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THE TIME OF THE END;

OR,

THE WORLD, THE VISIBLE CHURCH, AND
THE PEOPLE OF GOD,
AT
THE ADVENT OF THE LORD.

BY THE

REV. EDWARD HOARE, A.M.

CURATE OF RICHMOND.

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1846.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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SERMONS ON THE SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES
OF OUR PROTESTANT CHURCH.—PRICE 2*s*.

Richmond:

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TO THE
PARISHIONERS
OF

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RICHMOND, SURREY.

THE following Lectures on the World, the Visible Church, and the People of God, contain the substance of three Sermons preached in the Advent season of last year. They were written, and even committed to the press with the full expectation that our happy connexion would long remain unbroken. But it has pleased God to open before me another sphere of labour, which I have thought it right to undertake; and you must now receive this little volume as a parting memorial from one who can never cease to take the deepest interest in your welfare.

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I should have preferred leaving with you something more characteristic of the general tenour of my ministry; something containing fuller statements upon the grand saving doctrines of the Gospel, such as the completeness of the atonement, the present, free, and perfect justification of every poor sinner that believes in Jesus; and the new birth as wrought by the Holy Ghost in the soul, and invariably accompanied by the fruits of the Spirit in the life. These are the truths which I hope have filled my sermons, and which I pray God may be written indelibly by the Holy Ghost upon your hearts.

But I trust the subject of this little volume may not be altogether ill-suited to our present circumstances, inasmuch as by directing us to the church's dangers, it may lead us to pray for the church's safety. If the view taken of St. Paul's prophecy be correct, we live in times of peculiar peril, and must be prepared for a further increase of seduction and apostacy within the visible church. How earnest then should be the prayers of God's people, in behalf of God's ambassadors! He alone can make us able ministers of the New Testament; He alone can preserve us as faithful witnesses for Christ. I know well, brethren, that you have prayed habitually for me, and for that assurance I most heartily thank both God and you. And now I leave it with you as my earnest and solemn charge, that you will not relax those prayers, but increase and multiply them in behalf of him who is about to fill my place. Let his hands be strengthened by the believing intercessions of a faithful flock; let him go into your pulpit borne up by prayer. And may the God of all grace shower down both on you and him every rich blessing of his Spirit! May we hear the glad tidings of your undivided fellowship in the Gospel! And may an abundant answer be given to my unworthy though unceasing supplication, "that your hearts may be comforted, being knit together in love, unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ!"

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EDWARD HOARE.

*Richmond,
Feb. 1846.*

LECTURE I.

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"BEHOLD I come quickly," was the last promise, "Even so come, Lord Jesus," the last prayer, in Scripture. The glorious prospect of this quick return was the constant joy of the Apostles and early disciples of our Lord. Nor can any thing be more marked than the contrast between our thoughts and theirs, in reference to this important subject. They were for ever anticipating the time, and falling into error through their eager haste for the coming kingdom; we are too prone to stave off the thought of it, as a thing distant and uncertain. They could not rest without an eager inquiry as to the times and seasons of his approach; we, on the other hand, are tempted to sit still in listless apathy, with the eye blinded to the facts of history, with the ear deaf to the voice of prophecy, and so regardless of the knowledge really given us by God. They lived at the outset of the church's pilgrimage, with a distance of at least 1,800 years between them and their joyous hope; and yet they most eagerly inquired, "When shall these things be?" We live on the very verge of its conclusion, with the great climax full in view; yet we go on as if the world were to last for ever, steeped in apathy the most profound, with reference alike to the event itself and to its times.

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This indifference has arisen, in some measure, from a certain vague expectation of some undefined changes that are expected to precede the advent. There is a general idea afloat that there will be some notice of the glorious day; and even thinking persons look for the universal conversion of the world before the present dispensation can be brought to a close. In other cases, the mind instinctively shelters itself behind the sameness and uniformity in the order of society. No man doubts that, at the time appointed, the sun will rise to-morrow, for the simple reason that, day after day, it has risen hitherto with exact and unvarying punctuality. On the same principle, the continuance of the world's order deadens the expectation of a change. Society remains unaltered in its leading features: pleasure, trade, and politics, retain their hold on the public mind. The father's interests engross the son; and the natural inference is, that things will continue to move on as heretofore, and that there is little either to be hoped or dreaded in the prophetic promise of the Lord's return.

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Believers therefore should study well those portions of prophecy which describe the state of the world preparatory to our Lord's return. All witnesses for Christ should be acquainted with the

forerunners of his coming. Those who watch for him should know the signs of his appearing. In studying these signs there are three great classes which naturally come under review, the world, the visible church, and the chosen saints of God. Into each of these, if the Lord permit, we will examine separately. And may He, who alone "teacheth us to profit," so pour forth his Spirit, both on the writer and the reader, that all may be "led into the love of God, and the patient waiting for Christ!"

THE WORLD.

IN what condition will our Lord find society at his coming? What will be the spirit of the age? and what its habits and occupations when Christ appears to reign? This is our first question; and it is quite impossible to over-estimate its importance.

I. There will be *no stop to men's pleasures* before the advent. There will be no startling announcement which will prevail to check the pleasure hunters. They will be found pursuing their giddy course just as at present: they will not find their souls solemnized in anticipation of the great event: the nearness of the advent will not suffice to bring on repentance: if they are not subdued by the cross of Christ, they will not be by the prospect of his appearing. The great machinery of God's providence will move on without their perceiving it: the signal will be already given, the angelic hosts already on the wing, and the door of grace already closed, before there are any such startling appearances before the world as shall arouse the mere pleasure hunter from his dreams. Our Lord teaches this in Matthew, xxiv. 37-39.—"As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not, until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Noah's preaching was the only notice of the coming flood. The world pursued its own course until the very day that the rain began to fall. On the evening before they were feasting joyously, perhaps scoffingly at the toilsome labours of the man of God; many doubtless laughing at the ark; when, unexpectedly, without further notice, in the midst of their festivity, the storm gathered, the door was closed, and the unbelieving world overwhelmed in judgment. "So," saith the Lord, "shall be the coming of the Son of man."

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II. *Nor will there be any stop to business.*

The same passage from St. Matthew describes a state of active employment in the world:—"Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left." (xxiv. 40, 41). The men in the field and the women at the mill represent society as engaged in their daily callings. Nor is this description confined to the unconverted only; it includes both characters. Of the two men in the field one shall be taken, *i.e.* caught up to be with Christ as a believer; one shall be left, *i.e.* to perish as an unbeliever in the world: of the two women one shall be taken as a saint of God; one shall be left as a guilty subject of his wrath. The word here rendered "*taken*" is the same as was employed by our Lord when he said "I will come again and *receive* you unto myself;" and therefore all that are "*taken*" are chosen saints of God. Believers, therefore, and unbelievers, will go out on that very morning to their business. The streets, as usual, will be full, the shops open, trade flourishing; the accountant will be found at his desk, the merchant in his counting house, the tradesman in his shop, the judge on the bench, the lawyer at the bar, the statesman in his cabinet, and the children in the school. Nor will there be any check on their society. There will be the dinner party, the friendly intercourse of those who love the things of God, and the empty frivolities of those who live in pleasure. Men will have their balls, operas, and theatres, to the very last; they will dance on to the very morning of the resurrection. There will be no change in the habits of society, no alteration in the ordinary aspect of the world; we shall be living together in social life just as at present, with business, cares, and social duties; when suddenly—in a moment—in the twinkling of an eye—the whole shall be stopped by one shrill blast of the trump of God; and some rejoicing, some trembling, some singing hymns of joy, and some gnashing their teeth for woe, we shall be summoned before the Son of man.

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These are features in the general aspect of society, which only show that there is nothing to prevent the immediate appearance of our Lord. But they do not belong exclusively to any period. For the last eighteen hundred years men have been "eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage;" and, as far as these points are concerned, they may apply as well to any other time as ours. There are however other signs given, which tend rather especially to mark our own times as approaching closely to the latter days. Take for example the prophecy of Daniel, which teaches,

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III. That, just before the advent, there shall be *an increase of science and travelling*. Daniel, xii. 4.—"But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." These words plainly refer to the latter days; not to the end itself, but to "the time of the end;" to the last period. Now, of this period there are two things predicted to the Prophet; the one religious, the other social; the religious change is the unsealing of the vision, or the opening of the eyes of believers to truths hitherto concealed in prophecy; the social change is the rapid progress of travelling and science throughout the world. It is the latter of these with which we are now concerned. At the time of the end, therefore, there is to be an increase of knowledge and of men running to and fro on the

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earth. Now, ask any common observer of mankind, one who looks on life without reference to prophecy or religion; ask him what he thinks the most remarkable feature in the present aspect of society, and he will tell you the rapid advance of science and increased facility of communication. Just contrast the world at large, in respect of *travelling*, with what it was fifty years ago. Most truly may it be said, "Men are running to and fro on the earth." The leading commercial feature of the day is railway speculation; the habits of society are becoming materially changed through the ease and rapidity with which we travel. Thousands and tens of thousands have now become travellers, who, a few years since, had scarcely quitted the immediate neighbourhood of their native town. Nor is this confined to England. It is the same with America, Russia, India, and the whole continent of Europe. Look again at *science*, at the vast improvements in machinery, at the curious discoveries in every department of useful art, at the rapid increase of knowledge throughout the world. Look again at *the connexion* between the two. The increase of travelling is foretold by the Prophet in connexion with the advance of science. "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." But in Daniel's day there could appear no such connexion. The increase of knowledge could give no speed to the heavy motions of the camel. This connexion is a discovery of the last twenty or thirty years. The prophecy lay dormant for twenty-four centuries, when a new order of things sprang up amongst us; the connexion foretold in Daniel's prophecy broke in upon the minds of men of science, and the immediate effect has been, that increased knowledge and increased travelling are going hand in hand throughout the world. Now I do not mean to strain this too far, or to represent it as a sign of the immediate approach of our Lord. It may be merely the commencement of a new era; "the time of the end" may be only dawning upon the world. But thus much we may safely say, that there has already been sufficient change in these two respects to satisfy the prophecy; that, if the coming were to be to-morrow, there is enough to convince the most hardened infidel, that Daniel's words have received a literal, complete, and most remarkable, fulfilment. In this respect, therefore, the world is ready for the advent.

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IV. There is reason to believe from the prophetic Scriptures that *the nations of Europe will be the first nations of the world at the time of our Lord's return.*

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It is curious to observe in history the rise and fall of the various nations which have successively occupied the foremost position in society. Like the gleam of sunshine on the landscape, civilization and power have beamed for a while upon successive kingdoms, and then left them to be obscured and darkened by the cloud. Thus Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, have successively swayed the sceptre of the world. This sceptre is now held by the European nations generally. The power is perhaps greater than in any former age; but there is this great difference, that now it is possessed by no nation singly, but divided amongst several. In former days, the Roman republic was itself sovereign and supreme; there was no other which could pretend to rivalry. It is not so now; there may be proud pretensions to national superiority; but all have the advantage of unquestionable superiority over the uncivilized nations of Africa and the East. Such changes are inexplicable on merely worldly principles: there is nothing in nature to explain this rise and fall of moral light. The student of history may endeavour to trace the causes of a nation's gradual decline; but, why those causes themselves appeared is a question which no natural intellect can solve. The student of prophecy, however, is not left in darkness. He knows not why it is that an all-wise God has so ordered it, but he sees in all these changes the exact completion of God's prophetic Scriptures, and at once solves the mystery by referring the whole to the revealed purpose of an all-wise and all-controlling God. In two separate visions these changes were all foretold by Daniel. As history says there have been, so prophecy foretold there should be, four ruling kingdoms in the world. We are taught this by the vision of the image and its explanation in Daniel, ii. 31-45; and by the vision of the four beasts, in Dan. vii. ^[17] From both we gather the same leading facts. (1.) That Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome should, in turn, succeed to the supremacy of empires held by Babylon at the time of the Prophet. (2.) That the fourth, or Roman empire, should appear under a two-fold aspect, at first being united like the foot, but afterwards divided like the toes. (3.) That this fourth empire should be the last; that there should be no fifth arising to supersede it; for that in the time of the ten kings, its second or divided period, should arise the kingdom of the Son of man. Dan. ii. 44.—"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." Now, as to the two first facts, there is an exact correspondence between history and prophecy. As was foretold, Persia succeeded Babylon, Greece Persia, and Rome Greece. The Roman power again has appeared under a two-fold form, first being united under the republic and the empire, and then breaking up into the kingdoms of modern Europe. The prophecy, therefore, by its two first facts, brings the history of the world's kingdoms down to our own exact position, and at the same time it teaches, by the third, that there can be no further change before the advent. "In the days of these kings," *i.e.* the European nations, "shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom," *i.e.* the kingdom of the saints, of the Son of man in glory. With reference, therefore, to the political changes of the world, we are living under the last period of the last empire. There is to be no further shifting of the seat of power: strength and civilization will be found resting with Europe when the Son of man appears.

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V. There is however one feature of society before the advent of which the same cannot be said; one class of prophecies which do not yet appear to have received their full accomplishment, *viz.* those which predict a *state of war and tribulation.*

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We are taught by our Lord (Matthew, xxiv. 21, 22) that the time of the end shall be one of peculiar distress: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." The passage may have a primary and typical reference to the destruction of Jerusalem; but that this reference is not exclusive appears plainly from vv. 29 & 30: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven." The tribulation of those days is here described as the last event on earth before the advent. So again in Luke, xvii. 33:—"Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it." The passage refers to "the day when the Son of man is revealed," v. 30; and the words quoted show that the state of things will be of such a character as to involve the risk of martyrdom in the faithful confession of the truth. But the words of Daniel are more explicit still. "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever. But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased;" Daniel, xii. 1-4. There can be no doubt as to the time here referred to: it is determined by four indisputable marks. The final deliverance of God's chosen people; the resurrection; the glory of the saints; and the title given to it, "the time of the end." Nor can there be any doubt as to the fact predicted. "There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time."

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The words of our Lord again teach us that the commencement of these sorrows shall be war. "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;" Matt, xxiv. 6-8. So the great crisis is described in the Revelation, as "*the battle of Almighty God*;" Rev. xvi. 14. But we are now at peace, nor is there at present any open combination of the ruling powers against the truth. Believers may have their hearts grieved by the national support of error, and here and there may be the outbreak of a persecuting spirit; but there is nothing yet of a great tribulation, nothing approaching to the fiery trial foretold in Daniel's awful prophecy. All this is to come: how soon God only knows. Persecution is now condemned, but the last ten years have witnessed a wonderful political revolution in Rome's favour; and it may be amply proved from facts as well as documents that she only waits the favouring day of power, to develop her old character, and make herself drunk in the life-blood of the saints. We are still at peace: but we heard last year of the cloud in the West, who shall say how soon the storm may gather, and burst in a thunder-clap over our heads? Europe is still at peace; but surely the mine is ready, the train is laid, and it needs but the death of one aged sovereign to produce an explosion which may convulse the very foundations of society. Then increased science will only produce unknown horrors, nor does it need any stretch of a lively imagination to foresee the onset of such days as those described by our Lord, when he said, "Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

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For such a period believers should be ready. Every living man will be swept away by the flood, except the little, blessed, band, who have a fast "hold upon the anchor of the soul sure and stedfast, and that entereth into that within the veil." Nothing then will stand but the strong reality of a living union with Jesus. Well, therefore, has the voice gone forth as the precursor of the conflict, "Behold I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame;" Rev. xvi. 15.

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But, in what attitude shall society be found?

VI. According to the Scriptures, there shall be *a general indifference to the subject of his return*.

Of course, amongst the people of God, there will be many whose hearts God has led to the patient waiting for Christ. Some, in the fervour of an ardent hope, may carry their longings into enthusiasm; and others, in the calm sobriety of a Scriptural faith, like Simeon and Anna, will abide waiting for their Lord. But such cases will be the exception. The great mass of men will be altogether indifferent. They will care no more for our preaching than the men before the flood did for Noah's: they will think it an idle and enthusiastic tale, and utterly disregard the whole matter.

Some indeed will scoff at it. They will challenge believers to the proof of it; they will point to the world's unbroken course, and say "Where is the promise of his coming?" They will be ready to raise the sneer against the church's hopes, and only notice the blessed tidings just to scoff at them as idle speculation. "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation;" 2 Pet. iii.

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But this scoffing spirit is not described as the general feature of society. It requires some attention even to scoff at God's promises. But the general character of the world with reference to this great subject will be apathy; downright, dogged, indifference to the whole concern. Thus, in the parable of the talents, "they all slumbered and slept." The wise virgins could sleep in calm peace, for they were ready; the foolish virgins could slumber only in apathy, for, being unprepared, they could only wake to perish. Thus our Lord says he "will come as a thief in the night," when none give the thing a thought. The watchman may cry the hour, but the sleeper sleeps: he may sound the note of warning, but the sleeper sleeps: the thief may be within the chamber, but still he sleeps unmoved, unconscious, unprepared. Now this is the description which our Lord gives of the world before his coming. He says, men shall be found sleeping, a few blessed servants watching, but the mass sleeping, unconscious of his approach, unconcerned at his promises, unawakened even by the judgments that hurry on as the forerunners of his wrath.

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The message then for the day is, "Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." It is impossible for any man of common observation to be blind to the fact that the great mass of men are still slumbering before God. Quick and energetic in their business, keen in their speculations, alive and alert as to the money market, they are profoundly insensible to the coming. They are content to leave the great point unsettled. They are hurrying before the judgment seat, and have not yet bowed before the cross. They are shortly to stand before the judge, and for aught they know, the whole weight of God's curse still hangs over their unforgiven sin. There is no fellowship with a Saviour, no walking with God, no cleansing of guilt in the Lamb's most precious blood, no eager wrestling with God that they may have a full assurance of their name written in the book of life. A free, full, complete, salvation is now offered to them; justification and restoration are promised graciously through the name of Jesus. They are warned of their danger, and invited to the Lord for safety. Yet they sleep, they slumber on; and if perchance they for a while raise their head to listen, it is either to scoff at the message, or to sink back into a slumber more fatal, more profound. Oh! that the Holy Ghost may condescend in mercy to awake those slumberers to activity and life! Oh! that the Spirit of the living God may himself break the spell of that fatal apathy! Oh! that in our beloved church we may see the fulfilment of the Apostle's prayer:—"The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ!"

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LECTURE II.

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THE VISIBLE CHURCH.

THERE IS nothing more beautiful than holy union. It is beautiful in a family, beautiful in a parish, beautiful in a nation, and above all beautiful in a church. That such a union ought to exist amongst the people of God on earth none can deny; that it is the joy of heaven, and is about to fill the coming kingdom with overflowing peace, is the happy conviction of every student of the Scriptures. Nor can we be surprised that men of vivid imagination and ardent minds should be powerfully attracted by the idea of a visible oneness in the church of Christ. There is something so truly grand and heavenly in the thought of a holy succession of devoted men, combining apostolical authority with an apostolical spirit, and handing down from age to age, untainted and undiminished, a complete system of apostolical truth, that it is only natural for men to look with reverence on such a picture.

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But, before we are caught gazing on the imagination, we are bound to pause awhile to examine into facts; and, before we allow the mind to become unsettled in the ardent pursuit of a lovely theory, it is the imperative duty of all sober-minded, truth-seeking, men to look first at the word of God and learn whether, in the present dispensation, there is any hope that the vision will be realized.

To decide this point, we have to examine into *the predicted condition of the visible church of Christ*. The question is, are we warned of a state of division, or are we not? Does prophecy represent the visible church of the latter days as giving an undivided and unerring witness to the truth; as dwelling harmoniously "in the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life," and so prepared to welcome Christ with a united hymn of thankful joy? or does it foretell a state of things the exact opposite, *viz.* division, seduction, and vice, amongst professors? If the former be the state predicted, we may well sink into despair from its plain contrast with present facts: vice, heresy, and schism, are rampant in the body of baptized professors; whatever men think of the cause or remedy, all are agreed as to the fact. If the latter, we may look away from present anxieties and, falling back on God's revealed purpose, may learn, even from the distractions of the church, the wisdom, the knowledge, and the unfathomable counsel of its Head.

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May God the Holy Ghost guide us into the path of truth.

There are two ways in which we might profitably pursue our investigation. We might either take a wide range of Scriptural evidence, and give a cursory notice of many texts; or we might take one single passage and sift it thoroughly. We will adopt the latter method, and confine our attention almost exclusively to the third and fourth chapters of the second Epistle to Timothy.

Three subjects will naturally arise in our examination of this prophecy.

I. The period to which it refers.

II. The persons to whom it refers, *i.e.* whether it speaks of men within or without the visible church.

III. The state of things which it foretells.

I. *The period to which the prophecy refers* is described distinctly (iii. 1) as "the last days:" "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come;" or, as it is said, 1 Tim. iv. i., where a similar apostacy is foretold, "the latter days:" "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils." The exact extent of the period expressed by "the last," or "latter days," it may be difficult to determine; but one thing is plain; they must reach up to the advent of our Lord. There is nothing else to follow them before his coming. They may cover a longer or shorter period, but that period is the last of the present dispensation. They may commence earlier or later, but they must end with the advent. The prophecy carries us, therefore, right on to the coming of the Lord: it contains a picture of the visible church as Christ shall then find it; it is not a description of its early days alone, the first efforts of its infancy; but rather of its old age, when man shall have done his all, when churches have been established, bibles circulated, and all done that can be done through man's instrumentality; then—at the very end—will the church be surprised in the exact condition foretold in this chapter of the Apostle.

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II. *The persons to whom it refers.*

Does it speak of men within or without the visible church?

Upon this entirely depends our present use of the prophecy. If it is to be understood as referring to the heathen world, or to those who openly reject the name of Jesus, it would of course throw no light on our present subject. Before we can really apply it to our argument we must ascertain clearly that it speaks of those within, and not without the visible church of professed believers.

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A slight reference to the words will suffice to set this point at rest.

(1.) In *v.* 5, the persons described are said to retain "the form of godliness:" "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away." There is no rejection of the outward rites of Christianity. They are not like socialists, infidels, or heathen idolaters, persons who make no profession of a faith in Jesus, but they have all the specious appearance of true religion; they are members therefore of the visible church of Christ.

(2.) In *v.* 7, they plainly lay claim to "the truth:" "Ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth." By "*the truth*" is meant the pure truth of Christ's Gospel, the message of salvation which God has given us in his word. The study of the truth implies an outward avowal of it. They do not attain, but they profess a knowledge of it. So also in *v.* 8, they are described as "reprobate concerning the faith:" possessed of the appearance, but devoid of the reality. They look like men of faith, but when proved by divine tests they are found fictitious and defective. They are like false coin which cannot stand the refiner's fire. But all this implies profession, and it once more appears that the persons described belong to the visible church of Christ.

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(3.) The same may be gathered from the Apostle's charge to Timothy, as given in *ch.* iv. 1-4.—"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."

These words describe the danger as falling within the range of the church's discipline, as arising in the midst of that very body in which Timothy was then called to labour as a Bishop. The church at Ephesus, with Timothy at its head, was the type or representative of the church in the latter days in the heart of which this evil should arise. Nor is this point unworthy of our careful observation, for it proves the important fact that we must look for error in the midst of the most perfect ecclesiastical arrangement. In the church at Ephesus we see the church's order in its purest and most perfect form. The whole was arranged under Apostolic authority. St. Paul himself gathered in the converts, ordained the first elders, and placed the Bishop in his diocese. There was needed no long chain of questionable links to establish the fact of Apostolical succession; the whole came from the fountain head. The machinery of the church was perfect; the ordination, government, and discipline were Apostolic. Bearing in mind, therefore, that Timothy was addressed as the representative of those who in the latter days should fill his office, we are brought to the conclusion that we must look for the great defection in the very midst of Apostolical order. The most perfect ecclesiastical authority will be insufficient to secure the truth. Danger will arise not merely within the visible church, but within its purest and most Scriptural form.

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III. *The state of things which the words foretell.*

(1.) *A wide-spread departure from Christian morals.* "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;" iii. 2-4.

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How sad a picture, but how true! It is surely drawn from what God foresaw in present life! We have here a class of men sealed unto Christ by baptism, and, while they bear his name, dishonouring his kingdom. There is no evidence that they are born again of God, no fruit of the Spirit, no sign of his inward guidance. Love they have, but it is absorbed by self, and become hateful. For heavenly-mindedness, they are carried on by worldly covetousness; and, instead of wrestling for God, they are grasping, labouring, speculating for money. In the pride of wealth and intellect they grow boastful of their successes, and blaspheme the Lord who gave them. Parents are neglected and disobeyed; and, as is usually the case, when the earthly parent is set at nought, the heavenly Father is disregarded also; for self-confidence and self-pleasing reign in the unthankful and unholy heart.

Natural affection falls next, and the vile temper vents itself in savage fierceness even against the wife, the child, the brother. Promises are broken, slanderous reports are circulated, wives are neglected, profligate companions are adopted; and the children of God are despised and scoffed at, as absurd in their peculiarities, and contemptible in their faith.

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Governments again are disobeyed, political factions plot against the state, dignities are evil spoken of; and, strong in their own conceit, heady and high-minded men regard their own intellect as their only guide, and their own will as their only law. Meanwhile God is forgotten in a wide-spread thirst for pleasure; sabbaths are broken in pursuit of pleasure, souls endangered, and all for pleasure. Pleasure is the idol; the phantom before which they bow; the vain idea on which they fix their hearts' best love. They are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." Such, saith the Scripture, is to be the moral character of vast multitudes of professed believers in the latter days.

(2.) And now look at what may be termed their *religious* character.

We have already remarked they will retain the form of godliness. There is no open rejection of the name or the outward acts of Christianity: in appearance their standard is high, for it is a form of *godliness*. But, with all this, they deny its power; they do not like its soul-searching message. They would not for the world be accounted any thing but serious, they are regular and attentive at the round of the church's services; they welcome your words so long as you speak of the externals of religion; but, when you search into the real matter, the new birth by the Holy Ghost; pardon through the Lamb's blood; justification freely given through his righteousness; the deep humiliation of those who live by grace; the weaning of the affections from the world, and the fixing them unreservedly on Christ; then it is that the natural man rises up, and, if not by words, they will by facts deny its power. They will live as much in the world as ever. They will have the form of godliness at the sacrament on Sunday, they will deny its power by their eager thirst after gain and pleasure through the week. They will approve the form when the services are reverently conducted in the church: they will deny the power when called upon to cleave anew to Christ in life.

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And, even when there is not this cleaving to the world, there may be the denial of its power in conjunction with the form of godliness. Such is the case when the church and its forms are made more prominent than Christ and his grace. There may be the form of godliness in the expression of peculiar reverence for the things of God, in frequent bowings, in the constant use of the epithet "holy," and in humble submission to the church's teaching. But with all this there may be the stopping short of the power of a lively faith. The church may be like the painted window disguising the true colouring of the sun; the soul may be resting on the church's ordinances rather than the cross; baptism may be exalted, and the new birth by the Holy Ghost forgotten; while the mind becomes so subjected to the church's teaching, that it dares not presume to make a fearless use of the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. When such is the case, we have the form of godliness without the power.

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(3.) A third feature of the character of the church in the latter days, as here described by prophecy, is *an ignorance of, and aversion to, the truth as it is in Jesus.*

In chap. iii. v. 7, there is a description of future ignorance: "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

In chap. iv. vv. 3 & 4, this ignorance is turned into actual aversion. "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." And this is the more remarkable if you observe that the ignorance of truth does not arise from neglect. They are not like persons who pass it by as a thing of no importance, who turn aside from the whole matter; but they are "ever learning." They will make the thing their study, they will have many books and read them, they will ransack human literature, they will be able to quote human testimonies, they will strive to unravel the tangled mazes of patristic theology. And, what says the prophecy respecting their success? They are "never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Why is this? How can it be, that with all this fair form of godliness, with all this deep research and learning, they are yet outstripped by some simple

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cottager who knows only his bible and his Lord? The prophecy must again reply, and it shows that the defect is rather in the heart than in the head; for (iv. 3) "they will not endure," they do not like, "sound doctrine;" and again (iii. 8) "they resist the truth." Truth is presented and resisted, and then they will turn to fables. They are blinded, because they will not see; their mind is turned unto fables; just because their heart has never been turned in true repentance to the cross. They are exactly like those whom St. Paul describes as led astray by the man of sin: "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness;" 2 Thess. ii. 10-12. They have pleasure in unrighteousness, and therefore cannot love the truth. The result is a strong delusion, a judicial blindness, an incapacity of receiving Christ. In their latter stages they really think they are conscientious; they are not hypocrites or infidels, but have schooled their understanding into the belief of the fables to which their heart is turned. Having begun by disliking the truth, they end by believing lies. "For this cause shall God send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."

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(4.) But there is a fourth remark from the prophecy of no small importance; *viz.* this; *the apostacy will be found not merely amongst the laity, but the clergy, i.e.* amongst those who exercise the office of the ministry in the house of God.

Ordination cannot effect regeneration. The Bishop's hands may give the pastor's office, but they cannot give the pastor's spirit; and thus there will be amongst the clergy the same leaven of corruption that there is amongst the flock. Like priest, like people. Thus you will observe in the prophecy that there is to be no lack of teachers in the latter days. There will be deceivers as well as the deceived, and men will "heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;" iv. iii. Nor will these be mere upstarts rising up without legitimate ordination, for let us turn to the parallel prophecy, Acts, xx. 29 & 30. These words were addressed by St. Paul to the elders of the church of Ephesus, the very men over whom Timothy presided as a bishop. They are therefore closely connected with the epistle, the only difference being that they are addressed to different officers of the same church. It is only consistent therefore to suppose them to relate to the same apostacy. Nor can there be any doubt as to the ecclesiastical position of the persons addressed; they had authority higher even than Apostolic; for the command was given them "Take heed unto yourselves and to the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers." And now what says the prophecy? It contains the description of a two-fold danger, from without and from within: some shall arise without and break in upon the church's fold, "I know this, that after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock;" v. 29. But others shall spring up within, in the very midst of a rightly ordained ministry, corrupting the faith without attacking it. "Also, of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them;" v. 30.

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And this makes the latter days so pre-eminently perilous; seduction within is vastly more dangerous than attack without. How much more when it arises amongst the consecrated guardians of truth! If the defection were limited to the laity, the believer's path would be comparatively easy; but here lies the danger, that the truth will be resisted by the very men whose sole office it is to teach it; perverted by those who are solemnly entrusted with its maintenance; that there will be traitors in the very heart of the camp of God; that men holding the church's orders, and thereby winning to themselves the church's confidence, will draw away disciples after them, and, retaining their ecclesiastical position, will employ its influence as the secret antagonists of the truth.^[41]

Such being the predicted condition of the visible church in the latter days, it remains only that we draw from the prophecy two or three important practical conclusions.

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(1.) There is no Scriptural warrant for expecting infallibility in the visible church.

We need not pause to examine into the frail and feeble arguments on which the claim to such a gift is based, nor need we attempt to follow controversial writers in their contradictory endeavours to ascertain its seat. Let that seat be what it may, whether popes alone, or councils alone, or councils summoned under pontifical authority, we are prepared to prove from the prophetic Scriptures that there are no circumstances whatever under which any body of uninspired men can claim to be received as unerring authority by the church. If ever there has been a necessity for an infallible living voice to preserve the truth, and to cut off heresy by decrees, that necessity, all must admit, will be vastly multiplied in the latter days. Then there will be the false Christs foretold by our Lord; then the three unclean spirits will go forth to seduce professors; then the man of sin will be seated in the temple of God, and then, if ever, the infallible decree will be needful to assert the truth. But who at such a time is to decree it? There will be, as we have shown, a body of men within the church, corrupting the truth, resisting the truth, turned unto fables, believing lies. Are such persons to be admitted to the church's councils, or are they not? Are they, or are they not, to take a part in the decision? If they are, there is too much reason to fear it would be vitiated by their fables, that the dead fly would cause to stink the apothecary's ointment. But, if not, how are they to be excluded? By what tests is the council to be purified? They will all retain the form of godliness; they will appear with all the weight of ecclesiastical position, and apostolical ordination; there will be nothing wanting in the regularity of their orders, the validity of their sacraments, or the apparent godliness of their life; they will subscribe to any forms, and sign any articles; nor will there be any visible, tangible, criterion, by which they can be excluded from the church's ministry or council chamber; but yet, if admitted, they will draw away disciples after them, and by speaking perverse things will vitiate

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every decision in which they are permitted to take a part.

The prophetic Scriptures, therefore, are in perfect harmony with the remainder of the bible and lead us like it to the one infallible rule of faith, the written word of the living God. To this St. Paul directed Timothy; for, after having foretold the seductive errors about to arise and advance within the church, he leads him to the bible as the only sure resting place, and says, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works;" vv. 15-17. He seems here to place the infallibility of the word in direct contrast to the fallibility of men. In the course of his prophecy he has shown that amongst those who retain the form of godliness there will spring up many who deny its power; but then, turning to the written word, he says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God;" every sentence is infallible, every word inspired. On this alone is there any sure footing for those that would stand the shock of the latter days. If they lean on tradition, on councils, on popes, or even on devoted ministers whose characters they revere, and whose ministry they have found a blessing to their souls, they are leaning after all on man, on man who may fail them at the very crisis of their peril; but, when they draw truth from the fountain of truth, they may receive it with unreserved reliance, for God himself has given it, and declared by the Holy Ghost that it "is able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

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(2.) The people of God should not be shaken in their faith by the dangers which they observe within the church.

In saying this, it is not intended to under-rate the deep anxiety of the times in which we live. On the contrary, we believe the conflict now rising amongst professors to be one of so vast a moment as to have been the subject of prophetic warning no less than eighteen hundred years ago. But, at the same time men should not be soon shaken in mind or troubled. Our faith should rather be confirmed than weakened; for, as the fulfilment of each prophecy gives additional strength to our confidence in the prophet, so the rise of each new danger within the visible church should only add to our unshaken reliance on the divine authority, and unaltered infallibility of the word. If the guide through some unknown country were to warn us at the outset of our journey that, as we approached the close, we should find the path narrow, the bye-ways many, and the guides divided, we might feel distressed when his words were verified, but each new danger would increase our confidence in his guidance. So it is with the church. The path is narrow, the journey difficult and dangerous, but we must remember that the Guide told us of it at the outset, and the one result should be that we trust him more unreservedly, and lean with more peaceful security on his word. This is the use which our Lord himself has taught us to make of rising dangers. For mark his words: "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh;" Luke, xxi. 28. Believers are not to look down in discouragement, but to look up in hope. They are to take courage and be cheered on to fresh victories; they are to rejoice in the unfailing character of the word, and witnessing the progress of predicted dangers, are to look joyfully for predicted joys; they are to regard these fearful times as forerunners of their coming glory, and, fear being absorbed in hope, are to watch in joyful expectation for their crowning blessedness at the advent of their Lord.

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(3.) How precious are the promises of a Saviour's preserving grace!

It has been shown that the latter days will be days of peril, that there will spring up seducing teachers even in the very heart of Christianity in its purest form, that no articles or ecclesiastical system can avail to prevent their rise and progress, and that no human tests can separate the reality from the form of godliness. As these latter days approach, we are bound to apprehend these spiritual perils for ourselves and our little ones; we must expect our sons and daughters, as they grow up into the world, to be attacked by this deadly pestilence, and, unless preserved by grace, blighted and withered ere the lovely bloom be formed. In perilous times we live; for perilous times we are training our families. Oh! the blessedness of those precious promises which assure us that he will keep his own children to the end! Oh! the peace of being able to fall back upon those gracious words, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand!" Keeping to them we need not tremble at the subtle and skilful combination with which the enemy leads on his mighty hosts against the truth; nor need we shrink from the struggle in the deep consciousness of weakness, insufficiency, and ignorance. No! Believers! ye are in the right hand of the Lord; ye are purchased by the blood of Jesus, and loved with an everlasting love; ye are under the sacred teaching of the Holy Ghost, and by him called, preserved, taught, and sanctified; ye must therefore be content to cast away all earthly dependencies, to cease from every arm of flesh, to throw yourselves without either reserve or doubt on Him who has redeemed you by his blood; resting on his word as alone infallible, and abiding in his grace as the one and all-sufficient source of life, strength, peace, and holiness. "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

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LECTURE III.

THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

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IN considering the state of the world as foretold in prophecy preparatory to the advent of our blessed Lord, we have been led thus far to much matter of a distressing character; we have had to draw the picture of a busy world steeped in apathy, and a professing church full of apostacy; the prospect has in very truth been fearful, gloomy, and disheartening; but we are now to turn to brighter topics, and draw our thoughts to the beloved family of God's faithful children, to the little band of justified believers, to those that are new born of God, to the blessed church of God's elect: we are to examine prophecy respecting them; we are to search into their character, joys, and sorrows; and to gather from the testimony of the Spirit the condition in which they will be found at the advent of our Lord.

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I. They will be found *scattered throughout society*.

Our Lord prayed for his people, "not that they should be taken out of the world, but that they should be kept from the evil;" and we are never to expect to find them externally separate from the surrounding world. They will not be gathered together in separate states and villages; there will not be one village of unbelievers and another of believers; but there will be some of both classes every where. The tares will grow with the wheat, and the wheat with the tares. This appears very plainly from the prophecy of our Lord already referred to; "I tell you, In that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left;" Luke, xvii. 34-36. This passage describes the separation of God's children from the world, or the gathering in of God's elect; and the point which at present we would particularly observe is this, that up to the very crisis they are together in society, in the same bed, the same shop, the same field; there is no visible separation, no drawing off from the duties of common life; all are together to the very night of the advent.

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II. And we may remark, secondly, that the saints of God will not be *distinguished by any ecclesiastical system*.

There is a natural craving in the human mind for something tangible and visible. Hence the origin of idolatry; men want to see the object of their worship, and so create for themselves an image. Hence also the craving after that which God has declared impossible, a visible church free from error; an outward form inseparable from inward grace; a pure, holy, spotless framework, which, excluding all others, shall embrace in its system the whole of God's elect. But this second fiction is quite as impossible as the first, and there is no more expectation of seeing God's elect embodied in a form than of seeing God himself represented in an image.^[51] God's children are a scattered family; scattered not merely as to place but as to discipline. In saying this we do not undervalue a Scriptural discipline, or regard episcopacy as a thing which may be set aside at pleasure: as we find it in the bible we give thanks also that we find it in our church. But what we mean is this, that God's grace is not tied down to ecclesiastical machinery; that a true church cannot command it, a defective church cannot exclude it. None can bind the life-giving power of the Spirit.

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Thus all the descriptions of the saints of God in the latter days describe them not by outward form, but by inward grace; the distinguishing features are always spiritual, never ecclesiastical; they refer to character, not discipline. For example: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed;" Isaiah, lxvi. 5. There can be no doubt as to the date of this prophecy; it plainly carries us right up to the advent. "He shall appear to your joy." Nor can there be any doubt again as to the persons addressed in it; they are the blessed company of the saved in distinction to the miserable multitude of the lost. "He shall appear to your joy." And now how are they described? He does not say "Hear ye the word of the Lord, ye that are correct in your ecclesiastical arrangements; ye whose ministers are possessed of Apostolical succession;" nor "ye that are in communion with the Pope of Rome;" but "ye that tremble at his word." Whoever therefore receives in faith the promises of the bible; whoever is brought by God's Spirit blessing those promises to believe on Jesus, whoever he be, and wherever he be, whether he be churchman, dissenter, or even Romanist, that man is safe, and the Lord Jesus "shall appear for his joy."^[53]

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It is just the same in the book of Revelation. In that remarkable prophecy we have repeated mention of the saints in direct contrast with the apostacy of the latter days: we have in several passages their portrait clearly drawn, as if to leave no doubt as to their character when that last peril should gather around the faith. Now this description is always of a spiritual character. The seed of the woman are those "which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ;" xii. 17. "Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus;" xiv. 12. "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful;" xvii. 14. In all these passages there is not one word of outward form, they refer exclusively to inward life.

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But still more. A corrupt church *cannot exclude divine grace*; for we have in this book a full description of the great apostacy which is to swallow up all other heresies in the latter days. In chap. xvii. and xviii. it is described under the name of "Babylon." There is, we know, a difference of opinion as to the application of this prophecy. It may be an open question whether or not it applies to Rome. But on one thing all are agreed—that it is a description of a tremendous ecclesiastical apostacy which will be destroyed at the advent of the Lord. Now chapter xviii,

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gives a description of its fall,—a fall predicted in immediate connexion with the advent: “And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird;” v. 2. And the remarkable point is this, that even in Babylon, just at the period of her fall, there shall be found scattered a little band of the chosen saints of God; for what saith the angels cry? “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues;” v. 4. Even there, and even then, will be some of the chosen people of the Lord.

But, on the other hand, a *pure church cannot secure divine grace*. A Scriptural liturgy, and Scriptural articles, cannot secure a Scriptural people. There will be weeds in the garden, as well as flowers in the waste. This appears very plainly from the parable of the virgins. There can be no doubt of the reference of this parable to the visible church before the advent. It is a description of those who professed to be waiting for the bridegroom. Now we see in the ten virgins a perfect oneness of ecclesiastical form. There was no visible difference between the foolish and the wise. They were watching together; they professed allegiance to the same bridegroom; they had the same vessels, and the same lamps; the passer by could have seen no difference: the distinction was within, not without; and because the oil was wanting to the foolish, the bridegroom said, “I never knew you.”

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We are brought therefore to the conclusion that the saints of God will not be distinguished by ecclesiastical system. There will be nothing in them which the world can see, except it be the fruit of the Spirit. There will be no outward form, which can stamp them certainly as the elect of God. They will be knit to Christ by a living union, but the tie will be invisible. They will have the Father’s name written on the forehead, but no mortal eye can discern the character. They will be sealed by the seal of the Spirit, but there will be nothing external to enable man to pronounce with certainty upon their safety.

And how solemn are the thoughts involved in this sacred truth! We have already found that there will be no distinction in society, that in the same family, in the same trade, in the same shop, nay even in the same bed, one shall be taken and the other left. But this carries us farther still, and shows that there will be the same separation even in the same church. Two persons will come together to the same building, join in the same outward worship, make use of the same liturgy, sing the same praises, hear the same chapters, listen to and perhaps approve the same sermons, and kneel side by side at the same communion. Man will discern no outward difference. And so Christ will find them at his coming. They will “both grow together until the harvest.” Then and not till then will God separate his children. Then will it appear that the one has been a follower of the Lamb, the other of the world; the one born again of God, the other unregenerate; the one justified, the other damned; and all because the one was a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the other had the form of godliness, but rested there, and was without its power.

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III. They will stand out *as witnesses for Christ* in the midst of general declension. The ship at anchor will remain unmoved while all around it are drifted down the tide: and this is the position in which Christ will find his chosen people: they will hold fast anchored in Christ, while all around them are drifted off from God. We have already called your attention to the great apostacy foretold within the visible church, and we have only now to remark its widespread influence and effect. This is described by our Lord: “And many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved;” Matthew, xxiv. 11-13. These words foretell a period of abounding error, abounding sin, and abounding departure from the Lord: abounding error; “And many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many:” abounding sin; “because iniquity shall abound:” and abounding departure from the Lord; “the love of many shall wax cold.” The chill shall reach even those whose hearts once seemed warm. Nor shall any stand but the heirs of God’s salvation. “He that shall endure unto the end the same shall be saved.” All mere professors are here described as fallen; all mere hereditary Christians fallen; all Christians by expediency fallen; all who have rested in ecclesiastical, architectural, and ornamental Christianity fallen; all those who have had the form without the power—fallen; all fallen but the little band of those faithful men whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life. They will then stand out as the rock, when the storm has washed away the sand that covered it; unshaken, immovable, and only made conspicuous by the tempest. Or as the evergreen; still verdant, still beautiful, when the winter’s frost has stripped the neighbouring plants whose short-lived beauty seemed far more brilliant under the summer’s sun; so will they abide in the winter time of the church’s history; their life untouched, for it consists in a union with their Lord; their beauty undiminished, for it is His unfading likeness impressed by the Holy Ghost upon their heart.

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IV. A fourth remark follows at once from this position of the saints as witnesses in the midst of general declension, *viz.* this: they will be *unsupported by the arm of flesh*. When all except the true saints have declined from the faith, it stands to reason that those saints will be left unsupported by the world’s influence. This appears also very plainly from our Lord’s prophecy: “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;” Matthew, xxiv. 9. Political influence will then be against the truth. “Ye shall be hated of all *nations*.” There will be a national opposition to true godliness, as there ought to be a national support of it. We must be prepared therefore to see all national and political influence thrown boldly into the scale of error: we shall be taught by the sins of those in power not to lean on the arm of flesh, to cease from man, to rest simply upon Christ and Christ

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alone. Then God's redeemed will find no help from statesmen, but draw all their help from Christ. They will be forced to cleave to those precious promises, "I am with you always even unto the end of the world;" "The gates of hell shall not prevail against you;" "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Their union with him will be every day more and more precious; their thirsting after him more and more intense; his word, his grace, his presence, his love, will be the strength of their hope, the subject of their discourse, the one source of their joy; and, forsaken by all other, they will cleave only unto him till the blessed day when as the King of kings he shall come forth for their joy and glory.

V. And this leads us to a fifth and last feature in the description of the saints. They will be *waiting and watching for the coming of the Lord.*

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It is sometimes thought enthusiastic to be speaking much of the second coming of the Lord. Unfulfilled prophecy is thought difficult, and it is better, say many, to dwell exclusively upon the more certain narratives of the past. But not so the Scriptures. They describe believers as waiting, watching, and ardently expecting the blessed period of their Saviour's glory. For example, in 1 Thess. v. 4, expectation of the advent is the distinguishing characteristic of the people of God: "But ye brethren are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." To the world at large it should come as a thief in the night; it would find them unexpecting, unprepared; but not so to the saints. They would be on the look out; the world's night would be their day; the world's darkness their light; the world might see nothing, but they would see Christ. "Ye brethren are not in darkness, that that day should overtake *you* as a thief."

And it is very important in this respect to observe the contrast between the children of God and the surrounding world. With reference to the advent apathy, we have already seen, is to be the leading feature of society. Men will be unconscious and regardless of its approach. But with reference to the world's progress, even they shall be alarmed. They will be aroused, but not by the hope of Jesus. For look at the description: "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken;" Luke, xxi. 26. These words describe an undefined sense of something coming; a general expectation of some approaching crisis; a feeling of wonder as to what will happen next; a breaking up of former confidence, and a fearful looking after those things which are coming on the earth. Such will be the mind of those who look at things on merely worldly grounds. But now observe the contrasted character of the children of God. "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh;" v. 28. Like the men of the world, they look for an approaching crisis, but as men of faith they look beyond it. Like the world they observe the gathering storm; but as believers they fix their eye on Him who governs it. They will study history with their bibles in their hands; they will see in each passing change fresh landmarks, fresh signs of their Lord's approach. In the sound of war and the advance of error they will hear as it were the distant footsteps of their coming Lord. Prophecies will become clearer and clearer to their view, the book being unsealed according to the words of Daniel, because "the time of the end" is come. Facts will become interpreters, and difficulties be cleared up by the fulfilment of the prophecies; the signs of the advent will become intelligible in history; so that when He comes he will find his servants watching; looking up and lifting up their heads; waiting patiently, yet longing ardently; and ready to welcome their reigning King with the words long since provided for them by the Prophet. "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

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Believers! ye must be found thus waiting, thus watching. Time is hurrying on; but the men of this world still sleep in apathy. The voice of the watchman fails in rousing them; the signs of the times are neglected and despised by them. But it must not be so with the saints of God. Ye must be listening for his coming footstep; watching and keeping your garments in the midst of seducing error and abounding sin. As the chosen of God, ye must be standing forth for truth; as witnesses for Christ, ye must exalt the sovereignty of the word and of the Lamb; as citizens of the New Jerusalem, ye must be strangers and pilgrims upon earth. Oh! may God grant us all grace that we may be found faithful! May He hold us in his own right hand, and so make us more than conquerors over sin and error! May He take, under his especial care our wives, our children; our brethren, our dear friends, with the whole multitude of his scattered church! May He himself keep them and us in these dangerous days! that so, at his coming, both they and we may be found amongst the blessed company of God's faithful saints, and, beholding Christ in his glory may be made like him through the omnipotence of his grace!

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THE END.

FOOTNOTES.

[17] For the investigation of these prophecies, see Newton on the Prophecies, or Birks on the First Two Visions of Daniel.

[41] Hence it appears that defect in many of the church's ministers does not justify separation

from its communion. The Scriptures teach us plainly that such defect must be expected when the form and discipline are of the most perfect character.

[51] Is not this a fundamental error in the proposed Evangelical Alliance? It is a human scheme for the incorporation of God's elect.

[53] It is sometimes argued from these principles that believers are at liberty to disregard ecclesiastical distinctions; and, if justification were the only object which the Christian has in view, there might be some foundation for the conclusion. But the justified believer is living for a further and higher end, *viz.* a perfect conformity to the whole mind and will of God, and this latter is the standard to which all practical questions should be referred. In such cases the question is not "How does it affect my justification?" but, "Is it agreeable to God's will? and will it promote his glory?" Thus the importance of a Scriptural church discipline is not in the least affected by the principle that grace may prevail without it; nor is dissent necessarily justifiable because the dissenter may be justified. All believers are not always right in all things. Early education, early prejudice, or the sad defects and blemishes, which are too often seen in the human acting out of Scriptural principles, may serve to warp both the judgment and the will even of the child of God. Thus it is that a man may be safe in his union with Christ, and yet wrong in his want of union with the Episcopal church. Thus also we may regard such an one as a brother in Christ, while we are bound to protest against what we believe unscriptural in the system of his ministry.

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