

And be it carefully noted that this promise has no reference whatever to the death of the individual believer. Who can imagine that, when our Lord said, "I will come again," He really meant that we should go to Him through death? How can we presume to take such liberties with the plain and precious words of our Lord? Surely if He meant to speak of our going to Him, through death, He could and would have said so. But He has not said so, because He did not mean so; nor is it possible that He could say one thing and mean another. His coming for us, and our going to Him, are totally different things; and being different ideas, they would have been clothed in different language.

Thus, for example, in the case of the penitent thief on the cross, our Lord does not speak of coming to fetch him; but He says, "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise." We really must remember that Scripture is as divinely definite as it is divinely inspired, and hence it never could and it never does confound two things so totally different as the Lord's coming and the Christian's falling asleep.

It may be well, at this point, to remark that there are but four passages in the entire New Testament in which allusion is made to the subject of the Christian passing through the article of death. The first is that passage in Luke 23 already referred to: "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise." The second occurs in Acts 7, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The third is that most familiar and lovely utterance in 2 Corinthians 5, "Absent from the body, present with the Lord." The fourth occurs in that charming first of Philippian's, "Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better."

These most precious passages make up the sum of Scripture testimony on the interesting question of

the disembodied state. There is a passage in Revelation 14 often misapplied to this subject: “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord *from henceforth*: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.” But this has no application to Christians now, though no doubt all such who die in the Lord are blessed, and their works do follow them. The reference, however, is to a time yet future, when the Church shall have left this scene altogether, and other witnesses make their appearance. In a word, Revelation 14: 13 bears upon apocalyptic times, and must be so viewed if we would avoid confusion.

We must now resume our subject, and proceed with our proofs, and in so doing we shall ask the reader to turn to the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The blessed Lord had just gone up from this earth, in the presence of His holy apostles. “And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by Him in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven” (verses 10, 11).

This is intensely interesting, and furnishes a most striking proof of our present thesis. Indeed it is impossible to avoid its force. Alas! that any should seek or desire to avoid it! From the manner in which the angelic witnesses speak to the men of Galilee it would seem like tautology; but, as we well know, there is — there can be — no such thing in the volume of God. It is, therefore, lovely fulness, divine completeness, that we see in this testimony. From it we learn that the selfsame Jesus who left this earth, and ascended into Heaven, in the presence of a number of witnesses, shall *so come in like manner as* they had seen Him go into Heaven. How did He go? He went up personally, literally, actually, the very same person who had just been conversing familiarly with them — whom they had seen with their eyes, heard with their ears, handled with their hands — who had eaten in their presence, and “showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs.” Well then, “He shall so come in like manner.”

“He who with hands uplifted,
Went from this earth below,
Shall come again all gifted,
His blessing to bestow.”

And here we may ask — though it be rather anticipating what may come before us in a future paper — Who saw the blessed Lord as He went up? Did the world? Nay; not one unconverted, unbelieving person ever laid his eyes upon our precious Lord from the moment that He was laid in the tomb. The last sight the world got of Jesus was as He hung on the cross, a spectacle to angels, men, and devils. The next sight they will get of Him will be when, like the lightning flash, He shall come forth to execute judgment, and tread, in terrible vengeance, the winepress of the wrath of Almighty God. Tremendous thought!

None, therefore, but His own saw the ascending Saviour, as none but they had seen Him from the moment of His resurrection. He showed Himself, blessed be His holy name! to those who were dear to His heart. He assured and comforted, strengthened and encouraged their souls by these “many infallible proofs” of which the inspired narrator speaks to us. He led them to the very confines of the unseen world, just so far as men could go while still in the body; and there He allowed them to see Him ascending into Heaven; and while they gazed upon this glorious sight He sent the precious testimony home to their very hearts. “This same Jesus” — no other, no stranger, but the same loving, sympathizing, gracious, unchanging friend — “whom ye have seen go into heaven, shall so come in

like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.”

Is it possible for testimony to be more distinct or satisfactory? Could proof be more clear or conclusive? How can any counter argument stand for a moment, or any objection be raised? Either those two men in white apparel were false witnesses, or our Jesus shall come again in the exact manner in which He went away. There is no middle ground between those two conclusions. We read in Scripture that, “in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established;” and therefore in the mouth of two heavenly messengers — two heralds from the region of light and truth, we have the word established that our Lord Jesus Christ shall come again in actual bodily form, to be seen by His own first of all, apart from all others, in the holy intimacy and profound retirement which characterized His departure from this world. All this, blessed be God, is wrapped up in the two little words, “*as*” and “*so*.”

We cannot attempt, in a brief paper like the present, to adduce all the proofs which are to be found in the pages of the New Testament. We have given one from the Gospels and one from the Acts, and we shall now ask the reader to turn with us to the Epistles. Let us take, for example, the First Epistle to the Thessalonians. We select this Epistle because it is acknowledged to have been the earliest of Paul's writings; and further, because it was written to a company of very young converts. This latter point is valuable, inasmuch as we sometimes hear it stated that the truth of the Lord's coming is not suitable to bring before the minds of young believers. That the Apostle Paul did not think it unsuitable is evident from the fact that of all the Epistles which he wrote not one contains so much about the Lord's coming as that which he penned for the newly converted Thessalonians. The fact is, when a soul is converted and brought into the full light and liberty of the gospel of Christ, it becomes divinely natural for such a one to look for the Lord's coming. That most precious truth is an integral part of the gospel. The first coming and the second coming are most blessedly bound up together by the divine link of the personal presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church.

On the other hand, where the soul is not established in grace; where peace and liberty are not enjoyed; where a defective gospel has been received, there it will be found that the hope of the Lord's coming will not be cherished, for the simple reason that the soul is, of necessity, occupied with the question of its own state and prospects. If I am not certain of my salvation — if I do not know that I have eternal life — that I am a child of God — I cannot be looking out for the Lord's return. It is only when we know what Jesus has done for us at His first coming that we can with bright and holy intelligence look out for His second coming.

But let us turn to our Epistle. Take the following sentences from the first chapter: “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. . . . So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and *to wait for His Son from heaven*, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (verses 5-10).

Here we have a fine illustration of the effect of a full clear gospel, received in simple earnest faith. They turned from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son. They were actually converted to the blessed hope of the Lord's coming. It was an integral part of the gospel which Paul preached; and an integral part of their faith. Was it a reality to turn from idols? Doubtless. Was it a reality to serve the living God? Unquestionably. Well then it was just as real, just as positive, just as

simple, their waiting for God's Son from Heaven. If we question the reality of one, we must question the reality of all, inasmuch as all are bound up together and form a beautiful cluster of practical Christian truth. If you had asked a Thessalonian Christian what he was waiting for, what would have been his reply? Would he have said, "I am waiting for the world to improve by means of the gospel which I myself have received? or, I am waiting for the moment of my death when I shall go to be with Jesus?" No. His reply would have been simply this, "I am waiting for the Son of God from heaven." This, and nothing else, is the proper hope of the Christian, the proper hope of the Church. To wait for the improvement of the world is not Christian hope at all. You might as well wait for the improvement of the flesh, for there is just as much hope of the one as the other. And as to the article of death — though no doubt it may intervene — it is never once presented as the true and proper hope of the Christian. It may, with the fullest confidence, be asserted that there is not so much as a single passage in the entire New Testament in which death is spoken of as the hope of the believer; whereas, on the other hand, the hope of the Lord's coming is bound up, in the most intimate manner, with all the concerns and associations and relationships of life, as we may see in the Epistle before us. Thus, if the apostle would refer to the interesting question of his own personal connection with the beloved saints at Thessalonica, he says, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy."

Again, if he thinks of their progress in holiness and love, he adds, "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you; to the end He may stablish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, *at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints*" (1 Thess. 3: 12-13).

Finally, if the apostle would seek to comfort the hearts of his brethren in reference to those who had fallen asleep, how does he do it? Does he tell them that they should soon follow them? Nay; this would have been in full keeping with Old Testament times, as David says of his departed child, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Sam. 12: 23). But it is not thus that the Holy Ghost instructs us in 1 Thessalonians — quite the reverse. "I would not," he says, "have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that [not they which shall be, but] *we* which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [come before or take precedence of] them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then *we* which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4: 13-18).

It is impossible for any proof to be more simple, direct, and conclusive than this. The Thessalonian Christians, as we have already remarked, were converted to the hope of the Lord's return. They were taught to look out for it daily. It was as much a part of their Christianity to believe that He *would* come, as to believe that He *had* come and gone. Hence it came to pass that when some of their number were called to pass through death, they were taken aback; they had not anticipated this; and they feared lest the departed should miss the joy of that blissful and longed-for moment of the Lord's return. The apostle therefore writes to correct their mistake; and, in so doing, he pours a fresh flood of light upon the whole subject, and assures them that the dead in Christ — which includes all who had or shall have fallen asleep; in short, those of Old Testament times as well as those of the New — should rise first, that is, before the living are changed, and all shall ascend together to meet their descending Lord.

We shall have occasion to refer to this remarkable passage again, when handling other branches of this

glorious subject. We merely quote it here as one of the almost innumerable proofs of the fact that our Lord will come again, personally, really, and actually; and that His personal coming is the true and proper hope of the Church of God collectively, and of the believer individually.

We shall close this paper by reminding the Christian reader that he can never sit down to the table of his Lord without being reminded of this glorious hope, so long as those words shine on the page of inspiration, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till” — when? Till ye die? Nay; but — “*till He come*” (1 Cor. 11: 26). How precious is this! The table of the Lord stands between those two marvellous epochs, the cross and the advent — the death and the glory. The believer can look up from the table and see the beams of the glory gilding the horizon. It is our privilege, as we gather, on each Lord's day, round the Lord's table, to show forth the Lord's death, to be able to say, “This may be the last occasion of celebrating this precious feast; ere another Lord's day dawn upon us, He Himself may come.” Again we say, How precious is this!

THE DOUBLE BEARING OF THE FACT

Having, as we trust, fully established the fact of the Lord's coming, we have now to place before the reader the double bearing of that fact — its bearing upon the Lord's people, and its bearing upon the world. The former is presented, in the New Testament, as the coming of Christ to receive His people to Himself; the latter is spoken of as “the day of the Lord” — a term of frequent use also in Old Testament Scriptures.

These things are never confounded in Scripture, as we shall see when we come to look at the various passages. Christians do confound them, and hence it is that we often find “that blessed hope” overcast with heavy clouds, and associated in the mind with circumstances of terror, wrath, and judgment, which have nothing whatever to do with the *coming* of Christ for His people, but are intimately bound up with “the *day* of the Lord.”

Let the Christian reader, then, have it settled in his heart, on the clear authority of holy Scripture, that the grand and specific hope for him ever to cherish is the coming of Christ for His people. This hope may be realized this very night. There is nothing whatever to wait for — no events to transpire amongst the nations — nothing to occur in the history of Israel — nothing in God's government of the world — nothing, in short, in any shape or form whatsoever, to intervene between the heart of the true believer and his heavenly hope. Christ may come for His people tonight. There is actually nothing to hinder. No one can tell when He *will* come; but we can joyfully say that, at any moment, He *may* come. And, blessed be His name, when He does come for us, it will not be with the accompanying circumstances of terror, wrath, and judgment. It will not be with blackness and darkness and tempest. These things will accompany “the day of the Lord,” as the Apostle Peter plainly tells the Jews in his first great sermon, on the day of Pentecost, in which he quotes the following words from the solemn prophecy of Joel, “And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before” — what? the coming of the Lord for His people? Nay; but before “*that great and notable day of the Lord come.*”

When our Lord shall come to receive His people to Himself no eye shall see Him, no ear shall hear His voice, save His own redeemed and beloved people. Let us remember the words of the angelic witnesses in the first of Acts. Who saw the blessed One ascending into the heavens? None but His own. Well, “He shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” *As* was the going, *so* shall be the coming, if we are to bow to Scripture. To confound the day of the Lord with His coming for His Church is to overlook the plainest teachings of Scripture, and to rob the believer of his own true and

proper hope.

And here perhaps we cannot do better than to call attention to a very important and interesting passage in the Second Epistle of Peter: “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with Him in the holy mount. We have also the word of prophecy more sure [or confirmed], whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts” (2 Peter 1: 16-19).

This passage demands the reader's most attentive consideration. It sets forth, in the clearest possible manner, the distinction between “the word of prophecy” and the proper hope of the Christian, namely, “the morning star.” We must remember that the great subject of prophecy is God's government of the world in connection with the seed of Abraham. “When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance” (Deut. 32: 8, 9).

Here then is the scope and theme of prophecy — Israel and the nations. A child can understand this. If we range through the prophets, from the opening of Isaiah to the close of Malachi, we shall not find so much as a single line about the Church of God — its position, its portion, or its prospects. No doubt the word of prophecy is deeply interesting, and most profitable for the Christian to study; but it will be all this just in proportion as he understands its proper scope and object, and sees how it stands in contrast with his own special hope. We may fearlessly assert that it is as utterly impossible for any one to study the Old Testament prophecies aright who does not clearly see the true place of the Church.

We cannot attempt to enter upon the subject of the Church in this brief paper. It has been repeatedly referred to and unfolded elsewhere, and we can now merely ask the reader to weigh and examine the statement which we here deliberately make, namely, that there is not so much as a single syllable about the Church of God, the body of Christ, from cover to cover of the Old Testament. Types, shadows, illustrations, there are, which, now that we have the full-orbed light of the New Testament, we can see, understand, and appreciate. But it was not possible for any Old Testament believer to see the great mystery of Christ and the Church, inasmuch as it was not revealed. The inspired apostle expressly tells us that it was “*hid*,” not in the Old Testament Scriptures, but “in God,” as we read in Ephesians 3: 9, “And to make all men see what is the fellowship [or rather the administration] of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been *hid in God*, who created all things by Jesus Christ”. So also in Colossians we read, “Even the mystery which *hath been hid* from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints” (Col. 1: 26).

These two passages establish the truth of our statement beyond all question, for those who are willing to be governed absolutely by the authority of holy Scripture; they teach us that the great mystery — Christ and the Church — is not to be found in the Old Testament. Where have we in the Old Testament a word about Jews and Gentiles forming one body, and being united by the Holy Ghost to a living Head in Heaven? How could such a thing possibly be, so long as “the middle wall of partition” stood as an insuperable barrier between the circumcised and the uncircumcised? If one were asked to name a special feature of the old economy he would at once reply, “The rigid separation of Jew and Gentile.” On the other hand, if he were asked to name a special feature of the Church, or Christianity, he would as readily reply, “The intimate union of Jew and Gentile in one body.” In short, the two conditions

stand in vivid contrast, and it was wholly impossible that both could hold good at the same time. So long as the middle wall of partition stood, the truth of the Church could not be revealed; but the death of Christ having thrown down that wall, the Holy Ghost descended from Heaven to form the one body, and link it, by His presence and indwelling, to the risen and glorified Head in the heavens. Such is the great mystery of Christ and the Church, for which there could be no less a basis than accomplished redemption.

Now we entreat the reader to examine this matter for himself. Let him search the Scriptures to see if these things be indeed true. This is the only way to get at the truth. We must lay aside all our own thoughts and reasonings, our prejudices and predilections, and come like a little child, to the holy Scriptures. In this way we shall learn the mind of God on this most precious and interesting subject. We shall find that the Church of God, the body of Christ, did not exist, as a fact, until after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the consequent descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. And further, we shall find that the full and glorious doctrine of the Church was not brought out until the days of the apostle Paul. (Compare Rom. 16: 25, 26; Eph. 1-3; Col. 1: 25-29.) Finally, we shall see that the actual and unmistakable boundary lines of the Church's earthly history are Pentecost (Acts 2) and the rapture or taking up of the saints (1 Thessalonians 4: 13-17).

Thus we reach a position from which we can get a view of the Church's proper hope; and that hope is, most assuredly, "the bright and morning star." Of this hope the Old Testament prophets utter not a syllable. They speak largely and clearly of "the day of the Lord" — a day of judgment upon the world and its ways (see Isaiah 2: 12-22 and parallel Scriptures). But "the day of the Lord," with all its attendant circumstances of wrath, judgment, and terror, must never be confounded with His coming for His people. When our blessed Lord comes *for* His people there will be nothing to terrify. He will come in all the sweetness and tenderness of His love to receive His loved and redeemed people to Himself. He will come to finish up the precious story of His grace. "To them that look for Him shall He appear (*ophthesetai*) the second time, without [that is, apart from all question of] sin, unto salvation" (Heb. 9).* He will come as a bridegroom to receive the bride; and when He thus comes none but His own shall hear His voice or see His face. If He were to come this very night for His people — and He may, for aught we know — if the voice of the archangel and the trump of God were to be heard tonight, then all the dead in Christ — all who have been laid to sleep by Jesus — all the saints of God, both those of Old Testament and New Testament times, who lie sleeping in our cemeteries and graveyards, or in the ocean's depths — all these would rise from their temporary sleep. All the living saints would be changed in a moment, and all would be caught up to meet their descending Lord, and return with Him to the Father's house. (John 14: 3; 1 Thess. 4: 16, 17; 1 Cor. 15: 51-52.)

{*The clause, "them that look for Him," refers to all believers. It does not mean, as some suppose, those only who hold the truth of the Lord's second coming. This would make our place with Christ at His coming dependent upon knowledge, instead of upon our union with Him by the presence and power of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of God, in the above passage, most graciously takes for granted that all God's people are looking, in some way or another, for the precious Saviour; and verily so they are. They may not see eye to eye as to all the details. They may not all enjoy equal clearness of view or depth and fulness of apprehension; but, most surely, they would all be glad at any moment to see the One who loved them and gave Himself for them.}

This is what is meant by the rapture or catching up of the saints, and has nothing to do directly with Israel or the nations. It is the distinct and only proper hope of the Church; and there is not so much as a single hint of it in the entire Old Testament. If any one asserts that there is, let him produce it. If there be such a thing, nothing is easier than to furnish it. We solemnly and deliberately declare there is no

such thing. For all that respects the Church — its standing, its calling, its portion, its prospects — we must turn to the pages of the New Testament, and, of those pages, mainly the Epistles of Paul. To confound “the word of prophecy” with the hope of the Church is to damage the truth of God, and mislead the souls of His people. That the enemy has succeeded in doing all this, throughout the length and breadth of the professing Church is, alas! too true. And hence it is that so very few Christians have really Scriptural thoughts about the coming of their Lord. They are looking into prophecy for the Church's hope — they confound “the Sun of righteousness” with “the morning Star” — they mix up the coming of Christ *for* His people, and His coming *with* them — they make His “coming” or “state of presence” to be identical with His “appearing” or “manifestation.”

All this is a most serious mistake, against which we desire to warn our readers. When Christ comes with His people, “every eye shall see Him.” When He is manifested, His people will be manifested also. “When Christ our life shall appear [or be manifested], then shall ye also appear with Him in glory” (Col. 3: 4). When Christ comes to execute judgment, His saints come with Him. “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints, to execute judgment upon all” (Jude 14, 15). So also in Revelation 19, the rider on the white horse is followed by the armies in Heaven upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. These armies are not angels, but saints; for we do not read of angels being clothed in white linen, which is expressly declared, in this very chapter to be “the righteousness of saints” (ver. 8).

Now, it is most evident that, if the saints accompany their Lord when He comes in judgment, they must be with Him previously. The fact of their going to Him is not presented in the book of Revelation, unless it be involved — as we doubt not it is — in the catching up of the man child, in chapter 12. The man child is, most surely, Christ; and inasmuch as Christ and His people are indissolubly joined in one, they are most completely identified with Him; blessed for ever be His holy and precious name!

But, clearly, it does not at all lie within the scope of the book of Revelation to give us the coming of Christ *for* His people, or their being caught up to meet Him in the air, or their return to the Father's house. For these blessed events or facts, we must look elsewhere, as, for example, in John 14: 3; 1 Corinthians 15: 23, 51, 52; 1 Thessalonians 4: 14-17. Let the reader ponder these three passages. Let him drink into his very soul their clear and precious teaching. There is nothing difficult about them, no obscurity, no mist or vagueness whatever. A babe in Christ can understand them. They set forth in the clearest and simplest possible manner, the true Christian hope, which — we repeat it emphatically, and urge it upon the reader as the direct and positive teaching of holy Scripture — is the coming of Christ to receive His people, all His people, to Himself, to take them back with Him to His Father's house, there to remain with Him, while God deals governmentally with Israel and the nations, and prepares the way, by His judicial actings, for bringing in the First-begotten into the world.

Now, if it be asked, “Why have we not the coming of Christ for His people in the book of Revelation?” Because that book is pre-eminently a book of judgment — a governmental, judicial book, at least chapter 1 to 20. Hence even the Church is presented as under judgment. We do not see the Church in chapters 2 and 3 as the body or the bride of Christ; but as a responsible witness on the earth, whose condition is being carefully examined and rigidly judged by Him who walks amongst the candlesticks.

It would not, therefore, comport with the character or object of this book to introduce, directly, the rapture of the saints. It shows us the Church on the earth, in the place of responsibility. This it gives us, in Revelation 2 and 3, under the head of “the things that are.” But from that to Revelation 19, there is not a single syllable about the Church on earth. The plain fact is, the Church will not be on earth during that solemn period. She will be with her Head and Lord, in the divine retirement of the Father's house.

The redeemed are seen in Heaven, under the title of the twenty-four crowned elders, in chapters 4 and 5. There, blessed be God, they will be, while the seals are being opened, the trumpets sounded, and the vials poured out. To think of the Church as being on the earth, from Revelation 6-18 — to place her amid the apocalyptic judgments — to pass her through “the great tribulation” — to subject her to “the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” — would be to falsify her position, to rob her of her chartered privileges, and to contradict the clear and positive promise of her Lord.*

{* We shall have occasion, in a future paper, to show that, after the Church has been removed to Heaven, the Spirit of God will act both among the Jews, and also among the Gentiles. See Revelation 7.}

No, no, beloved Christian reader; let no man deceive you, by any means. The Church is seen on earth in Revelation 2 and 3. She is seen in Heaven, together with the Old Testament saints, in Revelation 4 and 5. We are not told, in the Revelation, how she gets there; but we see her there, in high communion and holy worship; and then, in Revelation 19, the rider on the white horse comes forth, *with* His saints, to execute judgment upon the beast and the false prophet — to put down every enemy and every evil, and to reign over the whole earth for the blissful period of a thousand years.

Such is the plain teaching of the New Testament, to which we earnestly invite the attention of our readers. And let no one suppose that our object is to find an easy path for Christians in thus teaching, as we do most emphatically, that the Church will not be in “the great tribulation” — will not come into “the hour of temptation.” Nothing of the kind. The fact is, the true and normal condition of the Church, and therefore of the individual Christian, in this world, is tribulation. So says our Lord: “In the world ye shall have tribulation.” And again, “We glory in tribulation.”

It cannot, therefore, be a question of avoiding that which is our appointed portion in this world, if only we are true to Christ. But the fact is, that the entire truth of the Church's position and prospect is involved in this question, and this is our reason for urging it so upon the prayerful attention of our readers.

The great object of the enemy is to drag down the Church of God to an earthly level — to set Christians entirely astray as to their divinely appointed hope — to lead them to confound things which God has made to differ, to occupy them with earthly things — to cause them to so mix up the *coming* of Christ for His people with His *appearing* in judgment upon the world, that they may not be able to cultivate those bridal affections and heavenly aspirations which become them as members of the body of Christ. He would fain have them looking out for various earthly events to come between them and their own proper hope, in order that they may not be — as God would have them — ever on the very tiptoe of expectation, looking out, with ardent desire, for the appearing of “the bright and morning Star.”

Well does the enemy know what he is about; and surely we ought not to be ignorant of his devices, but rather give ourselves to the study of the Word of God, and thus learn, as we most surely shall, “the double bearing” of the glorious fact of the Lord's coming.

“THE COMING” AND “THE DAY”

We must now ask the reader to turn with us for a little to the two Epistles to the Thessalonians. As we have already remarked, these Christians were converted to the blessed hope of the Lord's return. They were taught to look for Him day by day. It was not merely the doctrine of the advent received and held in the mind, but a divine Person constantly expected by hearts that had learnt to love Him and long for

His coming.

But, as we can easily imagine, the Thessalonian Christians were ignorant of many things connected with this blessed hope. The apostle had been “*taken* from them for a short time, in presence, not in heart.” He had not been allowed to remain long enough amongst them to instruct them in the details of the subject of their hope. They knew that Jesus was to return — that self-same blessed One who had graciously delivered them from the wrath to come. But as to any distinction between His coming *for* His people and coming *with* them — between His “state of presence” and His “appearing” His “coming” and His “day,” they were, at first, wholly ignorant.

Hence, as might be expected, they fell into various errors and mistakes. It is amazing how speedily the human mind wanders away into the wildest and grossest confusion and error. We need to be guarded on all sides by the pure, solid, all-adjusting truth of God. We must have our souls evenly balanced by divine revelation, else we are sure to plunge into all manner of false and foolish notions. Thus some of the Thessalonians conceived the idea of giving up their honest callings. They ceased to labour with their hands, and went about idle.

This was a great mistake. Even though we were perfectly certain that our Lord would come this very night, it would be no reason why we should not, most diligently and faithfully, attend to our daily round of duty, and do all that devolved upon us in that particular sphere in which His good hand has placed us. So far from this, the very fact of expecting the blessed Master would strengthen our desire to have everything done as it ought to be up to the very moment of His return, so that not so much as a single righteous claim should be left neglected. In point of fact, the hope of the Lord's speedy return, when held in power in the soul, is most sanctifying, purifying, and adjusting in its influence upon Christian life, conduct, and character. We know, alas! that even this most glorious truth may be held in the region of the understanding, and flippantly professed with the lips, while the heart and the life, the course, conduct, and character, remain wholly unaffected by it. But we are expressly taught by the inspired Apostle John, that “every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 John 3: 3). And, most surely, this “purifying” embraces all that which goes to make up our whole practical life, from day to day.

But there was another grave mistake into which those dear Thessalonians fell, and out of which the blessed apostle, like a true and faithful pastor, sought to recover them. They imagined that their departed Christian friends would not have part in the joy of the Lord's return. They feared that they would fail to participate in that blissful and longed-for moment.

Now while it is quite true that this very mistake proves how vividly these Christians realized their blessed hope, still it was a mistake, and needed to be corrected. But let us carefully note the correction: “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus [or are laid to sleep by Jesus] will God bring with Him.”

Mark this. He does not seek to comfort these sorrowing friends by the assurance that they should, ere long, follow the departed. Quite the reverse. He assures them that Jesus would bring the departed back with Him. This is plain and distinct, and founded upon the great fact that “Jesus died for us and rose again.”

But the apostle does not stop here, but goes on to pour a flood of fresh light upon the understanding of His dear children in the faith. “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent [or precede] them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the

trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first [that is, before the living are changed]. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in [the] clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

Here, then, we have presented to us what is commonly spoken of amongst us as the rapture of the saints — a most glorious, soul-stirring, and enrapturing theme — surely the brightest hope of the Church of God, and of the individual believer. The Lord *Himself* shall descend from Heaven with a summons designed only for the ears and the hearts of His own. Not one uncircumcised ear shall hear — not one un-renewed heart be moved by, that heavenly voice, that divine trumpet call. The dead in Christ, including, as we believe, the Old Testament saints, as well as those of the New, who shall have departed in the faith of Christ — all those shall hear the blessed sound, and come forth from their sleeping places. All the living saints shall hear it, and be changed in a moment. And oh! what a change! The poor crumbling tabernacle of clay exchanged for a glorified body, like unto the body of Jesus.

Look at yonder bent and withered frame — that body racked with pain, and worn out with years of acute suffering. It is the body of a saint. How humiliating to see it like that! Yes; but wait a little. Let but the trumpet sound, and in one moment that poor crushed and withered frame shall be changed, and made like to the glorified body of the descending Lord.

And there, in yonder mental hospital, is a poor patient. He has been there for years. He is a saint of God. How mysterious! True; we cannot fathom the mystery; it lies beyond our present narrow range. But so it is; that poor patient is a saint of God, an heir of glory. He too shall hear the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, and leave his illness behind him for ever, while he mounts into the heavens, in his glorified body, to meet his descending Lord.

Oh! what a brilliant moment! How many sick beds shall be vacant then! What marvellous changes shall then take place! How the heart bounds at the thought, and longs to sing, in full chorus, that lovely hymn,

“Christ, the Lord, will come again,
None shall wait for Him in vain:
I shall then His glory see:
Christ will come and call for me.
Then, when the archangel's voice
Calls the sleeping saints to rise,
Rising millions shall proclaim
Blessings on the Saviour's name.
'This is our redeeming God!'
Ransomed hosts will shout aloud:
Praise, eternal praise, be given
To the Lord of earth and Heaven!”
Amen and amen!

How glorious the thought of those “rising millions”! How truly delightful to be amongst them! How precious the hope of seeing that blessed One who loveth us and who gave Himself for us! Such is the

hope of the Christian, a hope concerning which there is not a single line from cover to cover of the Old Testament. "The word of prophecy" is of all importance. We do well to take heed to it. It is an unspeakable mercy for those who find themselves in a dark place to have a bright lamp to cast its light athwart the gloom. But let the Christian bear in mind that what he wants is to have "the day star arising in his heart"; in other words, to have his whole heart governed by the hope of seeing Jesus as the bright and morning Star. When the heart is thus filled and ruled by the proper Christian hope, then the eye can intelligently scan the prophetic chart: it can take in the whole field of prophecy as our God has graciously opened it before us, and find interest and profit in every page and in every line. But, on the other hand, we may rest assured that the man who looks into prophecy in order to find the Church or its hope there has his face turned the wrong way. He will find "the Jew" there, and "Gentile" there, but not "the Church of God." We earnestly trust that not one of our readers will fail to lay hold of this fact — a fact, we may safely say, of the very deepest moment.

But it will perhaps be asked, "Of what use, then, is prophecy? If indeed it be true that we cannot find aught about the Church on the prophetic page, of what possible use can it be to Christians? Why should we be told to take heed to it if it does not immediately concern us?" We reply, Is nothing of any value to us save what immediately concerns ourselves? Shall we take no interest in anything unless we ourselves form the immediate subject thereof? Is it nothing to us to have the counsels and purposes and plans of God laid open before us? Do we lightly esteem the high favour of having the thoughts of God communicated to us in His holy Word of prophecy? Surely it was not thus that Abraham treated the divine communications made to him in Genesis 18: "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" And what was that thing? Did it immediately concern Abraham? Not at all. It concerned Sodom and the neighbouring cities, and Abraham had no stake in them. But did that prevent his interest in the divine communication? Did it hinder his appreciation of the mark of special favour in his being made the honoured and trusted depository of the thoughts of God? Surely not. We may safely assert that the faithful patriarch highly esteemed the privilege conferred upon him.

And so should we. We should study prophecy with all the interest arising from the fact that therein we have unfolded to us, with divine precision, what God is about to do on this earth with Israel and with the nations. Prophecy is God's history of the future; and just in proportion as we love Him shall we delight to study His history; not indeed, as some have said, that we may know its truth by its fulfilment, but that we may possess all that absolute, that divine certainty as to the future which God's Word is capable of imparting. Nothing can be more absurd, in the judgment of faith, than to suppose that we must wait until the accomplishment of a prophecy to know that it is true. What an insult offered — unwittingly, no doubt — to the peerless revelation of our God.

But we must now turn, for a moment, to the solemn subject of "the day of the Lord." This is a term of frequent occurrence in Old Testament Scriptures. We cannot attempt to quote all the passages; but we shall refer to one or two, and then the reader can follow up the subject for himself.

In Isaiah 2 we read, "For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low. . . . And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted *in that day*. And the idols he shall utterly abolish. And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth."

So also in Joel 2. "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand. A day of darkness

and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains; a great people and a strong; there has not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations . . . the earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble; the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining . . . for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?"

From these and similar passages, we learn that "the day of the Lord" stands associated with the deeply solemn thought of judgment upon the world — upon apostate Israel — upon man and his ways — upon all that which the human heart prizes and longs after. In short, the day of the Lord stands in striking contrast with man's day. Man has the upper hand now, the Lord will have the upper hand then.

Now, while it is perfectly true that all the Lord's people can rejoice in the prospect of that day, which, though it will open in judgment upon the world, shall, nevertheless, be marked by the universal reign of righteousness; yet we must remember that the peculiar hope of the Christian is not that day with its awful accompaniments of judgment, wrath, and terror; but the coming or presence of Jesus, with its precious accompaniments of peace and joy, love and glory. The Church shall have met her Lord, and returned with Him to the Father's house, before that terrible day bursts upon the world. It will be her blissful portion to taste the sublime communion of that heavenly home, for an indefinite period previous to the opening of the day of the Lord. Her eyes shall be gladdened by the sight of "the bright and morning Star," long before even "the Sun of righteousness" shall arise, in healing virtue, upon the pious portion of the nation of Israel — the God-fearing remnant of the seed of Abraham.

We are intensely anxious that the Christian reader should thoroughly enter into this grand and important distinction. We feel persuaded that it will have an immense effect upon all his thoughts and views and hopes of the future. It will enable him to see, without a single intervening cloud, his true prospect as a Christian. It will deliver him from all mist, vagueness, and confusion; and further, it will divest his mind of all that feeling of dread with which so many even of the Lord's dear people contemplate the future. It will teach him to look for the Saviour — the blessed Bridegroom - the everlasting Lover of his soul, and not for judgments and terror, eclipses and earthquakes, convulsions and revolutions, it will keep his spirit tranquil and happy, in the sure and certain hope of being with Jesus, ere that great and terrible day of the Lord come.

See how the faithful apostle laboured to lead his dear Thessalonian converts into the clear understanding of the difference between "the coming" and "the day."

"But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when *they* [not ye] shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness" — The Lord be praised! — "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that are drunken, are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep [that is, are dead or alive] we should live together with Him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together and edify one another, even as also ye do" (1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11).

Here we have the distinction set forth with unmistakable clearness. The Lord Himself shall come for us as the Bridegroom. The day of the Lord shall come upon the world as a thief. Is it possible for contrast

to be more striking? How can any one confound these two things? They are as distinct as any two things can be. A bridegroom and a thief are surely two different things; and just as different are the coming of the Lord for His waiting people and the coming of His day upon a slumbering or intoxicated world.

Some perhaps may find a difficulty in the fact that the Church in Sardis is addressed in such solemn words as these, "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" (Rev. 3: 3). The difficulty will vanish when we reflect that, in the case of Sardis, the professing body is looked upon as having a mere name to live while dead. It has sunk to the level of the world, and can only see things from the world's standpoint. The Church has failed utterly; it has fallen from its high and holy position; it is under judgment; it cannot therefore be cheered by the Church's proper hope; but is threatened by the world's terrible doom. We do not see the Church here as the body or bride of Christ, but as the responsible witness for God on the earth — the golden candlestick which ought to have held forth the divine light of testimony in this dark world, in the absence of her Lord. But alas! the professing Church has sunk lower and become darker than even the world itself. Hence the solemn threatening. The exception confirms the rule.

We shall proceed with this subject as presented in 2 Thessalonians.

It is a fact full of the richest comfort and consolation to the heart of a true believer, that our God, in His marvellous grace, ever makes the eater to yield meat, and the strong, sweetness. He brings light out of darkness, life out of death, and causes the bright beams of His glory to shine amid the most disastrous ruin caused by the enemy's hand. The truth of this is illustrated throughout the Scriptures, and it should fill our hearts with peace and our mouths with praise.

Hence it is that the varied doctrinal errors and practical evils, into which the early Christians were permitted to fall, have been overruled of God, and used for the instruction, guidance, and solid profit of the Church to the close of her earthly history.

Thus, for example, the error of the Thessalonian Christians in reference to their departed brethren was made the occasion of pouring such a flood of divine light upon the Lord's coming, and upon the rapture of the saints, that it is impossible for any simple mind that bows to Scripture ever to fall into a similar mistake. They looked for the Lord to come, and in that they were right. They expected Him to set up His kingdom on the earth, and in that they were right, as to the broad fact.

But they made a great mistake in leaving out the heavenly side of this glorious hope. Their intelligence was defective — their faith lacking. They did not see the two parts — the double bearing of the advent of Christ — His descent into the air to receive His people to Himself, and His appearing in glory to set up His kingdom in manifested power. Hence they feared that their departed brethren would necessarily be absent from the sphere of blessing — the circle of glory. This mistake is divinely corrected, as we have seen, in 1 Thess. 4. The heavenly side of the hope — the Christian's proper portion — is placed before the heart as the true corrective for the error in reference to the sleeping saints. Christ will gather all (and not merely part of) His people to Himself; and if there is to be any advantage — a shade of difference in the matter — it will be on the side of those very people about whom they were mourning. "The dead in Christ shall rise first."

But from the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians we learn that those dear young converts had been led into another grave error — an error, not as to the dead, but as to the living — a mistake, not respecting "the coming," but respecting "the day of the Lord." In the one case they feared that the dead would not participate in the blissful triumph of "the coming"; and in the other case they feared that the living were actually, at the very moment, involved in the terrors of the day.

Such is the mistake with which the inspired apostle deals in his second letter to the Thessalonian believers; and nothing can exceed the tenderness and delicacy, and yet withal the wisdom and faithfulness of his dealing.

The Christians at Thessalonica were passing through intense persecution and tribulation; and it is very evident that the enemy, by means of false teachers, sought to upset their minds, by leading them to think that “the great and terrible day of the Lord” had actually arrived, and that the troubles through which they were passing were the accompaniments of that day. If this were so the entire teaching of the apostle was proved false; for if there was one truth that shone forth more brightly and prominently in his teaching than another, it was the association and identification of believers with Christ — an association so intimate, an identification so close, that it was impossible for Christ to appear in glory without His people. “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.” But He must appear in order to introduce “the day.”

Furthermore, when the day of the Lord does actually arrive it will not be to trouble His people, but, on the contrary, to trouble their persecutors. Of this the apostle reminds them, in the most simple, forcible manner, in his very opening lines: “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth, so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure; which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing *it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us*, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven and with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God [Gentiles], and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ [Jews]” (2 Thess. 1: 6).

Thus, not only was the Christian position involved in this matter, but the very glory of God — His actual righteousness. If, indeed, the day of the Lord brought tribulation to Christians, then was there no truth in the doctrine — the grand prominent doctrine of Paul's teaching — that Christ and His people are one; and moreover it would impugn the righteousness of God. In short, then, if Christians were in tribulation, it was morally impossible that the day of the Lord could have set in, for when that day comes, it will be rest for believers, as their public recompense, in the kingdom — not merely in the Father's house; which is not the point here. The tables will be completely turned. The Church will be in rest, the Church's troublers in tribulation. During man's day, the Church is called to tribulation; but in the day of the Lord all will be reversed.

Note this carefully. It is not the question of Christians suffering tribulation. They are actually called to it in this world, so long as wickedness has the upper hand. Christ suffered, and so must they. But the point we want to fasten upon the mind and heart of the Christian is that, when Christ comes to set up His kingdom, it is utterly impossible that His people can be in trouble. Thus the entire teaching of the enemy, by which he sought to upset the Thessalonian believers, was proved to be utterly fallacious. The apostle sweeps away the very foundation of the whole fabric by the simple statement of the precious truth of God. This is the divine way of delivering people from false notions and vain fears. Give them the truth, and error must flee before it. Let in the sunshine of God's eternal Word, and all the mists and clouds of false doctrine must be rolled away.

Let us, for a moment, examine the further teaching of our apostle, in this remarkable writing. In so doing, we shall see how thoroughly he establishes the distinction between “the coming” and “the day” — a distinction which the reader will do well to ponder.

“Now we beseech you, brethren, by [or on the ground of] the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter, as from us, as that the day of the Lord is present.”*

{*We have no pretensions whatever to scholarship; we are merely gleaners in the deeply interesting field of criticism in which others have reaped a golden harvest. We do not mean to occupy our readers with arguments in defence of readings given in the text; but we feel that there is no use in giving them what we consider to be erroneous. We believe there is no doubt whatever that the true reading of 2 Thessalonians 2 is as we have given it above, “as that the day of the Lord is present,” the word *enesteken* can only be thus rendered. It occurs in Romans 3: 38, where it is translated “things *present*.” So also in 1 Corinthians 3: 22, “things *present*”; 1 Corinthians 7: 25, “*present* distress”; Galatians 3: 4, “*present* evil world”; Hebrews 9: 9, “time then *present*.”

Now apart altogether from the question of various readings, a moment's reflection will suffice to show the simple minded Christian that the apostle could not possibly mean to teach the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord was not, even then, at hand. Scripture can never contradict itself. No one sentence of divine revelation can possibly collide with another. But if the reading given in our excellent Authorized Version were correct, it would stand in direct opposition to Romans 13: 12, where we are plainly and expressly told that “the day is at hand.” What “day”? The day of the Lord, most surely, which is always the term used in connection with our individual responsibility in walk and service.

This, we may remark in passing, is a point of much interest and practical value. If the reader will take the trouble to examine the various passages in which “the day” is spoken of, he will find that they have reference, more or less, to the question of work, service or responsibility. For instance, “That ye may be blameless [not at the *coming*, but] in the *day* of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1: 8). Again, “Every man's work shall be made manifest, for the *day* shall declare it” (1 Cor. 3: 13). “Without offence till the day of Christ” (Phil. 1: 10). “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at *that day*” (2 Timothy 4: 8).

From all these passages, and many more which might be adduced, we learn that “the day of the Lord” will be the grand time for reckoning with the workers; for the divine appraisal of service; for the setting of all questions of personal responsibility; for the distribution of rewards — the “ten cities” and the “five cities.”

Thus, wherever we turn, in whatever way we look at the subject, we are more and more confirmed in the truth of the clear distinction between our Lord's “coming,” or “state of presence,” and His “appearing,” or “day.” The former is ever held up before the heart as the bright and blessed hope of the believer, which may be realized at any moment. The latter is pressed rather upon the conscience, in deep solemnity, as bearing upon the entire practical career of those who are set in this world to work and witness for an absent Lord. Scripture never confounds these things, however much we may do it; nor is there a single sentence from cover to cover of the holy volume which teaches that believers are not always to be looking out for the coming of the Lord, and eager to bear in mind that “the day is at hand.” It is only “that evil servant” — referred to in our Lord's discourse in Matthew 24 — that “says in his heart, My Lord delayeth His coming”; and there we see the terrible results which must ever flow from the harbouring of such a thought in the heart.

We shall now return for a moment to 2 Thessalonians 2, a passage of Scripture which has given rise to much discussion amongst prophetic expositors, and presented considerable difficulty to the students of prophecy.

It is very evident that the false teachers had been seeking to disturb the minds of the Thessalonians by

leading them to think that they were, even then, surrounded by the terrors of the day of the Lord. Not so, says the apostle; that cannot be. Before ever that day opens we must all be gathered to meet the Lord in the air. He beseeches them, on the ground (*huper*) of the Lord's coming and our gathering together unto Him, not to be troubled about the day. He had already opened to them the heavenly side of the Lord's coming. He had taught them that they, as Christians, belonged to the day; that their home and their portion and their hope were all in that very region from which the day was to shine out. It was wholly impossible, therefore, that the day of the Lord could involve any terror or trouble to those who were actually, through grace, the sons of the day.

Further, even in looking at the subject from the earthly side of it, the false teachers were all wrong. "Let no man deceive you by any means: for [that day shall not come] except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not that when I was with you I told you these things. And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming [for the appearing of His presence]. Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (verses 3-10).

Here, then, we are taught that ere the day of the Lord arrives, the lawless one, the man of sin, the son of perdition, must be revealed. The mystery of iniquity must rise to a head. Man shall set himself up in open opposition to God, nay, shall even assume to himself the name and the worship of God. All this has to be developed on the earth before that great and terrible day of the Lord shall burst in judgment upon the scene. For the present there is a barrier, a hindrance to the manifestation of this awful personage. We are not told here what this barrier or hindrance is. God may vary it at different times.* But we learn, most distinctly, from the book of Revelation that ere the mystery of iniquity culminates in the person of the man of sin, the Church shall have been removed from this scene altogether. It is impossible to read, with an enlightened eye, Revelation 4, 5 and not see that the Church shall be in the very innermost circle of heavenly glory ere a single seal is opened, a single trumpet sounded, a single vial poured out. We do not believe that any one can understand the book of the Apocalypse who does not see this.

{* Some have considered that the hinderer is the Holy Ghost. This, at least, we know from other parts of Scripture, that ere the lawless one appears on the scene, the Church will have been safely and blessedly housed in her own eternal home above — her prepared place. How precious the thought of this!}

We may have occasion to go more freely into this profoundly interesting point by-and-by. We can only now entreat the reader to study the subject for himself. Let him ponder Revelation 4, 5, and ask God to interpret their precious contents to his soul. In this way we feel persuaded that he will learn that the twenty-four crowned elders set forth the heavenly saints, who shall be gathered round the Lamb, in glory, before a single line of the prophetic portion of the book is fulfilled.

We should like to put a very plain question to the reader — a question which can only be answered rightly in the immediate presence of God. It is this, What is it you are looking for? What is your hope? Are you looking forward to certain events which are to transpire on this earth, such as the revival of the

Roman Empire, the development of the ten kingdoms; the gathering back of the Jews to their own land of Palestine; the rebuilding of Jerusalem; the appearance of Antichrist; the great tribulation; and finally, the appalling judgments which shall, most surely, usher in the day of the Lord?

Are these the things which fill the vision of your soul? Is it for these you are looking and waiting? If so, be assured of it, you are not governed by the Church's proper hope. It is quite true that all these things which we have named shall come to pass in their appointed time; but not one of them should be allowed to come between you and your proper hope. They all stand on the prophetic page: they are all recorded in God's history of the future; but they were never intended to cast a shadow athwart the Christian's bright and blessed hope. That hope stands forth in glorious relief from the background of prophecy. What is it? Yes, we again say, what is it? It is the appearing of the bright and morning Star — the coming of the Lord Jesus, the blessed Bridegroom of the Church.

This, and naught else, is the true and proper hope of the Church of God. "I will give him the morning star" (Rev. 2: 23). "Behold the bridegroom cometh" (Matt. 25). When, we may ask, does the morning star appear in the natural world? Just before the dawning of the day. Who sees it? The one who has been watching during the dark and dreary hours of the night. How plain, how practical, how telling the application. The Church is supposed to be watching — to be lovingly wakeful — to be looking out. Alas! the Church has failed in this. But that is no reason why the individual believer should not be in the full present power of the blessed hope. "Let *him* that heareth say, Come." This is deeply personal. Oh! that the writer and the reader of these lines may realize habitually the purifying, sanctifying, elevating power of this heavenly hope! May we understand and exhibit the practical power of those words of the Apostle John, "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."

THE TWO RESURRECTIONS

It may be that some of our readers will feel startled by the title of this section. Accustomed, from their earliest days, to look at this great question through the medium of christendom's standards of doctrine and confessions of faith, the idea of two resurrections has never once entered their minds. Nevertheless Scripture does speak, in the most distinct and unequivocal terms, of a "resurrection of life," and a "resurrection of judgment" — two resurrections, distinct in character, and distinct in time.

And not only so, but it informs us that there will be, at least, a thousand years between the two. If men teach otherwise — if they build up systems of divinity, and set forth creeds and confessions of faith contrary to the direct and positive teaching of holy Scripture, they must settle that with their Lord, as must all who commit themselves to their guidance. But remember, reader, it is your bounden duty and ours to hearken only to the authority of the Word of God, and to bow down, in unqualified submission, to its holy teaching. Let us, then, reverently inquire, what saith the Scripture on the subject indicated at the head of this article? May God the Spirit guide and instruct!

We shall first quote that remarkable passage in John 5: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself; and hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man. Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment."*

{* The English reader should be informed that, in the entire passage, John 5: 22-26, the words “judgment,” “condemnation,” “damnation,” are all expressed by the same word in the original, and that word is simply “judgment,” *krisis*, the process, not the result. It is much to be deplored that our Authorized Version should not have so rendered the word throughout. It would have made the teaching of the passage so very much clearer. It is with extreme reluctance that we ever venture to touch our unrivalled English Bible, but it is, at times, absolutely necessary for the truth's sake, and for the sake of our readers. As to the rendering of verse 24, it really comes to the same thing whether we say “condemnation” or “judgment,” inasmuch as if there be judgment at all, its issue must be condemnation. But why not be accurate?}

Here, then, we have, indicated in the most unmistakable terms, the two resurrections. True, they are not distinguished as to time, in this passage; but they are as to character. We have a *life* resurrection; and a *judgment* resurrection, and nothing can be more distinct than these. There is no possible ground here on which to build the theory of a general resurrection. The resurrection of believers will be eclectic; it will be on the same principle, and partake of the same character as the resurrection of our blessed and adorable Lord; it will be a resurrection from among the dead. It will be an act of divine power, founded upon accomplished redemption, whereby God will interpose on behalf of His sleeping saints, and raise them up from among the dead, leaving the rest of the dead in their graves for a thousand years (Revelation 20: 5).

There is an interesting passage in Mark 9 which throws great light on this subject. The opening verses contain the record of the transfiguration; and then we read, “As they came down from the mountain, He charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from [*ek*, from among] the dead should mean.”

The disciples felt that there was something special, something entirely beyond the ordinary orthodox idea of the resurrection of the dead, and verily so there was, though they understood it not then. It lay beyond their range of vision at that moment.

Let us turn to Philippians 3, and hearken to the breathings of one who thoroughly entered into and appreciated this grand Christian doctrine, and fondly cherished this glorious and heavenly hope. “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death: if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from among the dead” [*exanastasin*] (verses 10, 11).

A moment's just reflection will suffice to convince the reader that the apostle is not speaking here of the great broad truth of “the resurrection of the dead,” inasmuch as every one must rise again. But there was something specific before the heart of this dear servant of Christ, namely, “a resurrection from among the dead” — an eclectic resurrection — a resurrection formed on the model of Christ's resurrection. It was for this he longed continually. This was the bright and blessed hope that shone upon his soul and cheered him amid the sorrows and trials, the toils and the difficulties, the buffetings and the conflicts of his extraordinary career.

But it may be asked, “Does the apostle always use this distinguishing little word (*ek*) when speaking of resurrection?” Not always. Turn, for example, to Acts 24: 15: “And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.” Here, there is no word to indicate the Christian or heavenly side of the subject, for the simplest possible reason that the apostle was speaking to those who were utterly incapable of entering into the Christian's proper hope — far more incapable than even the disciples in Mark 9. How could he possibly unbosom

himself in the presence of such men as Tertullus, Ananias, and Felix? How could he speak to them of his own specific and fondly cherished hope? No; he could only take his stand on the great broad truth of resurrection, common to all orthodox Jews. Had he spoken of a “resurrection from among the dead,” he could not have added the words, “which they themselves also allow,” for they did not “allow” anything of the kind.

But oh! what a contrast between this precious servant of Christ, defending himself from his accusers, in Acts 24, and baring his heart to his beloved brethren, in Philippians 3! To the latter he can speak of the true Christian hope in the full-orbed light which the glory of Christ pours upon it. He can give utterance to the inmost thoughts, feelings, and aspirations of the great, large, loving heart, with its earnest throbbings after the life-resurrection in the which he shall be satisfied as he wakes up in the likeness of his blessed Lord.

But we must return, for a moment, to our first quotation, from John 5. It may perhaps present a difficulty to some of our readers in laying hold of the truth of the Christian's hope of resurrection, that our Lord makes use of the word “hour” in speaking of the two classes. “How,” it is argued, “can there be a thousand years between the two resurrections, when our Lord expressly tells us that all shall occur within the limits of an hour?”

To this question we have a double reply. In the first place, we find our Lord making use of the selfsame word, “hour,” at verse 25, where He is speaking of the great and glorious work of quickening dead souls. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.”

Now, here we have a work which has been going on for nearly nineteen long centuries. During all that time, here spoken of as an “hour,” the voice of Jesus, the Son of God, has been heard calling precious souls from death to life. If, therefore, in the very same discourse, our Lord used the word “hour” when speaking of a period which has already extended to well-nigh two thousand years, what difficulty can there be in applying the word to a period of one thousand years?

Surely, none whatever, as we judge. But even if any little difficulty yet remained it must be thoroughly met by the direct testimony of the Holy Ghost in Revelation 20, where we read, “But the rest of the dead lived not again till the thousand years were finished. *This is the first resurrection.* Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God, and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years” (verses 5, 6).

This settles the question absolutely and forever, for all those who are willing to be taught exclusively by holy Scripture, as every true Christian ought to be. There will be two resurrections, the first and the second: and there will be a thousand years between the two. To the former belong all the Old Testament saints — referred to in Hebrews 12 under the title of the spirits of just men made perfect — then the Church of the firstborn ones — and finally all those who shall be put to death during “the great tribulation,” and throughout the entire period between the rapture of the saints and the appearing of Christ in judgment upon the beast and his armies, in Revelation 19.

To the latter, on the other hand, belong all those who shall have died in their sins, from the days of Cain, in Genesis 4, down to the last apostate from millennial glory, in Revelation 20.

How solemn is all this! How real! How soul-subduing! If our Lord were to come to night what a scene would be enacted in all our cemeteries and graveyards! What tongue, what pen can portray — what heart can conceive — the grand realities of such a moment? There are thousands of tombs in which lie mingled the dust of the dead *in* Christ and the dust of the dead *out* of Christ. In many a family vault

may be found the dust of both. Well, then, when the voice of the archangel is heard all the sleeping saints shall rise from their graves, leaving behind them those who have died in their sins, to remain in the darkness and silence of the tomb for a thousand years.

Yes, reader, such is the direct and simple testimony of the Word of God. True, it does not enter into any curious details. It does not furnish any food for a morbid imagination or idle curiosity. But it sets forth the solemn and weighty fact of a first and second resurrection — a resurrection of life and everlasting glory, and a resurrection of judgment and everlasting misery. There is, positively, no such thing in Scripture as a general resurrection — a common rising of all at the same time. We must abandon this idea altogether, like many others which we have received to hold, in which we have been trained from our earliest days, which have grown with our growth and strengthened with our strength, until they have become actually ingrained as a part of our very mental, moral, and religious constitution, so that to part with them is like the sundering of limb from limb, or rending the flesh from our bones.

Nevertheless it must be done if we really desire to grow in the knowledge of divine revelation. There is no greater hindrance to our getting into the thoughts of God than having our minds filled with our own thoughts, or the thoughts of men. Thus, for example, in reference to the subject of this paper, almost all of us have, at one time, held the opinion that all will rise together, both believers and unbelievers, and all stand together to be judged. Whereas, when we come to Scripture, like a little child, nothing can be simpler, nothing clearer, nothing more explicit than its teaching as to this question. Revelation 20: 5 teaches us that there will be an interval of a thousand years between the resurrection of the saints and the resurrection of the wicked.

It is of no use to speak of a resurrection of spirits. Indeed it is a manifest piece of absurdity; for inasmuch as spirits cannot die they cannot be raised from the dead. Equally absurd is it to speak of a resurrection of principles. There is no such thing in Scripture. The language is as plain as plainness itself. “The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.” Why should any one seek to set aside the plain force of such a passage? Why not bow to it? Why not get rid, at once, of all our old and fondly cherished notions, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word?

Reader, does it not seem plain to you that if Scripture speaks of a *first* resurrection, then it must follow that all will not rise together? Why should it be said, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection,” if all are to rise at the same time?

In fact it seems to us impossible for any unprejudiced mind to study the New Testament and yet hold to the theory of a general resurrection. It is due to the glory of Christ, the Head, that His members should have a specific resurrection — a resurrection like His own — a resurrection from among the dead. And verily, so they shall. “Behold I show you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” 1 Corinthians 15: 51-58. _____

THE JUDGMENT

There is something peculiarly painful in the thought of having so frequently to come in collision with the generally received opinions of the professing Church. It looks presumptuous to contradict, on so many subjects, all the great standards and creeds of Christendom. But what is one to do? Were it indeed a mere question of human opinion it might seem a piece of bold and unwarrantable temerity for any one individual to set himself in direct opposition to the established faith of the whole professing Church — a faith which has held sway for centuries over the minds of millions.

But we would ever impress upon our readers the fact that it is not at all a question of human opinion or of a difference of judgment amongst even the very best of men. It is entirely a question as to the teaching and authority of holy Scripture. There have been, and there are, and there will be, schools of doctrine, varieties of opinion, and shades of thought; but it is the obvious duty of every child of God and every servant of Christ to bow down, in holy reverence, and hearken to the voice of God in Scripture. If it be merely a matter of human authority, it must simply go for what it is worth; but, on the other hand, if it be a matter of divine authority, then all discussion is closed, and our place — the place of all — is to bow and believe.

Thus, in our previous section we were led to see that there is no such thing in Scripture as a general resurrection — a common rising of all at the same time. We trust our readers have, like the Bereans of old, searched the Scriptures as to this, and that they are now prepared to accompany us in our examination of the Word of God as to the subject of the judgment.

The great question at the outset is this, Does Scripture teach the doctrine of a general judgment? Christendom holds it; but does Scripture teach it? Let us see.

In the first place, as to the Christian individually, and the Church of God, collectively, the New Testament sets forth the precious truth that there is no judgment at all. So far as the believer is concerned judgment is past and gone. The heavy cloud of judgment has burst upon the head of our divine Sin-bearer. He has exhausted, on our behalf, the cup of wrath and judgment, and planted us on the new ground of resurrection, to which judgment can never, by any possibility, apply. It is just as impossible that a member of the body of Christ can come into judgment as that the divine Head Himself can do so. This seems a very strong statement to make; but is it true? If so, its strength is part of its moral value and glory.

For what, let us ask, was Jesus judged on the cross? For His people. He was made sin for us. He represented us there. He stood in our stead. He bore all that was due to us. Our entire condition, with all its belongings, was dealt with in the death of Christ; and so dealt with that it is utterly impossible that any question can ever be raised. Has God any question to settle with Christ, the Head? Clearly not. Well, then, neither has He any question to settle with the members. Every question is divinely and definitively settled, and, in proof of the settlement, the Head is crowned with glory and honour, and seated at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens.

Hence, to suppose that Christians are to come to judgment, at any time, or on any ground, for any object whatsoever, is to deny the very foundation truth of Christianity, and to contradict the plain words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has expressly declared, in reference to all who believe in Him, that they “shall not come into judgment” (John 5: 24).

In point of fact, the idea of Christians being arraigned at the bar of judgment to try the question of their title and fitness for Heaven is as absurd as it is unscriptural. For example, how can we think of Paul or the penitent thief standing to be judged as to their title to heaven, after having been there already for nearly two thousand years? But thus it must be if there be any truth in the theory of a general judgment. If the great question of our title to Heaven has to be settled at the day of judgment, then clearly it was

not settled on the cross; and if it was not settled on the cross, then most surely we shall be damned; for if we are to be judged at all it must be according to our works, and the only possible issue of such a judgment is the lake of fire.

If, however, it be maintained that Christians shall only stand in the judgment in order to make it manifest that they are clear through the death of Christ, then would the day of judgment be turned into a mere formality, the bare thought of which is most revolting to every pious and well regulated mind.

But, in truth, there is no need of reasoning on the point. One sentence of holy Scripture is better far than ten thousand of man's most cogent arguments. Our Lord Christ hath declared, in the clearest and most emphatic terms, that believers "shall not come into judgment." This is enough. The believer was judged over eighteen hundred years ago in the Person of his Head; and to bring him into judgment again would be to ignore completely the cross of Christ in its atoning efficacy; and most assuredly God will not, cannot allow this. The very feeblest believer may say, in thankfulness and triumph, "So far as I am concerned, all that had to be judged is judged already. Every question that had to be settled is settled. Judgment is past and gone forever. I know my work must be tried, my service appraised; but as to myself, my person, my standing, my title, all is divinely settled. The Man who answered for me on the tree is now crowned on the throne; and the crown which He wears is the proof that there remains no judgment for me. I am waiting for a life-resurrection."

This, and nothing short of this, is the proper language of the Christian. It is simply due to the work of the cross that the believer should thus feel and thus express himself. For such a one to be looking forward to the day of judgment for a settlement of the question of his eternal destiny is to dishonour his Lord and deny the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice. It may sound like humility and savour of piety to hover in doubt. But we may rest assured that all who harbour doubts, all who live in a state of uncertainty, all who are looking forward to the day of judgment for a final settlement of their affairs — all such are more occupied with themselves than with Christ. They have not yet understood the application of the cross to their sins and to their nature. They are doubting the Word of God and the work of Christ, and this is not Christianity. There is — there can be — no judgment for those who, sheltered by the cross, have planted a firm foot on the new and everlasting ground of resurrection. For such all judgment is over forever, and nothing remains but a prospect of cloudless glory and everlasting blessedness in the presence of God and of the Lamb.

However, it is not at all improbable that all this while the mind of the reader has been recurring to Matthew 25: 31-46 as a Scripture which directly establishes the theory of a general judgment; and we feel it to be our sacred duty to turn with him for a moment to that very solemn and important passage; at the same time reminding him of the fact that no one Scripture can possibly clash with another, and hence if we read, in John 5: 24, that believers shall not come into judgment, we cannot read in Matthew 25 that they shall. This is a fixed and invulnerable principle — a general rule to which there is, and can be, no exception. Nevertheless, let us turn to Matthew 25.

"When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats."

Now, it is most necessary to pay strict attention to the precise terms made use of in this Scripture. We must avoid all looseness of thought, all that haste, carelessness, and inaccuracy which have caused such serious damage to the teaching of this weighty Scripture, and thrown so many of the Lord's people into the utmost confusion respecting it.

And, first of all, let us see who are the parties arraigned. "Before Him shall be gathered *all nations*."

This is very definite. It is the living nations. It is not a question of individuals, but of nations — all the Gentiles. Israel is not here, for we read in Numbers 23: 9, that “the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.” If Israel were to be included in this scene of judgment, then would Matthew 25 stand in palpable contradiction to Numbers 23, which is wholly out of the question. Israel is never reckoned amongst the Gentiles, on any ground or for any object whatever. Looked at from a divine point of view, Israel stands alone. They may, because of their sins, and under the governmental dealings of God, be scattered among the nations; but God's Word declares that they shall not be reckoned among them; and this should suffice for us.

If then it be true that Israel is not included in the judgment of Matthew 25 then, without proceeding one step further, the idea of its being a general judgment must be abandoned. It cannot be general, if all are not included; but Israel is never included under the term “Gentiles.” Scripture speaks of three distinct classes, namely, “The Jew, and the Gentile, and the Church of God,” and these three are never confounded. But, further, we have to remark that the Church of God is not included in the judgment of Matthew 25. Nor is this statement based merely upon the fact which has been already gone into of the Church's necessary exemption from judgment; but also upon the grand truth that the Church is taken from among the nations, as Peter declared in the council at Jerusalem. “God did visit the Gentiles to *take out of them* a people for His name.” If then the Church be taken out of the nations, it cannot be reckoned among them; and thus we have additional evidence against the theory of a general judgment in Matthew 25. The Jew is not there; the Church is not there; and therefore the idea of a general judgment must be abandoned as something wholly untenable.

Who then are included in this judgment? The passage itself supplies the answer to any simple mind. It says, “Before Him shall be gathered all *nations*.” This is distinct and definite. It is not a judgment of individuals, but of nations, as such. And further, we may add that not one of those here indicated shall have passed through the article of death. In this it stands in vivid contrast with the scene in Revelation 20: 11-15, in the which there will not be one who has not died. In short, in Matthew 25, we have the judgment of “the quick”; and in Revelation 20 the judgment of “the dead.” Both these are referred to in 2 Timothy 4, “I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.” Our Lord Christ shall judge the living nations at His appearing; and He shall “judge the dead, small and great,” at the close of His millennial reign.

But let us glance, for a moment, at the mode in which the parties are arranged in the judgment, in Matthew 25: “He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.” Now, the almost universal belief of the professing Church is that “the sheep” represent all the people of God, from the beginning to the end of time; and that “the goats,” on the other hand, set forth all the wicked, from first to last. But, if this be so, what are we to make of the third party referred to here, under the title of “these My brethren”? The King addresses both the sheep and the goats in respect to this third class. Indeed the very ground of judgment is the treatment of the King's brethren. It would involve a manifest absurdity to say that the sheep were themselves the parties referred to. If that were so the language would be wholly different, and in place of saying, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren” we should hear the King saying, “Inasmuch as ye have done it to one another,” or “amongst yourselves.”

We would beg the reader's special attention to this point. We consider that were there no other argument and no other Scripture on the subject, this one point would prove fatal to the theory of a general judgment. It is impossible not to see three parties in the scene, namely, “the sheep,” and “the goats,” and “these My brethren”; and if there are three parties it cannot possibly be a general judgment, inasmuch as “these My brethren” are not included either in the sheep or the goats.

No, dear reader, it is not a general judgment at all, but a very partial and specific one. It is a judgment of living nations, previous to the opening of the millennial kingdom. Scripture teaches us that after the Church has left the earth a testimony will go forth to the nations; the gospel of the kingdom shall be borne, by Jewish messengers, far and wide, over the earth, into those regions which are wrapped in heathen darkness. These nations which shall receive the messengers and treat them kindly will be found on the King's right hand. Those, on the contrary, who shall reject them and treat them unkindly will be found on His left. "These My brethren" are Jews — the brethren of the Messiah.

The treatment of the Jews is the ground on which the nations will be judged by-and-by; and this is another argument against a general judgment. We know full well that all those who have lived and died in the rejection of the gospel of Christ will have something more to answer for than unkindness to the King's brethren. And, on the other hand, those who shall surround the Lamb in heavenly glory will do so on a very different title from aught that their works can furnish.

In short, there is not a single feature in the scene, not a single fact in the history, not a single point in the narrative which does not make against the notion of a general judgment. And not only so, but the more we study Scripture, the more we know of the ways of God; the more we know of His nature, His character, His purposes, His counsels, His thoughts; the more we know of Christ, His Person, His work, His glory; the more we know of the Church, its standing before God in Christ, its completeness, its perfect acceptance in Christ; the more closely we study Scripture; the more profoundly we meditate therein — the more thoroughly convinced we must be that there can be no such thing as a general judgment.

Who that knows aught of God could suppose that He would justify His people today and arraign them in judgment tomorrow — that He would blot out their transgressions today and judge them according to their works tomorrow? Who that knows aught of our adorable Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ could suppose that He would ever arraign His Church, His body, His bride, before the judgment seat in company with all those who have died in their sins? Could it be possible that He would enter into judgment with His people for sins and iniquities of which He has said, "I will remember no more!"

But enough. We fondly trust that the reader is now most fully persuaded in his own mind that there is, and can be, no such thing as a general resurrection — no such thing as a general judgment.

We cannot now enter upon the judgment in Rev. 20: 11-15 further than to say that it is a post-millennial scene, and that it includes all the wicked dead, from the days of Cain down to the last apostate from millennial glory. There will not be one there who has not passed through the article of death — not one there whose name has been set down in life's fair book — not one there who shall not be judged according to his own very deeds — not one there who shall not pass from the dread realities of the great white throne into the everlasting horrors and torments of the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. How awful! How terrible! How dreadful!

O! reader, what do you say to these things? Are you a true believer in Jesus? Are you washed in His precious blood? Are you sheltered in Him from coming judgment? If not, let me entreat you now, with all tenderness and earnestness, to flee, this very hour, from the wrath to come! Turn to Jesus, who now waits to receive you to Himself, and to present you to God in the full value of His atoning work, and in the full credit of His peerless name.

THE JEWISH REMNANT

Matt. 24: 1-44 forms a part of one of the most profound and comprehensive discourses that ever fell on

human ears — a discourse which takes in, in its marvellous sweep, the destiny of the Jewish remnant; the history of Christendom; and the judgment of the nations. At the last-named subject we have already glanced. It remains for us now to consider the subject of the remnant of Israel, and the history of professing Christianity, whether genuine or spurious.

First, let us look at the Jewish remnant.

In order to understand Matt. 24: 1-44, it will be needful for us to place ourselves at the standpoint of those whom our Lord was addressing at the moment. If we attempt to import into this discourse the light which shines in the Epistle to the Ephesians, we shall only involve our minds in confusion, and miss the solemn teaching of the passage which now lies open before us. We shall find nothing about the Church of God, the body of Christ, here. The teaching of our Lord is divinely perfect, and hence we cannot, for a moment, imagine anything premature therein. But it would be premature to have introduced a subject which, as yet, was hid in God. The great truth of the Church could not be unfolded until Christ, being cut off as the Messiah, had taken His place at the right hand of God, and sent down the Holy Ghost, to form by His presence the one body, composed of Jew and Gentile.

Of this we hear nothing in Matt. 24. We are entirely on Jewish ground, surrounded by Jewish circumstances and influences. The scenery and the allusions are all purely Jewish. To attempt to apply the passage to the Church would be to miss completely our Lord's object, and to falsify the real position of the Church of God. The more closely we examine the Scripture, the more clearly we shall see that the persons addressed occupy a Jewish standpoint, and are on Jewish ground, whether we think of those very persons whom our Lord was then addressing, or those who shall occupy the selfsame ground at the close, when the Church shall have left the scene altogether.

Let us examine the passage.

At the close of Matt. 23, our Lord sums up His appeal to the leaders of the Jewish nation with the following words of awful solemnity: "Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers! how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city. That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zecharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come *upon this generation*. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (verses 32-39).

Thus closes Messiah's testimony to the apostate nation of Israel. Every effort that love, even divine love, could put forth had been tried, and tried in vain. Prophets had been sent, and stoned; messenger after messenger had gone and pleaded, and reasoned, and warned, and entreated; but to no purpose. Their mighty words had fallen upon deaf ears and hardened hearts. The only return made to all these messengers was shameful handling, stoning, and death.

At length, the Son Himself was sent, and sent with this touching utterance: "It may be they will reverence My Son, when they see Him." Did they? Alas! no. When they saw Him, there was no beauty that they should desire Him. The daughter of Zion had no heart for her King. The vineyard was under the control of wicked husbandmen who wanted to keep it for themselves. "The husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir, come, let us kill Him, that the inheritance may be ours."

Thus much as to the moral condition of Israel, in view of which our Lord spoke those unusually awful words quoted above; and, then, “He went out and departed from the temple.” How reluctant He was to do this we know; for, blessed be His name, whenever He leaves a place of mercy, or enters a place of judgment, He moves with a slow and measured pace. Witness the departure of the glory, in the opening chapters of Ezekiel. “Then the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims. And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight; when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above” (Ezek. 10: 18, 19). “Then did the cherubims lift up their wings, and the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city” (Ezek. 11: 22, 23).

Thus, with slow and measured pace, did the glory of the God of Israel take its departure from the house at Jerusalem. Jehovah lingered near the spot, reluctant to depart.* He had come, with loving alacrity, with His whole heart and with His whole soul, to dwell in the midst of His people, to find a home in the very bosom of His assembly; but He was *forced* away by their sins and iniquities. He would fain have remained; but it was impossible; and yet He proved, by the very mode of His departure, how unwilling He was to go.

Nor was it otherwise with Jehovah Messiah, in Matt. 23. Witness His touching words, “How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” Here lay the deep secret “*I would.*” This was the heart of God. “*Ye would not.*” This was the heart of Israel. He, too, like the glory in the days of Ezekiel, was forced away; but not, blessed be His name, without dropping a word which forms the precious basis of hope as to the brighter days to come, when the glory shall return, and the daughter of Zion shall welcome her King with joyful accents. “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah.”

{*Contrast with this reluctant departure His ready entrance into the tabernacle in Exodus 40: 34 and into the temple, 2 Chr. 7: 1. No sooner was the habitation ready for Him, than down He came to occupy it, and fill it with His glory. He was as quick to enter as He was slow to depart. And not only so, but ere the book of Ezekiel closes, we see the glory coming back again; and “Jehovah Shammah” stands engraved in everlasting characters upon the gates of the beloved city. Nothing changeth God's affection. Whom He loves, and as He loves, He loves to the end. “The same yesterday, today, and for ever.”}

But, until that bright day dawn, darkness, desolation, and ruin make up the sum of Israel's history. The very thing which the leaders sought, by the rejection of Christ, to avert, came upon them, in stern and awful reality. “The Romans shall come, and take away both our place and nation.” How literally, how solemnly this was fulfilled! Alas! their place and their nation were gone already, and the significant movement of Jesus, in Matt. 24: 1, was but the passing sentence, and writing desolation upon the whole Jewish system. “Jesus went out and departed from the temple.” The case was hopeless. All must be given up. A long period of darkness and dreariness must pass over the infatuated nation — a period which shall culminate in that “great tribulation” which must precede the hour of final deliverance.

But, as in the days of Ezekiel, there were those who sighed and cried over the sins and sorrows of the nation, so in the days of Matt. 24, there was a remnant of godly souls who attached themselves to the rejected Messiah, and who cherished the fond hope of redemption and restoration for Israel. Very dim indeed were their perceptions, and their thoughts full of confusion. Nevertheless their hearts, as touched by divine grace, beat true to the Messiah, and they were full of hope as to Israel's future.

Now, it is of the utmost importance that the reader should recognize and understand the position of this

remnant, and that it is with it our Lord is occupied in His marvellous discourse on the mount of Olives. To suppose for a moment that the persons here addressed were on Christian ground would involve the abandonment of all true thoughts of what Christianity is, and the ignoring of a company whose existence is recognized throughout the Psalms, the Prophets, and various parts of the New Testament. There was, and there always is, “a remnant according to the election of grace.” To quote the passages which present the history, the sorrows, the experiences, and the exercises of that remnant would demand a volume, and hence we shall not attempt it; but we are extremely desirous that the reader should seize the thought that this godly remnant is represented by the handful of disciples which gathered round our Lord on the mount of Olives. We feel persuaded that if this be not seen, the true scope, bearing, and application of this remarkable discourse must be lost.

“And Jesus went out and departed from the temple; and His disciples came to Him for to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down. And as He sat upon the mount of Olives the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (or age, *aiónos*.)

The disciples were, naturally, occupied with earthly and Jewish objects and expectations — the temple and its surroundings. This must be borne in mind if we would understand their question and our Lord's reply. As yet they had no thought beyond the earthly side of things. They looked for the setting up of the kingdom, the glory of the Messiah, the accomplishment of the promises made to the fathers. They had not yet fully taken in the solemn and momentous fact that the Messiah was to be “cut off and have nothing” (Dan. 9: 26). True, the blessed Master had, from time to time, sought to prepare their minds for the solemn event. He had faithfully warned them in reference to the dark shadows that were to gather round His path. He had told them that the Son of Man should be delivered to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified.

But they understood Him not. Such sayings seemed dark, hard, and incomprehensible; and their hearts still fondly clung to the hope of national restoration and blessing. They longed to see the star of Jacob in the ascendant. Their minds were full of expectancy as to the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. As yet they knew nothing — how could they? — of that which was to spring out of the rejection and death of the Messiah. The Lord had no doubt spoken of building an assembly; but as to the position and privileges of that assembly, its calling, its standing, its hopes, they knew absolutely nothing. The thought of a body composed of Jew and Gentile, united by the Holy Ghost to a living and glorified Head in the heavens, had never entered — how could it have entered? — their minds. The middle wall of partition was still standing; and one of their number — the very foremost amongst them — had, long after, to be taught, with much difficulty, to take in the idea of even admitting the Gentiles into the kingdom.

All this, we repeat, must be taken into account if we would read aright our Lord's reply to the inquiry as to His coming and the end of the age. There is not a single syllable about the Church, as such, from beginning to end of that reply. Up to verse 14, He passes on to the end, giving a rapid survey of the events which should transpire amongst the nations. “Take heed,” He says, “that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one

another. And many false prophets shall rise and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations: and then shall the end come.”

Here then we have a most comprehensive sketch of the entire period from the moment in which our Lord was speaking, down to the time of the end. But the reader will need to bear in mind that there is an unnoticed interval — a parenthesis, a break — in this period, during which the great mystery of the Church is unfolded.

This interval or break is entirely passed over in this discourse, inasmuch as the time had not arrived for its development. It was as yet “hid in God,” and could not be unfolded until the Messiah was finally rejected and cut off from the earth and received up into glory. The whole of this discourse would have its full and perfect accomplishment, although such a thing as the Church had never been heard of. For, let it never be forgotten, the Church forms no part of the ways of God with Israel and the earth. And as to the allusion, in verse 14, to the preaching of the gospel, we are not to suppose that it is at all the same thing as “The glorious gospel of the grace of God,” as preached by Paul. It is styled, “This gospel of the kingdom”; and, moreover, it is to be preached, not for the purpose of gathering the Church, but “as a witness to all nations.” We must not confound things which God, in His infinite wisdom, has made to differ. The Church must not be confounded with the kingdom; nor yet the gospel of the grace of God with the gospel of the kingdom. The two things are perfectly distinct; and, if we confound them, we shall understand neither the one nor the other. And, further, we would desire to press upon the reader the absolute necessity of seeing the break, parenthesis, or unnoticed interval in which the great mystery of the Church is inserted. If this be not clearly seen, Matt. 24 cannot be understood.

But we must proceed with our Lord's discourse.

At verse 15, He seems to call His hearers back a little, as it were, to something very specific — something with which a Jewish believer would be familiar from the fact of Daniel's allusion to it. “When ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whoso readeth let him understand): then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains. Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. . . . But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day. For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”

All this is most definite. The quotation from Daniel 12 fixes the application beyond all question. It proves that the reference is not to the siege of Jerusalem under Titus; for we read in Daniel 12 that, “At that time thy people shall be delivered”; and, most clearly, they were not delivered in the days of Titus. No; the reference is to the time of the end. The scene is laid at Jerusalem. The persons addressed and contemplated are Jewish believers — the pious remnant of Israel, in the great tribulation, after the Church has left the scene. How can any imagine that the persons here instructed are viewed as on Church ground? What force would there be to such in the allusion to the winter or the Sabbath day?

Then, again, “If any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there, believe it not. . . . If they shall say unto you, Behold He is in the desert, go not forth: Behold He is in the secret chambers, believe it not.” What possible application could such words have to persons who are instructed to wait for God's Son from Heaven, and who know that ere He returns to this earth they shall have met Him in the clouds and returned with Him to the Father's house? Could any Christian, instructed in his proper hope, be deceived by persons saying that Christ is here or there, in the desert or in the secret chambers?

Impossible. Such a one is looking out for the Bridegroom to come from Heaven; and he knows that it is wholly out of the question that Christ can appear on this earth without bringing all His people with Him.

Thus, the simple truth settles everything; and all we want is to be simple in taking it in. The simplest Christian knows full well that his Lord will not appear to him like a flash of lightning, but as the bright and morning Star, and hence he understands that Matt. 24 cannot apply to the Church, though most surely the Church can study it with interest and profit, as it can all the other prophetic Scriptures; and, we may add, the interest will be all the more intense, and the profit all the deeper, in proportion as we see the true application of such Scriptures.

Limited space forbids our entering as fully as we could wish into the remaining portion of this marvellous discourse; but the more closely each sentence is examined, the more fully each circumstance is weighed, the more clearly we must see that the persons addressed are not on proper Christian ground. The entire scene is earthly and Jewish, not heavenly and Christian. There is ample instruction supplied for those who shall find themselves, by-and-by, in the position here contemplated; and nothing can be clearer than that the entire paragraph, from verse 15-42, refers to the period which shall elapse between the rapture of the saints and the appearing of the Son of Man.

Some may perhaps feel a difficulty in understanding verse 34: "This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled." But we must remember that the word "generation" is constantly used in Scripture in a moral sense. It is not to be confined to a certain number of persons actually living at the time, but takes in the *race*. In the passage before us it simply applies to the Jewish race; but the wording is such as to leave the question of time entirely open, so that the heart might ever be kept in readiness for the Lord's coming. There is nothing in Scripture to interfere with the constant expectation of that grand event. On the contrary, every parable, every figure, every allusion is so worded as to warrant each one to look for the Lord's return in his own lifetime, and yet to leave margin for the elongation of the time according to the longsuffering grace of a Saviour God.

CHRISTENDOM

What varied thoughts and feelings are awakened in the soul by the very sound of the word "Christendom"! It is a terrible word. It brings before us, at once, that vast mass of baptized profession which calls itself the Church of God, but is not; which calls itself Christianity, but is not. Christendom is dark and a dreadful anomaly. It is neither one thing nor the other. It is not "the Jew or the Gentile, or the Church of God." It is a corrupt mysterious mixture, a spiritual malformation, the masterpiece of Satan, the corrupter of the truth of God, and the destroyer of the souls of men, a trap, a snare, a stumbling-block, the darkest moral blot in the universe of God. It is the corruption of the very best thing, and therefore the very worst of corruptions. It is that thing which Satan has made of professing Christianity. It is worse, by far, than Judaism; worse by far than all the darkest forms of paganism, because it has higher light and richer privileges, makes the very highest profession, and occupies the very loftiest platform. Finally, it is that awful apostasy for which is reserved the very heaviest judgments of God — the most bitter dregs in the cup of His righteous wrath.

True it is, blessed be God, there are a few names even in Christendom who, through grace, have not defiled their garments. There are some brilliant embers amid the smouldering ashes — precious stones amid the terrible *débris*. But as to the mass of Christian profession to which the term Christendom applies, nothing can be more appalling, whether we think of its present condition or its future destiny. We doubt if Christians generally have anything like an adequate sense of the true character and

inevitable doom of that which surrounds them. If they had it would solemnize their minds, and cause them to feel the urgent need of standing apart, in holy separation, from Christendom's ways, and distinct testimony against its spirit and principles.

But let us turn again to our Lord's profound discourse on the mount of Olives, in which, as we have already observed, He deals with the subject of the Christian profession. This He does in three distinct parables, namely, the household servant; the ten virgins; and the talents. In each and all we have the two things noticed above, the genuine and the spurious; the true and the false; the bright and the dark; that which is of Christ, and that which is of Satan; that which belongs to Heaven, and that which emanates from hell.

We shall glance at the three parables which embody, in their brief compass, a vast mine of most solemn and practical instruction.

Turn to Matt. 24: 45-47. "Who, then, is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord, when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you that he shall make him ruler over all his goods."

Here, then, we have at once the source and object of all ministry in the house of God. "Whom *his lord* hath made ruler." This is the source. "To give them meat in due season." This is the object.

These things are of the very highest possible moment, and they are worthy of the reader's most profound thought. All ministry in the house of God, whether in Old or New Testament times, is of divine appointment. There is no such thing recognized in Scripture as human authority in appointing to the ministry. Neither is there such a thing as a self-constituted ministry. None but God can make or appoint a minister of any sort or description. Thus, in Old Testament times, Jehovah appointed Aaron and his sons to the priesthood; and if a stranger presumed to meddle with the functions of the holy office, he was to be put to death. Even the king himself dared not touch the priestly censer, for we are told of Uzziah, king of Judah, that, "When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction; for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men. And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense; go out of the sanctuary: for thou hast trespassed: neither shall it be for thine honour from the Lord God. . . . *And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death*" (2 Chr. 26).

Such was the solemn result — the awful consequence of man's daring intrusion upon that which was wholly of divine appointment. Has this no voice for Christendom? Assuredly it has. It sounds a warning note in our ears. It tells the professing Church, in accents not to be mistaken, to beware of human intrusion upon a domain which belongs only to God. "Every high priest taken from among men is ordained *for* [not *by*] men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. . . . *And no man taketh this honour unto himself*, but he that is called [not of men but] of God, as was Aaron" (Heb. 5).

Nor was this principle of divine appointment confined to the high and holy office of the tabernacle. No man dare put his hand to the most insignificant part of that sacred structure unless by Jehovah's direct authority. "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, See I *have called* by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah." Nor could Bezaleel choose his companions in labour, or appoint whom he would to the work, any more than he could choose or appoint himself. No; this, too, was divine. "And I," says Jehovah, "Behold I *have given* with him Aholiab." Thus Aholiab, as well as Bezaleel, held his commission immediately from Jehovah Himself, the only true source of all

ministerial authority.

Nor was it otherwise in the case of the prophetic office and ministry. God alone could make, and fit, and send a prophet. Alas! there were those of whom Jehovah had to say, "I have not sent them, yet they ran." They were unhallowed intruders upon the domain of prophecy, just as there were upon the office of the priesthood; but all such brought down upon themselves the judgment of God.

And, may we not ask, Is this great principle changed? Has ministry been shifted from its ancient base? Has the living stream been diverted from its divine source? Is it true that this more precious and glorious institution has been shorn of its lofty dignities? Can it be possible that, under the times of the New Testament, ministry has been cast down from its divine excellency? Has it become a mere human appointment? Can man appoint his fellow, or appoint himself to any one branch of ministry in the house of God?

What answer is to be returned to these questions? No doubtful one, thank God; but a distinct and emphatic *No!* Ministry was, is, and ever shall be, divine; divine in its source; divine in its nature; divine in its every feature and principle. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administration, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all" (1 Cor. 12: 46). "But now hath *God* set the members every one of them in the body *as it hath pleased Him.*" "And *God* hath set some in the Church; first, apostles; secondarily prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles; then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (verses 18, 28). "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore He saith, when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. . . . And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4: 7-13).

Here lies the grand source of all ministry in the Church of God, from first to last — from the foundation laid in grace, to the topstone, in glory. It is divine and heavenly, not human or earthly. It is not of man or by man, but of Jesus Christ, and God the Father who raised Him from the dead, and in the power of the Holy Ghost (see Gal. 1). There is no such thing recognized in Scripture as human authority in any one branch of ministry in the Church. If it be a question of gift, it is emphatically stated to be "the gift of Christ." If it be a question of assigned position, we are, with equal clearness and emphasis, told that "God hath set the members." If it be a question of local charge, whether elder or deacon, it was entirely of divine appointment, by apostolic hands or apostolic delegates.

All this is so clear, so distinct, so palpable, on the very surface of Scripture, that it is only necessary to say, "How readest thou?" And the more we penetrate beneath the surface — the more we are conducted by the Eternal Spirit into the profound and precious depths of inspiration — the more thoroughly convinced we shall be that ministry, in its every department and every branch, is divine in its source, nature, and principles. The truth of this shines out in full-orbed brightness, in the Epistles; but we have the germ of it in the words of our Lord in Matt 25: 45, "Whom his lord hath made ruler over his household." The household belongs to the Lord, and He alone can appoint the servants, and this He does according to His own sovereign will.

Equally plain is the object of ministry, as stated in this parable, and elaborated in the Epistles. "To give them meat in due season." "For the edifying of the body of Christ" — "that the Church may receive edifying." It is this that lies near the loving heart of Jesus. He would have His household perfected —

His Church edified — His body nourished and cherished. For this end, He bestows gifts, and maintains them in the Church, and will maintain them until they shall be no longer needed.

But alas! there is a dark side of the picture. For this we must be prepared since we have the picture of Christendom before us. If there is a “faithful, wise, and blessed servant,” there is also “an evil servant” who “says in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming.” Mark this. It is in *the heart* of the wicked servant that the thought originates as to the delay of the coming.

And what is the result? “He shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken.” How awfully this has been exemplified in the history of Christendom, we need not say. Instead of true ministry flowing from the risen and glorified Head in the heavens, and promoting the edification of the body, the blessing of souls, and the prosperity of the household, we have a false clerical authority, arbitrary rule, a lording it over God's heritage, a grasping after this world's wealth and power, fleshly ease, self-indulgence, and personal aggrandizement, priestly domination in its nameless and numberless forms and practical consequences.

The reader will do well to apply his heart to the understanding of these things. He will need to seize, with clearness and power, the distinction between clericalism and ministry. The one is a thoroughly human assumption; the other, a purely divine institution. The former has its source in man's evil heart; the latter has its source in a risen and exalted Saviour, who, being raised from the dead, received gifts for men, and sheds them forth upon His Church, according to His own will. That is a positive scourge and curse; this, a divine blessing to men. In fine, this in its root-principle flows from Heaven and leads back thither; that in its root-principle flows from hell and leads thither again.

All this is most solemn, and it should exert a mighty influence upon our souls. There is a day coming when the Lord Christ will deal, in summary justice, with that which man has dared to set up in His house. We speak not of individuals — though surely it is a most serious and terrible thing for any one to put his hand unto, or have aught to do with, that on which such awful judgment is about to be executed — but we speak of a positive system — a great principle which runs, in a deep and dark current, through the length and breadth of the professing Church — we speak of clericalism and priestcraft, in all its forms and in all its ramifications.

Against this dreadful thing we solemnly warn our readers. No human language can possibly depict the evil of it, nor can human language adequately set forth the deep blessedness of all true ministry in the Church of God. The Lord Jesus not only bestows ministerial gifts, but, in His marvellous grace, He will abundantly reward the faithful and diligent exercise of those gifts. But as to that which man has set up, we read its destiny in those burning words, “The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

May the gracious Lord deliver His servants and His people from all participation in this great wickedness which is perpetrated in the very bosom of that which calls itself the Church of God. And, on the other hand, may He lead them to understand, to appreciate, and to exercise that true, that precious, that divine ministry which emanates from Himself, and is designed, in His infinite love, for the true blessing and growth of that Church which is so dear to His heart. We are in danger, very great danger, while seeking (as we most surely should) to keep clear of the evil of clericalism — of rushing into the opposite extreme of despising ministry.

This must be carefully guarded against. We have ever to bear in mind that [properly] ministry in the Church is of God. Its source is divine. Its nature is heavenly and spiritual. Its object is the calling out, the building up of the Church of God. Our Lord Christ imparts the varied gifts, evangelists, pastors, and

teachers. He holds the great reservoir of spiritual gifts. He has never given it up, and He never will. Spite of all that Satan has wrought in the professing Church; spite of all the actings of “that evil servant”; spite of all man's daring assumption of authority which in no wise belongs to him; spite of all these things, our risen and glorified Lord “hath the seven stars.” He possesses all ministerial gifts, power, and authority. It is He alone who can make any one a minister. Unless He impart a gift there can be no true ministry. There may be hollow assumption — guilty usurpation — empty affectation — worthless talking; but not one atom of true, loving, divine ministry can there be unless where our sovereign Lord is pleased to bestow the gift. And even where He does bestow the gift that gift must be “stirred up,” and diligently cultivated, else “the profiting” will not “appear unto all.” The gift must be exercised in the power of the Holy Ghost, else it will not promote the divinely appointed end.

But we are rather anticipating what is yet to come before us in the parable of the talents, so we shall close here by simply reminding the reader that the weighty subject on which we have been dwelling has direct reference to the coming of our Lord, inasmuch as all true ministry is carried on in view of that great and glorious event. And not only so, but the counterfeit, the corrupt, the evil thing will be judicially dealt with when the Lord Christ shall appear in His glory.

THE TEN VIRGINS

We now approach that solemn section of our Lord's discourse in which He presents the kingdom of Heaven under the similitude of “ten virgins.” The instruction contained in this most weighty and interesting parable is of wider application than that of the servant to which we have already referred, inasmuch as it takes in the whole range of Christian profession, and is not confined to ministry either within the house or outside. It bears directly and pointedly upon Christian profession, whether true or false.

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.” Some have considered that this parable refers to the Jewish remnant; but it does not seem that this idea is borne out, either by the context in which this parable occurs or by the terms in which it is couched.

As to the entire context, the more closely we examine it the more clearly we shall see that the Jewish portion of the discourse ends with Matthew 24: 44. This is so distinct as not to admit of a question. Equally distinct is the Christian portion, extending, as we have seen, from Matthew 24: 45 to Matthew 25: 30; while from Matthew 25: 31 to the end, we have the Gentiles. Thus the order and fulness of this marvellous discourse must strike any thoughtful reader. It presents the Jew, the Christian, and the Gentile, each on his own distinct ground, and according to his own distinctive principles. There is no merging of one thing in another, no confounding of things that differ. In a word, the order, the fulness, and the comprehensiveness of this profound discourse are divine, and fill the soul “with wonder, love, and praise.” We rise from the study of it, as a whole, with those words of the apostle upon our lips, “O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out.”

And then, when we examine the precise terms made use of by our Lord in the parable of the ten virgins we must see that it applies not to Jews but to Christian professors — it applies to us — it utters a voice, and teaches a solemn lesson to the writer and the reader of these lines.

Let us apply our hearts thereto.

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth

to meet the bridegroom.”

Primitive Christianity was especially characterized by the fact here indicated, namely, a going forth to meet a returning and an expected bridegroom. The early Christians were led to detach themselves from present things, and go forth, in the spirit of their minds, and in the affections of their hearts, to meet the Saviour whom they loved, and for whom they waited. It was not, of course, a question of going forth from one place to another; it was not local, but moral, and spiritual. It was the outgoing of the heart after a beloved Saviour whose return was eagerly looked for day by day.

It is impossible to read the Epistles to the various churches and not see that the hope of the Lord's sure and speedy return governed the hearts of the Lord's dear people in early days. “They waited for the Son from heaven.” They knew He was to come and take them away, to be with Himself forever; and the knowledge and power of this hope had the effect of detaching their hearts from present things. Their bright, heavenly hope caused them to sit loose to the things of earth. “They looked for the Saviour.” They believed that He might come at any moment, and hence the concerns of this life were just to be taken up and attended to for the moment — properly, thoroughly attended to, no doubt — but only, as it were, on the very tiptoe of expectation.

All this is conveyed to our hearts, briefly but clearly, by the expression, “They went forth to meet the bridegroom.” This could not be intelligently applied to the Jewish remnant, inasmuch as they will not go forth to meet their Messiah, but, on the contrary, they will remain in their position and amid their circumstances until He come and plant His foot on the mount of Olives. They will not look for the Lord to come and take them away from this earth to be with Him in Heaven; but He will come to bring deliverance to them in their own land, and make them happy there under His own peaceful and blessed reign during the millennial age.

But the call to Christians was to “go forth.” They are supposed to be always on the move; not settling down on the earth, but going out in earnest and holy aspirations after that heavenly glory to which they are called, and after the heavenly Bridegroom to whom they are espoused, and for whose speedy advent they are taught to wait.

Such is the true, the divine, the normal idea of the Christian's attitude and state. And this lovely idea was marvellously realized and practically carried out by the primitive Christians. But alas! we are reminded of the fact that we have to do with the spurious as well as the true in Christendom. There are “tares” as well as “wheat” in the kingdom of Heaven; and thus we read of these ten virgins, that “five of them were wise, and five were foolish.” There are the true and the false, the genuine and the counterfeit, the real and the hollow, in professing Christianity.

Yes, and this is to continue unto the time of the end, until the Bridegroom come. The tares are not converted into wheat, nor are the foolish virgins converted into wise ones. No, never. The tares will be burnt and the foolish virgins shut out. So far from a gradual improvement by the means now in operation — the preaching of the gospel and the various beneficent agencies which are brought to bear upon the world — we find, from all the parables, and from the teaching of the entire New Testament, that the kingdom of Heaven presents a most deplorable admixture of evil; a corrupting process; a grievous tampering with the work of God, on the part of the enemy; a positive progress of evil in principle, in profession, and in practice.

And all this goes on to the end. There are foolish virgins found when the Bridegroom appears. Whence come they, if all are to be converted before the Lord comes? If all are to be brought to the knowledge of the Lord by the means now in operation, then how comes it to pass that when the Bridegroom comes, there are quite as many foolish as wise?

But it will perhaps be said that this is but a parable, a figure. Granted; but a figure of what? Not surely of a whole world converted. To assert this would be to offer a grievous insult to the holy volume, and to treat our Lord's solemn teaching in a manner in which we would not dare to treat the teaching of a fellow mortal.

No, reader, the parable of the ten virgins teaches, beyond all question, that when the Bridegroom comes, there will be foolish virgins on the scene, and clearly, if there are foolish virgins, all cannot have been previously converted. A child can understand this. We cannot see how it is possible, in the face of even this one parable, to maintain the theory of a world converted before the coming of the Bridegroom.

But let us look a little closely at these foolish virgins. Their history is full of admonition for all Christian professors. It is very brief, but awfully comprehensive. "They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them." There is the outward profession, but no inward reality — no spiritual life — no unction — no vital link with the source of eternal life — no union with Christ. There is nothing but the lamp of profession, and the dry wick of a nominal, notional, head belief.

This is peculiarly solemn. It bears down with tremendous weight upon that vast mass of baptized profession which surrounds us, at the present moment, in which there is so much of outward semblance, but so little of inward reality. All profess to be Christians. The lamp of profession may be seen in every hand; but ah! how few have the oil in their vessels, the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the Holy Ghost dwelling in their hearts. Without this, all is utterly worthless and vain. There may be the very highest profession; there may be a most orthodox creed; one may be baptized; he may receive the Lord's supper; be a regularly enrolled and duly recognized member of a Christian community; be a Sunday-school teacher; an ordained minister of religion; one may be all this, and not have one spark of divine life, not one ray of heavenly light, not one link with the Christ of God.

Now there is something peculiarly awful in the thought of having just enough religion to deceive the heart, deaden the conscience, and ruin the soul — just enough religion to give a name to live while dead — enough to leave one without Christ, without God, and without hope in the world — enough to prop the soul up with a false confidence, and fill it with a false peace, until the Bridegroom come, and then the eyes are opened when it is too late.

Thus it is with the foolish virgins. They seem to be very like the wise ones. An ordinary observer might not be able to see any difference, for the time being. They all set out together. All have lamps. And, moreover, all turn aside to slumber and sleep, the wise as well as the foolish. All rouse up at the midnight cry, and trim their lamps. Thus far there is no apparent difference. The foolish virgins light their lamps — the lamp of profession lighted up with the dry wick of a lifeless, notional, nominal faith; alas! a worthless — worse than worthless — thing, a fatal soul-destroying delusion.

Here the grand distinction — the broad line of demarcation — comes out with awful, yea, with appalling clearness. "The foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps *are going out*" (see margin). This proves that their lamps had been lighted; for had they not been lighted, they could not go out. But it was only a false, flickering, transient light. It was not fed from a divine source. It was the light of mere lip profession, fed by a head belief, lasting just long enough to deceive themselves and others, and going out at the very moment when they most needed it, leaving them in the dreadful darkness of eternal night.

"Our lamps are going out." Terrible discovery! "The Bridegroom is at hand, and our lamps are going out. Our hollow profession is being made manifest by the light of His coming. We thought we were all right. We professed the same faith, had the same shaped lamp, the same kind of wick; but alas! we now

find to our unspeakable horror, that we have been deceiving ourselves, that we lack the one thing needful, the spirit of life in Christ, the unction from the Holy One, the living link with the Bridegroom. Whatever shall we do? O ye wise virgins, take pity upon us, and share with us your oil. Do, do, for mercy's sake, give us a little, even one drop of that all-essential thing, that we may not perish forever.”

Ah! it is all utterly vain. No one can give of his oil to another. Each has just enough for himself. Moreover, it can only be had from God Himself. A man can give *light*, but he cannot give *oil*. This latter is the gift of God alone. “The wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the Bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage; *and the door was shut.*” It is of no use looking to Christian friends to help us or prop us up. No use in flying hither and thither for some one to lean upon — some holy man, or some eminent teacher — no use building upon our Church, or our creed, or our sacraments. *We want oil.* We cannot do without it. Where are we to get it? Not from man, not from the Church, not from the saints, not from the fathers. We must get it from God; and He, blessed be His name, gives freely. “The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

But, mark, it is an individual thing. Each must have it for himself. No man can believe, or get life for another. Each must have to do with God for himself. The link which connects the soul with Christ is intensely individual. There is no such thing as secondhand faith. A man may teach us religion, or theology, or the letter of Scripture; but he cannot give us oil; he cannot give us faith; he cannot give us life. “It is the *gift* of God.” Precious little word, “gift.” It is like God. It is free as God's air; free as His sunlight; free as His refreshing dewdrops. But, we repeat, and with solemn emphasis, each one must get it for himself, and have it in himself. “None can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: that he should still live forever and not see corruption. For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever” (Psalm 49: 79).

Reader, what do you say to these solemn realities? Are you a wise or a foolish virgin? Have you got life in a risen and glorified Saviour? Are you a mere professor of religion, content with the mere ordinary dead routine of churchgoing, having just sufficient religion to make you respectable on earth, but not enough to link you with Heaven?

We earnestly beseech you to think seriously of these things. Think of them now. Think how unspeakably dreadful it will be to find your lamp of profession going out and leaving you in obscure darkness — darkness that may be felt — the outer darkness of an everlasting night. How terrible to find the door shut behind that brilliant train which shall go in to the marriage; but shut in your face! How agonizing the cry, “Lord, Lord, open unto us!” How withering, how crushing the response, “I know you not.”

O, beloved friend, do give these weighty matters a place in your heart now, while yet the door is open, and while yet the day of grace is lengthened out in God's marvellous long suffering. The moment is rapidly approaching in the which the door of mercy shall be closed against you forever, when all hope shall be gone, and your precious soul be plunged in black and eternal despair. May God's Spirit rouse you from your fatal slumber, and give you no rest until you find it in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and at His blessed feet in adoration and worship.

We must now draw this paper to a close; but, ere doing so, we shall just for a moment glance at the wise virgins. The great distinguishing feature which, according to the teaching of this parable, marks them off from the foolish virgins is that when starting at the first they “took oil in their vessels with their lamps.” In other words, what distinguishes true believers from mere professors is that the former

have in their hearts the grace of God's Holy Spirit; they have got the spirit of life in Christ Jesus; and the Holy Ghost dwelling in them as the seal, the earnest, the unction, and the witness. This grand and glorious fact characterizes now all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ — a stupendous, wondrous fact, most surely — an immense and ineffable privilege, which should ever bow our souls in holy adoration before our God and our Lord Jesus Christ, whose accomplished redemption has procured for us this great blessing.

How sad to think that, notwithstanding this high and holy privilege, we should have to read, as in the words of our parable, “They all slumbered and slept!” All alike, wise as well as foolish, fell asleep. The Bridegroom tarried, and all, without exception, lost the freshness, fervour, and power of the hope of His coming, and fell fast asleep.

Such is the statement of our parable, and such is the solemn fact of the history. The whole professing body fell asleep. “That blessed hope” which shone so brightly on the horizon of the early Christians, very speedily waned and faded away; and as we scan the page of Church history for eighteen centuries, from the Apostolic Fathers to the opening of the current century, we look in vain for any intelligent reference to the Church's specific hope — the personal return of the blessed Bridegroom. In fact, that hope was virtually lost to the Church; nay, more, it became almost heresy to teach it. And even now, in these last days, there are hundreds of thousands of professed ministers of Christ who dare not preach or teach the coming of the Lord as it is taught in Scripture.

True it is, blessed be God, a mighty change took place within the last century. There was then a great awakening. God, by His Holy Spirit, recalled His people to long-forgotten truths, and amongst the rest, to the glorious truth of the coming of the Bridegroom. Many saw then that the reason why the Bridegroom tarried was simply because God was longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Precious reason!

But they also saw that, spite of this longsuffering, our Lord is at hand. Christ is coming. The midnight cry has gone forth, “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him.” May millions of voices re-echo the soul-stirring cry until it passes in its mighty moral power, from pole to pole, and from the river to the ends of the earth, rousing the whole Church to wait, as one man, for the glorious appearing of the blessed Bridegroom of our hearts.

Brethren beloved in the Lord, awake! Let every soul be roused. Let us shake off the sloth and the slumber of worldly ease and self-indulgence — let us rise above the withering influence of religious formality and dull routine — let us fling aside the dogmas of false theology, and go forth, in the spirit of our minds and in the affections of our hearts, to meet our returning Bridegroom. May His own solemn words come with fresh power to our souls, “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour.” May the language of our hearts and our lives be, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

The dark stream of evil is flowing apace:

Awake, and be doing, ye children of grace,

Let's seek with compassion the souls that are lost,

Well knowing the price their redemption has cost.

While singing with rapture the Saviour's great love,

And waiting for Him to translate us above —

“It may be tomorrow, or even tonight” —

Let our loins be well girded, and lamps burning bright.

THE TALENTS

It only remains for us now to consider that portion of our Lord's discourse in which He again takes up the deeply solemn subject of ministerial responsibility during the time of His absence. That this stands closely connected with the hope of His coming is evident from the fact that having summed up the parable of the ten virgins with these most weighty words, "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour," He goes on to say, "For as a man travelling into a far country, who called his servants, and delivered unto them his goods."

There is a material difference between the parable of the talents and that of the servant in Matthew 24: 45-51. In the latter, we have ministry inside the house. In the former, on the other hand, we have ministry abroad in the world. But in each we find the grand foundation of all ministry, namely, the gift and authority of Christ. "He called *his own* servants, and delivered unto them *his* goods." The servants are His, and the goods are His. No one but the Lord Christ can put a man into the ministry, as none but He can impart spiritual gift. It is utterly impossible for any one to be a minister of Christ unless He calls him and fits him for the work. This is so plain as not to admit of a single question. A man may be a minister of religion; he may preach the doctrines of the gospel, and teach theology; but a minister of Christ he cannot possibly be unless Christ calls him to, and gifts him for, the work. If it be a question of ministry inside the house, it is "whom his lord hath made ruler over his house." And if it be a question of ministry abroad in the world, we are told that "He called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods."

This great root-principle of ministry is powerfully embodied in these words of one of the greatest ministers that ever lived, when he says, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, *who hath enabled me*, for that He counted me faithful, *putting me into the ministry*" (1 Tim. 1: 12).

Thus it must be in every case, whatever be the measure, the character, or the sphere of ministry. The Lord Christ alone can put any one into the ministry, and enable him to fulfil it. If it be not this, it will be either a man putting himself into the ministry, or his fellow man doing it, both of which are alike opposed to the mind of God, and to all the principles of the true ministry as taught in the Word. If we are to be guided by Scripture, we must see that all ministry in or out of the house must be by divine appointment and divine ability. If it be not thus, it is worse than worthless. A man may set himself up as a minister, or he may be set up by his fellows; but it is all utterly vain. It is not from heaven — it is not of God — it is not by Jesus Christ; and, in the sequel, it will be made manifest and judged as a most horrible and daring usurpation.

It is of the very last importance that the Christian reader should thoroughly seize this grand principle of ministry. It is as simple as it is solemn. And, moreover, that it rests on a basis truly divine cannot be questioned by any one who bows down — as every Christian ought — with unqualified and absolute submission, to the authority of the divine Word. Let the reader take his Bible, and read carefully every line therein which bears upon the subject of ministry. If he turns to the parable of the house-steward, he will read, "Whom *his Lord* hath made ruler." He does not make himself ruler; neither is he appointed by his fellows. The appointment is divine.

So, also, in the parable of the talents, the master calls his own servants, and delivers unto them his goods. The call and the equipment are divine.

We have another aspect of the same truth in Luke 19. "A certain nobleman went into a far country, to

receive for himself a kingdom, *and to return*. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, *Occupy till I come*.” The difference between Luke and Matthew appears to be this: in the former, human responsibility; in the latter, divine sovereignty is prominent. But in both the great root-principle is distinctly maintained and unanswerably established, namely, that all ministry is by divine appointment.

The same truth meets us in the Acts of the Apostles. When one was to be appointed to fill the place of Judas, the appeal is made to Jehovah, “Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all, show whether of these two *Thou hast chosen*; that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship.”

And even where it is a question of local charge, as of deacons, in Acts 6, or of elders, in Acts 14, it is by direct apostolic appointment. In other words, it is divine. A man could not even appoint himself to a deaconship, much less to an eldership. In the case of the former, inasmuch as the deacons were to take charge of the people's property, these latter were, in the grace and lovely moral order of the Spirit, permitted to select men in whom they could confide; but the appointment was divine, whether of deacons or elders. Thus, whether it be a question of gift or of local charge, all rests on a purely divine basis. This is *the* all-important point.

Again, if we turn to the Epistles, the same great truth shines in full and undimmed lustre before us. Thus, at the opening of Romans 12, we read, “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as *God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith*. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then *gifts differing according to the grace that is given us*,” etc. In 1 Cor. 12 we read, “*But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body as it hath pleased Him*” (verse 18). And again, “*God hath set some in the Church, first, apostles*,” etc. (verse 28). So also in Ephesians 4, “But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of *the gift of Christ*.”

All these Scriptures, and many more that might be quoted, go to establish the truth which we are intensely anxious to impress upon our readers, namely, that ministry in all its departments, is divine — is of God — is from heaven — is by Jesus Christ. There is positively no such thing in the New Testament as human authority to minister in the Church of God. Turn where we may, throughout its sacred pages, and we find only the same blessed doctrine as is contained in that one brief sentence in our parable, “He called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.” The whole New Testament doctrine of ministry is embodied here; and we earnestly entreat the Christian reader to let this doctrine take full possession of his soul, and exert its full sway over his conduct, course and character.*

*We do not, by any means, restrict the application of the “talents” to direct, specific, spiritual gifts. We believe the parable takes in the wide range of Christian *service*: just as the parable of the ten virgins takes in the wide range of Christian *profession*.

But it may perhaps be asked, “Is there no adaptation of the vessel to the ministerial gift deposited therein?” Unquestionably there is; and this very adaptation is distinctly presented in the words of our parable, “Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man *according to his several ability*.”

This is a point of deepest interest, and it must never be lost sight of. The Lord knows what use He means to make of a man. He knows the character of gift which He purposes to deposit in the vessel, and He shapes the vessel and moulds the man accordingly. We cannot doubt that Paul was a vessel specially formed of God for the place he was afterwards to fill, and the work he had to do. And so in

every case. If God designs a man to be a public speaker, He gives him lungs, He gives him a voice, He gives him a physical constitution adapted to the work which He designs him to do. The gift is from God; but there is always the most distinct reference to the ability of the man.

If this be lost sight of, our apprehension of the true character of ministry will be very defective indeed. We must never forget the two things, namely, the divine gift, and the human vessel in which the gift is deposited. There is the sovereignty of God, and the responsibility of man. How perfect and how beautiful are all the ways of God! But alas! man mars everything, and the touch of the human finger only dims the lustre of divine workmanship. Still, let us never forget that ministry is divine in its source, its nature, its power, and its object. If the reader rises from this paper convinced in heart and soul of this grand truth, we have so far gained our object in penning it.

But it is not improbable the question may be asked, “What has all this subject of ministry to do with the Lord's coming?” Much every way. Does not our blessed Lord introduce the subject again and again, in His discourse on the mount of Olives? And is not this entire discourse a reply to the question of the disciples, “What shall be the sign of Thy coming and the end of the age?” Is not His coming the great prominent point of the discourse as a whole, and of each section of it in particular? Unquestionably.

And what is the next prominent theme? Is it not ministry? Look at the parable of the servant made ruler over the household. How is he to serve? In view of his Lord's return. The ministry links itself on, as it were, to the departing and the return of the Master. It stands between, and is to be characterized by, these two grand events. And what is it that leads to failure in the ministry? Losing sight of the Lord's return. The evil servant says in his heart, “My Lord delayeth His coming,” and, as a consequence, “he begins to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken.”

So also in the parable of the talents. The solemn and soul-stirring word is “Occupy till I come.” In short, we learn that ministry, whether in the house of God or abroad in the world, is to be carried on in full view of the Lord's return. “After a long time the lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them.” All the servants are to keep continually before their minds the solemn fact that there is a reckoning time coming. This will regulate their thoughts and feelings in reference to every branch of their ministry. Harken to the following weighty words in which one servant seeks to animate another, “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me *at that day*; and not to me only, *but unto all them also that love His appearing*” (2 Tim. 4: 18).

Does not this touching and weighty passage show how intimately the subject of ministry stands connected with the Lord's coming? The blessed apostle — the most devoted, gifted, and effective workman that ever wrought in the vineyard of Christ — the most skilful steward that ever handled the mysteries of God — the wise master builder — the great minister of the Church and preacher of the gospel — the incomparable servant — this rare and precious vessel carried on his work, fulfilled his ministry, and discharged his holy responsibilities in full view of “*that day*.” He looked forward, and is still looking, to that solemn and glorious occasion when the righteous Judge shall place on his brow

“the crown of righteousness.” And he adds, with such affecting sweetness, “not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.”

This is peculiarly touching. There will be a crown of righteousness in “that day,” not merely for the gifted, laborious, and devoted Paul, but for every one that loves the appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. No doubt Paul shall have gems in his crown of peculiar lustre; but, lest any one should think that the crown of righteousness was only for Paul, he adds these lovely words, “unto all them also that love His appearing.” The Lord be praised for such words! May they have the effect of stirring up our hearts, not only to love the appearing of our Lord, but also to serve with more intense and wholehearted devotedness in view of that glorious day! That the two things are very closely connected we may see in the sequel of the parable of the talents. We can do little more than quote the words of our Lord.

When the servants had received the talents, we read, “Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents; behold I have gained besides them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents; behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”

It is interesting and instructive to note the difference between the parable of the talents as given in Matthew, and the parable of the ten servants, in Luke 19. In the former, it is a question of divine sovereignty; in the latter, of human responsibility. In that, each receives a like sum; in this, one receives five, another two, according to the master's will. Then, when the day of reckoning comes, we find in Luke a definite reward according to the work; whereas, in Matthew, the word is, “I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” They are not told what they are to have, or how many things they are to rule over. The master is sovereign both in His gifts and rewards; and the crowning point of all is, “Enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”

This, to a heart that loves the Lord, is beyond everything. True, there will be the ten cities and the five cities. There will be ample, distinct, and definite reward for responsibility discharged, service rendered, and work done. All will be rewarded. But above and beyond all, shines this precious word, “Enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” No reward can possibly come up to this. The sense of the love that breathes in these words will lead each one to cast his “crown of righteousness” at the feet of his Lord. The very crown which the righteous Judge shall give, we shall willingly cast at the feet of a loving Saviour and Lord. One smile from Him will touch the heart far more deeply and powerfully than the brightest crown that could be placed on the brow.

But one word ere we close. Who would not work? Who hid his lord's money? Who proved to be “a wicked and slothful servant?” The man who did not know his master's heart — his master's character — his master's love. “Then he which had received the one talent, came and said, Lord, I know thee, that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His Lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I

sowed not, and gather where I have not strewed. Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming, I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

How awfully solemn! How striking the contrast between the two servants! One knows, and loves, and trusts, and serves his lord. The other belies, fears, distrusts, and does nothing. The one enters into the joy of his lord, the other is cast out into outer darkness, into the place of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. How solemn! How soul-subduing is all this! And when does it all come out? When the Master returns!

NOTE. — We may add, in connection with the foregoing remarks on ministry, that every Christian has his and her own specific place and work to do. All are solemnly responsible to the Lord to know their place and fill it, to know their work and do it. This is a plain practical truth, and most fully confirmed by the principle upon which we have been insisting, namely, that all ministry and all work must be received from the Master's hand, carried on under His eye, and in full view of His coming. These things must never be forgotten.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We must now draw this series of papers to a close; and it is with a strong feeling of reluctance that we do so. The theme is intensely interesting, deeply practical, and abundantly fruitful. Moreover, it is very suggestive, and opens up an extensive field of vision for the spiritual mind to range through with an interest that never flags, because the subject is inexhaustible.

However, we must, **FOR THE PRESENT AT LEAST**, close our meditations on this most marvellous line of truth; but ere doing so, we are anxious to call the reader's attention, as briefly as possible, to one or two things which have been barely hinted at in the progress of these papers. We deem them not only interesting, but of real practical value in helping to a clearer understanding of many branches of the great subject which has been engaging our attention.

The reader who has travelled in company with us through the various branches of our subject will remember a cursory reference to what we ventured to call “an unnoticed interval — break — or parenthesis” in the dealings of God with Israel and with the earth. This is a point of the deepest interest; and we hope to be able to show the reader that it is not some curious question, a dark mysterious subject, or a favourite notion of some special school of prophetic interpretation. Quite the contrary. We consider it to be a point which throws a flood of light on very many branches of our general subject. Such we have found it for ourselves, and as such we desire to present it to our readers. Indeed we strongly question if any one can rightly understand prophecy or his own true position and bearings, who does not see the unnoticed interval or break above referred to.

But let us turn directly to the Word, and open at chapter 9 of the book of Daniel.

The opening verses of this remarkable section show us the beloved servant of God in profound exercise of soul in reference to the sad condition of his much loved people Israel — a condition into which, through the Spirit of Christ, he most thoroughly enters. Though not having himself personally participated in these actings which had brought ruin upon the nation, yet he identifies himself, most completely, with the people, and makes their sins his own in confession and self-judgment before his

God.

We cannot attempt to quote from Daniel's remarkable prayer and confession on this occasion; but the subject which immediately concerns us now is introduced in verse 20.

“And while I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God; yea, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision. Seventy weeks are determined [or portioned out] upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.”

Now we cannot, in our limited space, enter upon any elaborate argument to prove that the “seventy weeks,” in the above quotation, mean really four hundred and ninety years. We assume this to be the fact. We believe that Gabriel was commissioned to instruct the beloved prophet, and to inform him of the fact that, from the going forth of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, a period of four hundred and ninety years was to elapse, and that then Israel would be brought into blessing.

This is as simple and definite as anything can be. We may assert, with all possible confidence, that it is not so certain that the sun shall rise, at the appointed moment, tomorrow morning, as that at the close of the period above named by the angelic messenger, Daniel's people shall be brought into blessing. It is as sure as the throne of God. Nothing can hinder. Not all the powers of earth and hell combined shall be allowed to stand in the way of the full and perfect accomplishment of the Word of God by the mouth of Gabriel. When the last sand of the four hundred and ninetieth year shall have run out of the glass, Israel shall enter upon the possession of all their destined pre-eminence and glory. It is impossible to read Daniel 9: 24, and not see this.

But, it may be, the reader feels disposed to ask — and ask, too, with astonishment, “Have not the four hundred and ninety years expired long ago?” We reply, Certainly not. Had they done so, Israel would be now in their own land, under the blessed reign of their own loved Messiah. Scripture cannot be broken; nor can we play fast and loose with its statements, as though they might mean anything or everything, or nothing at all. The word is precise. “Seventy weeks are portioned out upon thy people.” Neither more nor less than seventy weeks. If this be taken to mean literal weeks, the passage has no sense or meaning whatever. It would be an insult to our readers to occupy time in combating such an absurdity as this.

But if, as we are most thoroughly persuaded, Gabriel meant seventy weeks of years, then have we a period most distinct and definite before us — a period extending from the moment in which Cyrus issued his decree to restore Jerusalem, to the moment of Israel's restoration.

Still, however, the reader may feel led to ask, “How can these things be? It is very much more than four hundred and ninety years, four times told, since the king of Persia issued his decree, and yet there is no sign of Israel's restoration. There must surely be some other mode of interpreting the seventy weeks.”

We can only repeat our statement, that the four hundred and ninety years are not out yet. There has been a break — a parenthesis, a long unnoticed interval. Let the reader look closely at Daniel 9: 25-26: “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build

Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks [49 years] and threescore and two weeks [434 years]; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times;” or, as the margin reads it, “in strait of times,” that is, the street and the wall of Jerusalem were built in the shorter of the two periods named, or in forty-nine years. “And after threescore and two weeks [434 years from the rebuilding of Jerusalem], shall Messiah be cut off, and have nothing” (see margin).

Here then we reach the marked, memorable, and solemn epoch. The Messiah, instead of being received, is cut off. In place of ascending the throne of David, He goes to the cross. Instead of entering upon the possession of all the promises, He has nothing. His only portion — so far as Israel and the earth were concerned — was the cross, the vinegar, the spear, the borrowed grave.

Messiah was rejected, cut off, and had nothing. What then? God signified His sense of this act, by suspending for a time His dispensational dealings with Israel. The course of time is interrupted. There is a great gap. Four hundred and eighty-three years are fulfilled; seven yet remain — a cancelled week, and all the time since the death of the Messiah has been an unnoticed interval — a break or parenthesis, during which Christ has been hidden in the heavens, and the Holy Ghost has been working on earth in forming the body of Christ, the Church, the heavenly bride. When the last member shall have been incorporated into this body, the Lord Himself shall come and receive His people to Himself, to conduct them back to the Father's house, there to be with Him in the ineffable communion of that blessed home, while God will, by His governmental dealings, prepare Israel and the earth for the introduction of the First-begotten into the world.

Now as to this interval and all that was to occur therein, Gabriel maintains a profound reserve. Whether he understood aught of it is not the question. It is clear he was not commissioned to speak of it, inasmuch as the time was not come for so doing. He passes, with marvellous and mysterious abruptness, over ages and generations — steps from headland to headland of the prophetic chart, and dismisses in a short sentence or two, a lengthened period of nearly two thousand years. The siege of Jerusalem by the Romans is thus briefly noticed, “The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.” Then, a period which has already lasted for eighteen centuries is thus disposed of, “And the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.”

Then, with intense rapidity, we are conducted on to the time of the end, when the last of the seventy weeks, the last seven of the four hundred and ninety years, shall be accomplished. “And he [the Prince] shall confirm the covenant with many [of the Jews] *for one week* [seven years]; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolator” (margin).

Here then we reach the end of the four hundred and ninety years which were determined or portioned out upon Daniel's people. To attempt to interpret this period without seeing the break and the long unnoticed interval, must of necessity plunge the mind in utter confusion. It cannot possibly be done. Numberless theories have been started; endless calculations and speculations have been attempted; but in vain. The four hundred and ninety years are not accomplished yet; nor will they have their accomplishment until the Church has left this scene altogether, and gone to be with her Lord in her bright heavenly home. Revelation 4 and 5 show us the place which the heavenly saints shall occupy during the last of Daniel's seventy weeks; while from Revelation 6-18 we have the various actings of God in government, preparing Israel and the earth for the bringing in of the First-begotten in the world.*

{*It is, we are aware, a question among the expositors, whether the events detailed in Revelation 6-18 will occupy a whole week or only a half. We do not here attempt to offer an opinion. Some consider that the public ministry of John the Baptist and that of our Lord occupied a week, or seven years, and that in consequence of Israel's rejection of both, the week is cancelled, and remains yet to be fulfilled. It is an interesting question; but it in no wise affects the great principles which have been before us, or the interpretation of the book of Revelation. We may add that the expressions "forty and two months" — "twelve hundred and sixty days" — "time, times, and the dividing of time," indicate the period of half a week, or three years and a half.}

We are very anxious to make these matters clear to the reader. It has greatly helped us in the understanding of prophecy, and cleared away many difficulties. We feel thoroughly persuaded that no one can understand the book of Daniel, or indeed the general scope of prophecy, who does not see that the last of the seventy weeks remains to be fulfilled. Not one jot or tittle of God's Word can ever pass away, and seeing He has declared that "seventy weeks were portioned out upon Daniel's people," and that at the close of that period they should be brought into blessing, it is plain that this period is not yet expired. But unless we see the break, and the dropping of time, consequent upon the rejection of the Messiah, we cannot possibly make out the fulfilment of Daniel's seventy weeks, or four hundred and ninety years.

Another important fact for the reader to seize is this, the Church forms no part of the ways of God with Israel and the earth. The Church does not belong to time, but to eternity. She is not earthly, but heavenly. She is called into existence during an unnoticed interval — a break or parenthesis consequent upon the cutting off of the Messiah. To speak after the manner of men, if Israel had received the Messiah, then the seventy weeks or four hundred and ninety years would have been fulfilled; but Israel rejected her King, and God has retired to His place until they acknowledge their iniquity. He has suspended His public dealings with Israel and the earth, though most surely controlling all things by His providence, and keeping His eye upon the seed of Abraham, ever beloved for the father's sake.

Meanwhile He is calling out from Jews and Gentiles that body called the Church, to be the companion of His Son in heavenly glory — to be thoroughly identified with Him in His present rejection from this earth, and to wait in holy patience for His glorious advent.

All this marks off the Christian's position in the most definite manner possible. His portion and his prospects, too, are thus defined with equal clearness. It is vain to look into the prophetic page in order to find the Church's position, her calling, or her hope. They are not there. It is entirely out of place for the Christian to be occupied with dates and historic events, as though he were in anywise involved therein. No doubt, all these things have their proper place and their value, and their interest, as connected with God's dealings with Israel and with the earth. But the Christian must never lose sight of the fact that he belongs to Heaven, that he is inseparably linked with an earth-rejected, heaven-accepted Christ — that his life is hid with Christ in God — that it is his holy privilege to be looking out, daily and hourly, for the coming of his Lord. There is nothing to hinder the realization of that blissful hope at any moment. There is but one thing that causes the delay, and that is, "the longsuffering of our Lord, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" — precious words these for a lost and guilty world! The salvation is *ready* to be revealed; and God is *ready* to judge. There is nothing now to wait for but the gathering in of the last elect one, and then — oh! most blessed thought — our own dear and loving Saviour will come and receive us to Himself to be with Him where He is, and to go no more out forever.

Then when the Church has gone to be with her Lord in the heavenly home, God will resume His public

actings with Israel. They will be brought into great tribulation, during the week already referred to. But at the close of that period of unexampled pressure and trial, their long-rejected Messiah will appear for their relief and deliverance. He will come forth as the rider on the white horse, accompanied by the heavenly saints. He will execute summary judgment upon His enemies, and take to Himself His great power and reign. The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. Satan shall be bound for a thousand years; and the whole universe shall repose beneath the blissful and benignant rule of the Prince of peace.

Finally, at the close of the thousand years, Satan shall be loosed, and permitted to make one more desperate effort — an effort issuing in his eternal defeat and consignment to the lake of fire, there to be tormented with the beast and the false prophet throughout the everlasting ages.

Then follows the resurrection and judgment of the wicked dead, and their consignment to the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone — tremendous and appalling thought! No heart can conceive — no tongue can tell — the horrors of that lake of fire.

But hardly is there a moment to dwell upon the dark and awful picture, ere the unutterable glories of the new heavens and the new earth burst upon the vision of the soul; the holy city is seen descending from Heaven, and these seraphic sounds fall upon the ear, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the throne, said, Behold I make all things new.”

O beloved christian reader, what scenes are before us! What grand realities! What brilliant moral glories! May we live in the light and power of these things! May we cherish that blessed hope of seeing the One who loved us and gave Himself for us — who would not enjoy His glory alone, but endured the wrath of God in order that He might link us with Himself, and share with us all His love and glory for ever. Oh! to live for Christ and wait for His appearing!

High in the Father's house above
My mansion is prepared;
There is the home, the rest I love,
And there my bright reward.
With Him I love, in spotless white,
In glory I shall shine;
His blissful presence my delight,
His love and glory mine.
All taint of sin shall be removed,
All evil done away;
And I shall dwell with God's Beloved,
Through God's eternal day.