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THE PROPHECIES OF OUR LORD
AND HIS APOSTLES.

THE PROPHECIES OF
OUR LORD
AND HIS APOSTLES.

A Series of Discourses

DELIVERED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH, BERLIN,

BY W. HOFFMANN, D.D.,

CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO THE KING.

Translated, with the Sanction of the Author,

BY

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.



THE central thought of these discourses is the great hope of the Apostolic Church, the glorious coming of the Lord for the completion of His Kingdom. The reviving of this hope in the hearts of so many believers of different lands is one of the most consolatory signs of the present day. Indeed, it may almost be said to constitute a new era in the history of the Church. Of the practical importance of the Apostle's admonition, 1 Thess. v. 19—21, not to repress the Spirit's work by attaching too light a value to the prophetic element in the New Testament, I cannot better speak than in the words of the Author, "All prophecy which we are not to despise falls necessarily within the broad outline and main lineaments with which the word of Apostolic prophecy

supplies us. We know—and, thanks be to God, it is powerfully proclaimed—that our righteousness is through faith; because all depends upon our apprehending God in Christ through faith. Faith is, therefore, clearly witnessed to, wherever the Word of God is preached in its purity, as the centre of the Christian life, and consequently also of the life of the Christian Church. Nor is it less insisted on that faith must work by love—that the love of God and of our neighbour is the sum of all the commandments of God, and, because God is love, we, who are loved of Him, must love in return. Less, however, is spoken of hope, the third in the Trinity of Graces. We are, indeed, at particular times, directed to this subject; but then, it is ever the hope of everlasting life, the hope whose fulfilment lies beyond the grave. That hope, on the other hand, which is given to the Church as a whole for her time on earth, before she has reached the end, and goes forth with joy and rejoicing to meet the Lord coming to judgment in the clouds of heaven, seldom receives its due share of attention. It is true it is not needful to speak so very frequently of this, but the Holy Spirit is a spirit of hope, and desires that the Christian hope should be living within us; *that* hope, also, which has

respect to the Church, the Kingdom of God as a whole. For the more we contemplate ourselves as those for whom are designed all the great institutions of God, which are completed in the long course of the world's history; the more each individual has the joyful and blessed consciousness of being reckoned in this great and mighty plan of God's gracious completion, and of having his place therein, the more our confidence increases of vanquishing Satan and sin, and flesh and blood, which ever seek to draw us within the sphere of their lower interests."

Of the New Testament prophecies Dr. Hoffmann is a reverent and loving expositor, and even those who may not in all points agree with his interpretation—whether they regard it as too spiritual, or too realistic—will feel that he has brought to his subject the result of profound research, and that he is ever ready to bow before the majesty of Scripture. All that we can yet know is, however, at best, only fragmentary. We know in part, and we prophesy in part; and only when that which is perfect is come shall that which is fragmentary be done away. It was within the original design of the author to deliver, at some future time, a series of discourses on the Apocalypse of John—a design which I hope may yet be carried into effect.

In any case I cannot but rejoice to have the privilege of introducing this series of discourses to the English public, regarding, as I do, the growing spirit of Christian catholicity represented by men like Dr. W. Hoffmann in Germany, Dean Alford in England, and Professor Islay Burns in Scotland, as one of the happiest auguries for the future of the Church of Christ. Commending the work in its English garb to the rich blessing of God, I pray that Author, Translator, and Reader, may meet where prophecy shall cease, because we shall see face to face.

M. J. E.

STRATFORD-ON-AVON,

October, 1869.

* * * For the Footnotes the Translator is responsible.

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FIRST PART.

The Prophecies of Our Lord.

THE PROPHECIES OF OUR LORD AND HIS APOSTLES.

The Final Prospect of the Church.

“If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha.”—I COR. xvi. 22.

BE not surprised, beloved in Christ Jesus, that on my return to you after a somewhat lengthened absence I choose for my salutation a text of Scripture which breathes a curse—*Anathema!* For the curse in this instance is relieved by a background which, for the believing heart, speaks only of light and life, of peace and joy. Our text concludes with the watchword *Maran-atha*, “The Lord comes,” with the watchword of the Church of Christ, which in her times of peace she has raised with thousand and million voices, and which, in her hours of suffering, she has sighed forth out of the depths. I return to you to-day after visiting a great number of Evangelical congregations, and inquiring after the life of faith and love in their

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members. The impression most deeply left upon my mind at the conclusion of my visitation was that which the Apostle expresses in his closing words to his beloved Corinthian Church—"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema," and "the Lord comes." Only His coming, and the certain hope and expectation of it, is able to support us in these times of depression and spiritual poverty ; and to enable us, in the assurance of that which His grace shall yet effect, to look with hopefulness on the Church to which we belong, while at the same time this trumpet-call of the Apostle exhorts us earnestly to inquire, "*When He comes will He find me watching?*" There is yet another reason for my choice of this text. You followed me with affection and interest, when during the past year we meditated on the prophecies and types of the Old Testament, listened to the voices of the watchmen which sounded forth so consolingly, but also with such stirring power, through the world's deep night and dawn. And now I am impelled to begin a new series of discourses on the prophecies of Holy Writ, but this time on the *prophecies of the New Testament* from the mouth of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of His Apostles, so that we now occupy ourselves with that blessed hope which here below, in affliction and darkness, in distress and death, must ever, *as a whole*, be held forth before the Church of Christ. To-day let us inquire as to the FINAL PROSPECT OF THE

CHURCH ON EARTH, and contemplate this prospect first on its SEVERE AND AWAKENING SIDE, and then on its GRACIOUS AND CONSOLING SIDE.

Lord Jesus, Thou Great Prophet and Instructor of the simple, Thou didst receive the Spirit of prophecy without measure of Thy Father in the days of Thy flesh ; Thou didst shed forth this Spirit upon Thy disciples, and didst give Him to speak to all generations of Thy Church, and even to-day in Thy word and Thy disciples' word. Help us to understand this word, that we may not be merely wondering hearers of that which Thou hast before spoken, but that when the Spirit testifies "the Lord comes," we may be able to say, "Even so ; come quickly !" Amen.

Beloved in the Lord,—You may, perhaps, feel inclined to ask—Why, then, again *prophecy* ? Is there in the New Testament, as well as in the Old, a distant goal set before us ? Must we still look for that which is future ? Does not one important distinction between the Old Covenant and the New consist in this, that under the one salvation has to be waited for and hoped for, and under the other it has already appeared ? Do not the Apostles of our Lord even speak of facts which have taken place, of the word of the cross, of the risen Saviour ? Does not John say, "That which we have seen and heard, which our hands have touched of the word of life, declare we unto you ?" And does he not add, "The life was manifested ?"

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True; and on this account the New Testament prophecies are not of the same all-decisive importance to believers under the New Covenant as were the Old Testament prophecies for believers under the Old Covenant. But who can say, This is important, that is unimportant, in the whole domain of Divine revelation? Who of us would be so rash as to assert that what Christ has spoken of the future of His Church—so far as it has not yet become past or present—does not concern us, has nothing to do with our spiritual life? And how could such a one withstand that warning of the Holy Spirit recorded at the close of the whole Bible, “I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things that are written in this book?” Thus does the Holy Spirit attach great importance to the right relation of faith to prophecy, even where the import of prophecy is not yet perfectly understood. It is a duty, then, for us, following the prophetic word, to contemplate the final prospect of the Church on earth, and all that is prophesied of the future of that Church. And this final prospect the Apostle opens before us in the solemn expression of the Aramaean language, *Maran-atha*, “The Lord comes!”

This expression has first *a terrible and awakening side*. You must confess that nothing renders us more sluggish, weary, and indifferent than when one year after another passes as before ; all remains as it was ; the minuter changes and alternations of affairs being scarcely perceived, and every succeeding decade of years, save that it finds us older, bears in the spiritual domain essentially the same character as the preceding. It is a matter of experience that nothing more depresses us in the life of faith, than when the enervating impression prevails, there is nothing new under the sun ; everything moves in constant rotation—moves according to an unknown law of necessity, but ever the old returns, in a new and slightly altered form, yet in inner life and essence the same as it has always been ; and when we meet with such questions as those which the Second Epistle of Peter describes as then current in the Christian community, “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.” This languid, enervating, and enervated wisdom of the natural understanding, which compares only that which is present, affords to the Church of Christ no hopeful prospect. Into the midst of this feeble and paralysed Christianity, no longer capable of any aspiration in the power of the Divine word, must ring the trumpet-note “Maran-atha, the Lord comes !” Whether thou wilt believe it or not ; whether the expectation of thy

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Lord Jesus Christ to judgment, upon the clouds with great power and glory, should disappear from Christendom, and appear, so far as thy life is concerned, only an insignificant and worthless appendix to the scheme of Christian doctrine ; or whether thou shouldst day by day, and hour by hour, meditate on the Lord in the parable who findeth His servants watching or sleeping ; or on the bridegroom whom the virgins were to go forth to meet, but who found five with trimmed and burning lamps, and five in darkness—the Lord comes, altogether irrespective of thy preparedness.

And now, my brethren, *wherefore* does he come ? We confess with all Christians, “ He shall come again to judge the quick and the dead.” And *how* will he come ? The answer is received at the lips of the two men in white apparel, “ He shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into Heaven.” So, in His glorified humanity, as the High Priest, tempted in all points, yet without sin ; as the Saviour who has descended into the deepest grief, into the sorrows of death ; and in answer to whom thou canst not open thy mouth. He comes not in the lowly servant form, but in the clouds of Heaven, with great power and glory. He comes for those who believe in Him, who love His appearing, who so look for the great God and Saviour Jesus Christ from Heaven, as to go forth to meet Him with the cry—Come quickly !

We have now gained a point of contact with the

individual conscience. The question shapes itself thus—Is the thought of the return of Christ from Heaven for thee one inspiring terror? Bring the thought again before you. It may be to-day that our Lord Jesus Christ, the perfected Prince of our salvation, will descend from Heaven, and before His throne all will be made manifest who have walked on earth (from the first of the human race), who have not entered into salvation through faith. If, then, all outward form, which only veils the true man, shall disappear; if every secret of wickedness, creeping in darkness, shall be brought to the light of eternity; if the thoughts of thy heart, and all the dark passions and the intricate web of thy inner life shall be disclosed before the eyes of all men, is not the thought one of terror? Therefore does the Apostle employ so severe a word in regard to those who love not the Lord Jesus Christ, the word “Anathema”—rejection—curse—banishment—exclusion; exclusion not only here on earth from the Church, but exclusion from the communion of those who possess in Christ Jesus their only, their perfect life; exclusion from the peace and joy of the Holy Ghost, in which the kingdom of God consists; exclusion from the hope which remains to every believer, even when he trembles and sighs in the darkest nights of suffering; exclusion from all the heavenly glory which shall follow; exclusion from the assembly of just men made perfect, and from the host of glorious beings who, from eternity to eternity,

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sing the praises of redemption, of creation, of the whole work of God. And whither banished? Given up to thyself, to thine own darkness, and to the fellowship of those who, like thee, loved not our Lord Jesus Christ—to the world of hatred, of everlasting death. It is a word of earnest warning which the Apostle directs to every heart in the cry—The Lord comes! And therefore it is needful we should ask, How shall I stand in the great day of His coming? In this respect I testify to you again, from the impressions I have received in the words, and without words from the hearts, of many thousands of members of our National Church within the last few weeks, that where love to the Lord Jesus Christ has not become the first and only dominant affection of the heart, there is no standing either now against the temptations of the world and the devil, or amidst the last trials, and before the judgment-seat. Only personal communion with thy Saviour is the all-victorious power which shall here render thee superior to thy foes, and there sustain thee before His judgment-seat. He that loves the Lord Jesus Christ is not perplexed, or if perplexed, is not in despair. But unto him that loves Him not, the premonitions of Christ's appearing—the signs of which He has spoken as presented in Heaven and earth, in the sun and moon, will be a source of surprise and dread. Then “all kindreds of the earth shall wail.”

Therefore, my brethren, in proportion as the words

I have read to you are terrible, do they urge upon you to seek after that which is no longer terrible, but that which is most precious—the treasure of our heart, the pearl of our whole being—the love of Christ.

But our Lord Jesus Christ can no one truly love who knows not how much he has been loved of Him; and the Apostle might therefore have said, “If any man believe not on the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema!” He is evidently speaking of those to whom Christ has been proclaimed, who profess him, and not of the heathen who are without, and to whom the word of the cross is unknown. *Thou* hast in baptism received the seal of the Three-one God, hast heard throughout thy life the footsteps of the faithful Shepherd, and must confess, “Oft-times in sorrow, oft-times in joy, has the Lord my God drawn near to me.” Hast thou, then, experienced the love of Christ? Hast thou at least a blissful feeling that the Lord Jesus Christ has consecrated for thee, a wretched sinner, His life and sufferings, and the powers of His soul; that He loves thee with a love of which all the most tender, ardent, intense, and powerful on earth is yet but a feeble reflection? If thou knowest this, thou canst not but love Him again; for He has sued for thy heart until He could say, “Thou art mine, and I am thine.”

If, on the other hand, thou hast not experienced it, knowest not that thou art so greatly loved, and speakest only of the general fatherly love of God, in

which He causes His sun to shine upon the evil and the good, then thou knowest nothing of love towards our Lord Jesus Christ, and the cry of "Maran-atha" sounds in thy conscience as a trumpet-note of judgment, and the voice of self-condemnation is awakened within thee: "I have hitherto loved nothing but my own miserable self; I have seemed to love others, but all the love which I showed to them was only another form of my self-love; I know not yet what love is, for I have not known an earthly love which is a reflex of the eternal love, much less that eternal love itself." This is the severe and alarming side in the final prospect of the Church of Christ on earth.

We have already, in the foregoing pages, cast a rapid glance at the GRACIOUS AND CONSOLING SIDE. To those especially who love our Lord Jesus Christ is the salutation addressed. At what does love aim? What is its goal? Union—blending—oneness with the beloved. A child of God who loves the Lord Jesus Christ cannot be fully satisfied until that has been fulfilled to him which John expresses in the words, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be. But we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Or as Paul expresses it, "He shall change the body of our humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto the body of His glory, according to the power whereby He is able also to subdue all things to Himself." A true Christian is not perfectly satisfied until he is with Jesus Christ, glorified with the glorified Saviour; as

spirit with Him who is the Spirit, bodily with Him who in glorified humanity has ascended into Heaven. Then is peace and holy delight. And all the expressions which human language has for joy and enlargement of heart remain far short of the feelings of the soul—poor and unsuccessful attempts to represent this glory and blessedness. On earth, the Christian—his love never perfectly satisfied here below—stands in need of consolation, and this consolation is “Maranatha, the Lord comes!” By this is not merely said that you must die, that you will not need to remain here; by this the hope is not merely given, that one day, when the hour of your God has come, you will be permitted to lay aside this body of mortality, of death, and of sin; and purified through the blood of Jesus Christ, to enter into the blessed communion with all who have been before glorified. Something yet higher is expressed in this word. It proclaims that not only does the Lord stand in a saving relation of grace towards the individuals who know in faith how they have been loved of Him, and who love Him in return; but also that this is a condition of His kingdom, that the Lord shall once more come, and we behold Him; and then, as it is written in the Epistle to the Corinthians, the Son “shall deliver up the kingdom to the Father”—shall transplant and raise the earthly kingdom into the heavenly. The consolatory import of this word constitutes a hope of the kingdom—a universal one—not for thee

alone, but for all who believe—a final prospect for the Church. And yet more, this hope is given unto *thee*. It is said, “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema!”—for him the Lord comes to judgment; but if any man, it is tacitly asserted, love the Lord Jesus Christ, for him the Lord comes, not to judgment, but to his delight and joy.

Beloved friends, this is the fair and consolatory side in the future of the kingdom of God. That which we begin to-day will consequently ever be a meditation, inspiring terror for him who loves not the Lord Jesus Christ; but at the same time, a meditation affording consolation, strengthening, and joy for him who does love Christ.

What, then, is demanded and expected of thee that thou mayest have a part among them that are saved in the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ; that it may be for thee the close of all sufferings, of all tribulation, of all affliction, of all seeking and striving; and the beginning of all enlargement and fulness of the heart, of all joy and glory? Nothing but this, that thou lovest the Lord Jesus Christ. It is true I have before said, and with good reason, that no one can do this who is not himself loved of Christ. But though only a spark of this love to Jesus Christ is present, the Maran-atha loses its terrible force; it becomes consolatory. And where this spark burns only dimly, the Lord has given His gracious promise

that He will not quench the smoking flax—will not leave unfinished the work begun.

Oh, search yourselves, make it your earnest business while it is called to-day, to examine whether you have in your heart love to the Saviour, this Son of God and Son of man—this Priest, and King, and Victim! Ask yourselves whether life would be for you blank and desolate if He were only, as in the blindness of our time He is often represented, a lofty model of human perfection, but not the Heaven-descended one, the Son of Man who is in Heaven! Would this doctrine of fools, if it were true, blot out the sum of your life! Be of good cheer; if this be so, love for the Saviour is present in your heart, though as a feeble spark. And if this love be present, He will Himself prepare them who wait for His appearing—ever anew will fan to a flame the spark which threatens to die.

In this way we shall grow to that power of love in which we can make the watchword of the Church of Christ on earth "*Maran-atha*" (the Lord cometh!) our cry of joy; and in the midst of all tribulations and all conflicts, as well as in all deep feeling of our own want and insufficiency, can console ourselves with the thought, "*I have a glorious goal: my Lord comes!*" From this arises gradually a joyful waiting and longing, a certain confident hoping for the coming of the Lord, so that at length the cry ever more resounds, "Come quickly!" And where such longing and sighing

for His coming is found, there hearts unite, so that it is no longer here and there a single one who with trembling raises the cry, but it becomes ever louder and more powerful in swelling chorus, the watchword of believers of the true Church of God on earth —“Come, Lord Jesus!” *Amen.*

The First Conflict.

“ Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves : be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men : for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues ; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak ; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child : and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake ; but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.”—**MATT. x. 16—22.**

WE have now entered upon the sacred domain of New Testament Prophecy, and have before us to-day the foundation prophecy of Our Lord Jesus Christ as to the course of His Kingdom through all the ages of the world. For it will be understood that we do not make those Prophecies of the Lord the object of our meditation in which He predicts His sufferings, His resurrection, His ascension, and which long ago

have passed into complete and glorious fulfilment ; but that we have to do with those of His discourses in which He depicts before the eyes of His disciples the progress of His kingdom upon earth unto its earthly and heavenly completion ; that we are consequently led with especial care to examine those of His discourses in which, beginning with His own entering upon everlasting perfection and glory, now step by step, He gives us to see what shall afterwards take place, until at length the moment bursts upon us in which the word shall be perfectly fulfilled, "Behold, I make all things new." I have called that the foundation-prophecy of our Lord, which is contained in the words of our text ; but, at the same time, to designate its import, I call it the Prophecy of the FIRST CONFLICT. Our Lord, however, predicts this conflict as not once only to be fought, but as one which, beginning for His disciples, soon after His ascension, would continue through the time of their life, and would be repeated through all the ages of His Church unto the final victory.

We shall, therefore, have to speak of a conflict which lies not only in the past, but is to be looked for with yet greater intensity in the future, and which, in a lesser degree, characterizes the present also. The first conflict is set before our eyes, and we see here three forms of it—first, the DISCIPLE AND THE WORLD ; then, the WITNESS AND HIS WORD ; and lastly, the COMBATANT AND HIS WORK.

Lord Jesus, thou bidst us look upon the conflict which Thy disciples must wage to their latest breath, which Thou wilt give Thy Church again to wage when Thine hour comes—a conflict now hidden from us, but which we also, if we are Thy true disciples, must join in. Give us, then, only with joy to look to Thee, the Beginner and Finisher of our faith, the Captain of our salvation, that we may not alone look upon the conflict, but courageously perform our part in the same, assured that under Thy banner we shall be victorious. Amen.

Beloved in the Lord, in the right understanding of New Testament Prophecy, very much depends upon observing the distinction of periods, oftentimes difficult to recognise, but which, nevertheless, exists in the Sacred Scriptures. It is not even to this hour fully determined what finer references in the prophetic discourses of Our Lord relate only to a judgment already accomplished—the destruction of Jerusalem—which relate to a completion of His kingdom upon earth, and which relate to the last judgment, the second coming of our Lord. And so it is with other prophecies. Under the old covenant also, nothing was more difficult to understand than the transition from one goal of prophecy to another. Here, in this foundation-prophecy, one thing at least is clear, that the Lord speaks of things which the disciples who heard him should live speedily to witness. In this respect we have before us a prophecy already fulfilled.

But then, also, this prophecy has its application to the whole form of the Kingdom of Christ on earth during by far the longest period of its existence ; speaks not of things which take place once for all, and afterwards become the substratum upon which the future is built, but of things which constantly repeat themselves. A fundamental law of the Kingdom of God is here expressed, namely, that a disciple of Christ and the world stand in antagonism to each other ; that the witness of Christ, with his word, turns to this hostile world ; and that the soldier of Christ suffers defeat, and, nevertheless, triumphs. Therefore, we must bring into prominence these three forms.

Let us then proceed to particulars. "I send you forth," says the Lord to His disciples, "as sheep in the midst of wolves ;" and almost immediately adds, "But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to their councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues, and you shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake." All of which clearly said to the disciples, "As you come forth from the quiet circle in which you are now gathered around me, when my earthly course is finished, and your first preparation is completed, and you begin to show yourselves as the disciples of the Crucified, you will become conscious of a new life, a power entirely unknown to the world before, which affects the Jewish world immediately surrounding you, as well as the distant heathen world—a power which awakens

opposition rising to avowed hostility, to hatred, and, at last, to the works of hatred." Thus the Lord proclaims beforehand a severe and exhausting conflict; and not without design does He afford them a detailed view of that which should happen. It is true, He says in general, "Beware of men," and implies thereby that humanity would be hostile to them, at their first appearance they would be an object of aversion for all. But then He gives them—what they before little thought of—a view of council houses and assemblies of those who have judicial power, and even of princes' palaces and courts of kings, and says, "Thither will you be brought, my poor disciples, and there will you be called upon to confess me." Evidently, the Lord will thereby make known to them beforehand that it is the nature of His kingdom not only to affect unfavourably one here and there who displays an especial aversion for the truth, but to have whole masses, yea, even spiritual communities, as its foes; for He speaks of the synagogues in which they would be scourged, where their presence would be unendurable, and where it would be thought right to put them to death.

Behold, my friends, the expression of a fixed law. The Kingdom of Christ comes to the world as something strange to it, as something adverse; and this because the world knows not its own truest, deepest, and best life; because it comprehends not the light which has long been shining in it; because it will not

receive the appeasing of that longing which has impelled it into the ways of idolatry; because it would rather continue to drink of the bitter and brackish water, and, therefore, remains incapable of relishing the God-sent Water of Life. That is how it has happened in the history of the Christian Church. The disciples of Jesus have been delivered by the Jews into the hands of the Gentiles, and the Gentiles have hated and persecuted them at once as those who came forth from the detested nation of the Jews, and as those who brought a new doctrine and worship, and threatened to overthrow the thrones and altars of the ancient gods.

We know, by a multitude of testimonies both Christian and heathen, that against no one the most dissimilar superstitions, the most cold and haughty unbelief, conspired so ardently as against the lowly men who came forth from the obscurity of Galilee and proclaimed the Crucified. We know, from the letters of the Apostle Paul, how the word of the Cross was to the Jews an offence, to the Greeks foolishness; how, consequently, the message which formed the centre of all the apostolic proclamations—that the Son of God is come in the flesh as the Paschal Lamb, has died upon the cross for the sin of the world—became the great and universal stumbling-block. You will say, Thanks be to God, this first conflict is left behind us. You will, at most, cast your eyes upon distant lands, where an overpowering idolatry still confronts the solitary herald of the Cross, and

exhausts him with toil and anxieties, if it does not at all times imperil his life or liberty. But this is an error. The Lord spoke these words to His disciples, precisely as he speaks to them all those other words which we do not hesitate to apply to believers of every age. We also must have our share in these words; not only as regards the future which yet awaits the Church, but as regards the present life of the disciples of Jesus. The world to-day stands in the same antagonism towards Christ as it did then. It is true we have no longer to seek around us *that* world to which a Peter, a John, a Paul, must oppose a front courageous through faith. But, we ask, are there in our days, and in the midst of the Christian Church, those who, by their own doing and abstaining, by their speech and silence, show the Cross of Jesus Christ beaming forth in them as the sacred sign of their redemption—are they, in the Christian society of the present day, the most welcome guests?

Is it not common to find fault with them, and that which they proclaim, and to seek occasion to evade the force of the testimony they give? Must we not confess that now in the Christian world the distinction meets us again between the living and true Christians and the world? It is true that the two divisions are not separated by a sharply-drawn line perceptible to every one, and under all circumstances. It was not even so in the Apostles' time; for in Israel there were many persecutors of the disciples

of Jesus, who afterwards became their warmest friends, their brethren and companions in faith. Saul is the most towering form among these, but he certainly did not stand alone; and even among the heathen there were earnest souls who did not seek after truth entirely in vain, who cherished a desire after salvation and peace with God, and, at first, hoped to satisfy this longing nowhere so little as in the proclamation of the Cross of Jesus of Nazareth, the Galilean put to death in Jerusalem at the command of the Roman Procurator. And yet a good number of them afterwards became teachers and lights in the Church of Christ. Then, also, there were certain border-lands and transitory states between the world and the children of God. Such there are now. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore nor close our eyes to the fact that Judaism and heathenism, superstition and unbelief—in spite of all the Divine revelation enclosed in the husk of Judaism, and notwithstanding the higher yearnings of heathen philosophy—opposed to the apostolic message a decided hatred. So it is still; and in many a soul which speaks of Christian things with interest, yea, even with a kind of inspiration, and in thousands of minds which speak little or nothing of it, there is an aversion for the living power of true Christianity, a genuine discipleship; and should such disciple of Christ only present himself, this aversion would be revealed in words or, at least, in mien, and, where the occasion occurs, in more than

word or mien. Let each one examine carefully whether, when—what, perhaps, seldom happens—he meets one who, in quiet simplicity, in uprightness of heart, without many words, with patience, meekness, and long suffering, confesses Jesus Christ the Crucified alone as the light, the power, and the joy of his life—whether he is well pleased, whether he feels himself drawn to such an one, and his heart goes towards him; or whether the desire arises to find a weak side to his religious life, or a stain in his character; or whether he even feels as though he must flee the presence, the intercourse, and the influence of this man? In this is seen the hatred of the world for the disciples of Christ; for the disciples of Jesus Christ are known, not by their bearing no traces of sins, faults, and infirmities, and certainly not by their testifying of Jesus in words, by their speaking fluently of Him, but by this, that everyone must secretly confess, “what He is we can become only when some miraculous change has passed over us—some change from on high. That which He speaks of the word and Cross of Christ is the result of deep and heartfelt conviction.”

When such an one is recognised, the world at first at least regards him with little friendship, with dislike, or even with hostility; for the disciple passes through the world not simply as a disciple, but he testifies: HE IS A WITNESS, AND HIS WORD IS A TESTIMONY.

It is written in our text, "Ye shall be brought before governors and kings for My sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles." That is not merely as though he should say, the fact that you are treated with hostility, and that they will bring you as transgressors before principalities and powers, would be in itself a witness in regard to them; but it is predicted to the Apostles that they will have an opportunity in the synagogues, council-houses, and palaces, to testify in word of Him their Saviour. Accordingly, he presently adds, "Take no thought how or what ye shall speak." It is this to which we naturally pass from the consideration of the disciple, and his position in regard to the world.

So they went forth, these despised and unpretending men, these organs of the Holy Spirit. Even their first appearance commanded, often against the will of those to whom they came, certain reverence; something beamed from the eyes of these lowly men which was not read in the eye of heathen philosophers, or of Jewish Scribes; a sacred fire, a sacred light, a sacred love beamed forth from them. They were precisely such as were most unendurable to the heart resisting the truth, because they rendered a silent testimony; they stood there as men in whom something of the primæval glory of the Divine likeness was to be recognised—something of the confidence and assurance of faith, which overcomes the world—something of the love which is stronger than death—something

of the living hope which no bloodshed, no shame on earth is able to quench. For this reason, those among the Gentiles and Jews who were not laid hold of by their testimony became their most decided foes.

For it is ever true that a man who wishes to continue in sin, to whom a lie is dearer than truth, because truth condemns him before it makes him free, can abide no one less than Him who, through God's grace, has become a partaker of light and life and Divine truth. The words of Jesus—"Be not anxious how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your Father which speaketh in you"—bring us into the very heart of our subject. It is no longer a question of man's testimony, but of God's testimony through men; and no longer of man's word, but of God's word in the mouth of man. God speaks; the Crucified Saviour, raised and seated at the right hand of the Majesty of His Father, speaks in the Holy Ghost through His disciples. And the testimonies of the disciples of Jesus we now possess, under the name of the New Testament, as the well-spring and Divine standard of all our spiritual life, knowledge, and action.

They stand now before the world, and that not before the great undistinguished mass, but before the princes of the world, the wise and learned of the world, the conscious defenders of the world and its principles; they stand not only as individual persons

who bring a doctrine, but as organs of everlasting truth ; and their testimony comes to the hearts of these princes, these rulers, and these scribes, and invites them to the Lamb of God, who beareth the sin of the world. Their first testimony ever remains, that the life has appeared, and that the longing for life which breathes through the world needs no more to seek its satisfaction in broken cisterns, but that now the spring of life is flowing, and every one that thirsts may drink the water of life without price. Such testimony, when it came to the heathen and their great ones, found also—according to the promise of the Lord, that the Gospel should be preached to the poor—its way to the lowly among the people. This testimony from the mouth of God, of the Holy Ghost, it is which has given birth to the Church of Christ, has overthrown the glory and power of the heathen world, and has transformed the seats of heathen dominion into thrones of Christian government. It brought its recipients at first nothing but the bitter cup to drink, which their Master Himself had drunk. We know that of the Apostles, no one, so far as our acquaintance extends, passed through life without severe trials ; and scarcely any one entered eternity by what is termed a natural death. And we know, further, that they were only the first followers after Christ, the first fruits ; that they were succeeded by a long succession of martyrs, who were called to lay down their life for the testimony of Jesus.

This conflict is continued through all ages of the Christian Church. There have, indeed, been quieter times, when the authorities did not rise up against the Lord, and against His anointed, to bring those who confessed Him before their tribunal, cast them into prison, and to lead them to the scaffold. But there have also been other times, which have often recurred since the time of the Apostles, and will, perhaps, return again. I may even leave out the word "perhaps," and say, they *will* return again, according to the word of prophecy. This conflict will yet be prolonged, and the world, which calls itself Christian, will yet once more be drawn up in battle array against those who bear the testimony of Jesus; and the occasion will yet arise for showing who belongs to the Saviour for life and death, and who accompanies His hosts only so long as it is a time of peace.

Remember, dear friends, that the word of the testimony which produces such effects, which becomes a witness to whole nations, either for judgment or for life—that word is not the word of man; and, therefore, if we should be, each one in his measure, witnesses of Jesus Christ, and if this prophecy, in its alarming and its consoling aspect, is to belong to us, the word of the Holy Ghost, the word of the Heavenly Father, must also be in us, and we must have something to speak which is not of ourselves, but of Him who speaketh in us. A witness of Jesus is only he who, like the Apostles, speaks, because he cannot but

speak, of this Jesus of Nazareth ; and this from his innermost experience, because he has received forgiveness of sins, life, and blessedness, through Jesus Christ. The witness of Christ is he who, in the sphere in which God has placed him, invites and urges those who are yet far from Jesus to taste the goodness of the Lord. Such an one is a witness for Christ, be he ever so unlearned, poor, and in every way inferior, according to human judgment ; let him only know the simple foundation-truths by living faith—*living*, that is, as the Holy Spirit speaks them in him. Such witnesses of Jesus Christ will experience in our time the same fate as the Apostles ; not exactly the cross and the sword, but scorn, contempt, repulses, misrepresentation, and even persecution. In their case will be seen that neither the advanced culture of our European nations, nor the Christian culture of our Evangelical Church, will be able to repress the enmity against the Cross of Christ, and against the pure and simple testimony concerning it.

The hour appointed in God's hidden counsel for removing the barriers which restrain the passion and hatred of men against Christ has not yet struck, nor will it in the immediate future. We know not, it is true, whether any of us may live to behold such a time ; but this we know, that then only shall we have our part in the victory and blessing of Jesus Christ, if we in this our time are witnesses as we have been called to be. A nation of witnesses, a Church of

witnesses will the Lord make of us, if we have in us the word of the Holy Ghost as an irresistible, all-subjecting power.

Consequently, the witness has become a COMBATANT ; and it is of this which our text last speaks. The disciple shall be a witness ; the witness a combatant. How, then, does he become a combatant ? In this, that through the rejection of his testimony, he is not prevented from further testifying that he regards the hatred and bitterness which meets him, as the Apostle Peter exhorts the believers to do in his first Epistle : " Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you ; for the time is come that judgment must begin at the House of God." He becomes a combatant because he sees opposed to him a hostile power, and that not in men. The combatant of Christ, though he has also to do with men, has not regard simply to men ; just as he himself does not come forward and bear witness, simply in his human character. As he is the organ of the Holy Ghost, so are they also, if they steadfastly resist the Word of God and return hatred for love, organs of the Prince of Darkness, the Prince of this World ; and, therefore, the witness of Christ knows and experiences, again and again, that his warfare is with principalities and powers, who rule in the darkness of this world—that is to say, that he has to do with the evil spirits under heaven, with the kingdom of Satan.

It is written in our text, "And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and the children shall rise up against the parents, and cause them to be put to death." Shall, indeed, the most sacred bonds which God himself has knitted between father and mother, husband and wife, be dissolved, through the testimony of the disciples of Jesus? And yet, so it is; there is no other bond so sacred and so endearing as to be compared with that which binds the human heart to its Saviour. If a human being is once united to Christ, has once entered into living communion with Him through His grace, draws daily and hourly all his light and all his strength from this one heart, then the world feels it—even that world united with us in closest bonds—the husband of the wife, the wife of the husband, father and mother of the children, and the children of each other, friends formerly most intimate—feels that a higher communion has come between. If, then, they are not drawn to Him by the same gracious power which took hold of the first in their circle, but resist Him, the member of their circle who has become a believer, who has become spiritually new, is so much more hated of them, so much the more an object of aversion as he was before near to them. For wherever a regenerate man enters into the circle of others, even upright, honourable men, he is a witness. They read, without his speaking a word, in his whole bearing, "You also ought to be as I am." Then

there is ever felt a Divine admonition, which says, "Behold, it is possible to become on earth, in the midst of this poor, sinful world, a possession of God in Christ Jesus." Where such a witness is borne, there is strife and conflict; there arises even that which the Lord has predicted in such words of power—the tearing asunder of the most sacred and noblest bonds. The Word of God brings at first, as our Saviour himself has said, not peace, but the sword. It separates, in the individual man, joint and marrow, soul and spirit; and in the community of men, everything which is of the truth from that which is not. We cannot remain neutral in the presence of the living witness of Christ; we must either submit to Him, to receive therefrom peace, and blessing, and everlasting life, or we must resist. Thus, the witness of Christ is exposed to continual conflict, and must be reproached, as the Gospel itself is often reproached, with bringing disturbance and dispeace, with marring the beauty of life, with destroying the charm and grace of social intercourse, with demanding of us that which is impossible, and thus depriving life of its cheerfulness. These are modes of expression heard in our own time; we hear every day such language as this—"This is a superhuman demand; we are so weak, and God will not require of us above our power." But, beloved, all this, since Christ's ascension, is no longer admissible. It is not said, *Thou shalt restore in thyself*

the image of God; but, *He will do it*. If it were necessary that *you* should do it, if it were even possible to lift up your head proudly and boldly, and to press forward in the strength of your own virtue, you would feel less to repel you. But because it is necessary, as a sinner, to be accepted through grace—to be judged in grace, but also to be justified through grace—there is an offence; and thus every disciple of Jesus, so long as the Church of Christ shall remain the Church militant, will be exposed to conflict.

“But he that endureth to the end shall be saved.” These are words of very serious import; and we shall have, in our after meditations, more fully to examine them. “He that endureth to the end shall be saved.” What powerful temptations, what assaults of the world, what weakness of faith, what lukewarmness, what cooling of affection, and what dejection arise! And yet it is said, “He that *endureth* to the end shall be saved.” In this promise lies the greatest wonder of Divine grace. There is, properly, only *One* who can be regarded by God as having endured to the end—the Prince of our Salvation. And yet the Lord speaks of poor men who will persevere. This is grace upon grace. Here there must be an intervention of Divine help, and a Divine imputation through grace. And so it is. The nearer the end comes to each, and to Christians in general on earth, so much the more deeply and painfully will each one, and believers as a

whole, feel the spiritual poverty in which they have walked, the sin they have wrought, the indolence of which they have to accuse themselves, the failures they have to repair; and will wonder, can only wonder, that God remembers not these their sins, but regards them only as such as have endured to the end.

Oh, my friends, are we disciples? are we witnesses? are we combatants? Then, be of good cheer; the Lord is He who will enable us to endure unto the end. And, then, the blessedness! Yea, not then first, for we already taste from time to time a drop out of the full cup of Eternity. Already, amidst the bitterest tears, we are enabled to experience to some extent that the Lord knows His own, that He crowns them and satisfies them with heavenly good. But what will this be, compared with the joy and blessedness contained in the words, "Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptation." Oh, that then none of us may be wanting! Amen.

The Coming of the Son of Man.



“Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom.”
—MATT. xvi. 28.

BELOVED IN CHRIST JESUS,—In the first of the meditations, whose series we follow, I called to you, in the words of the Apostle Paul, “*The Lord comes!*” In the second, supported by a word of the Saviour, we glanced at the characteristics of His kingdom as a whole, and found it was a *kingdom of conflict* here on earth. To-day the outstretched finger of the Lord Jesus Christ points us again to the COMING OF THE SON OF MAN; and he brings before our eye two points, in that he once says to us, HE COMES IN HIS KINGDOM, and then adds, HE COMES QUICKLY.

Lord, Thou didst come, Thou comest still, and Thou wilt yet come. Oh, help us by Thy Holy Spirit, that we may love Thine appearing; that, as He who has come, Thou mayest ever be our salvation and life, that we may daily experience Thy coming, and may joyfully await Thy advent in glory. Amen.

Our meditation has once more the same foundation—thought. The Lord comes. We meditate on

the coming of the Lord ; but this time we have not to show in general that He comes, and that in all ages of the Church, until the last of the days, this hope and supporting expectation of His coming must continue ; but we have to receive instructions from Him concerning the way and manner in which the Son of man comes, namely, *in what character* He comes, and *when* He comes.

As to the character in which He comes, our text is only one of many which speak of it ; for it is known to us all that He will not come a second time in humility and poverty, will not appear again to bear the burden of our sins and misery, but as King and Lord ; that He will not come again, afterwards to depart and to disappear from our eyes in the clouds of heaven, but will come to bring in the end ; after which all who have believed in Him will behold Him in unspeakable joy and blessedness, and all who have rejected Him will receive the reward of their works from everlasting to everlasting. He will come **IN HIS KINGDOM** ; and since this kingdom is a kingdom on earth, and is called a kingdom of heaven because it was founded—or, I would rather say, born—from above, and because its highest peak soars again into heaven, into the sunlight of everlasting glory, there is, on this account, need for a closer examination of that which our Lord says : “ Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the

Son of man coming in His kingdom." Did He by this mean to imply that the last visible manifestation of the Son of man in glory, to judge the world, would take place during the lifetime of some who were then surrounding him? He could not mean this, since He himself has said, "The times and the seasons the Father hath put in His own power. The day and the hour know not the angels which are in heaven; not even the Son." But were there not some among His disciples who, in their lifetime, had occasion to think of these words from their Master's lips, who received so truly the fulfilment of them, that no more doubt could remain as to their meaning? Of what event have we first to think? of what coming of the Lord? Of that which He proclaimed to Jerusalem; that He would come and judge the city of God and the chosen people. Nevertheless, in those discourses in which He speaks of the future and the last earthly goal of His kingdom, he gathers together, in one picture, in one contemplation, more than once, the judgment which came upon Israel, and the destruction of Jerusalem, and events which should take place centuries afterwards, and, finally, His appearing amidst the flames of the last judgment; so that we are not in a position sharply to separate between the one and the other, but must say, all belongs to one great Divine whole. His kingdom began when the Holy Ghost descended, gathered souls together, and made them His subjects, so that

they could no more leave Him—that no powers of the world and no powers of hell were able to tear them from Him. But not of this manifestation of His kingdom does He speak when He says, “The Son of man will come in His kingdom.” He speaks of His majestic victory, of His kingly sway, and of the important moments in the history of the world, when this kingly sway of the crucified Son of man, from the throne of eternity, becomes manifest for all who know anything whatever of Him. To such periods belongs, first, the destruction of the Jewish state, of the Jewish national life, and, above all, of the temple and its sacrifices. That is the first mighty coming of the Lord in His kingdom. For how came about the destruction of Jerusalem, viewed in relation to His kingdom? Looking back, we must answer, For a chastisement—for a judgment upon the unfaithful nation. Looking forward, that the Gospel might be preached in all the world. So long as Jerusalem remained, this magnet placed there by the hand of God himself, all apostolic labour turned upon *its* centre, all eyes were directed to this one city of God’s revelation; and never, humanly speaking, would the kingdom of God, the preaching of Jesus Christ and faith in the Crucified, have been able to reach all the nations of the earth, if Jerusalem had remained in its ancient importance; for it was the place distinguished by God, by its association with the greatest turning points in the whole history of God’s king-

dom. In Jerusalem happened all, or at least the greater part, of that which exerted the deepest influence on the spiritual destinies of mankind, from the offering of Isaac upon Moriah, and from the appearing of Melchisedec at Salem, to the ascension of the Son of God and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. Therefore, the chosen Apostle to the heathen, Paul, who testified of Christ in the most illustrious cities of the Gentile world, was not able to remain far distant from this centre. Ever and again we see this Apostle also journeying up to Jerusalem, and there holding brotherly intercourse with those who were pillars of the Church of Christ, and who had remained in the Holy City. Yea, the Lord himself had at first said, "Tarry in Jerusalem;" and this so penetrated the hearts of the first Church, even of many Gentile Christians, that in the gathering of the Roman armies around Jerusalem, and their knocking at the doors of the Holy City, and in the coming of the abomination of desolation which left not one stone upon another, there became manifest to them a doctrine, a revelation, a fact of God's kingdom, which no one but the Lord, in prophetic spirit, had before rightly understood.

Brethren, it thus became evident that Jesus Christ is not only a Saviour for the nation of Israel, and through them for the other nations of the earth, but that He is the Saviour for all that is called man, and that we should no longer worship in this or that place, but

that everywhere, in spirit and in truth, the Father is to be honoured in the Son. From this moment it was clear that the Gospel is not bound to one place or one time, but, as a testimony of the kingdom, must be preached in all the world before the end can come. The destruction of Jerusalem is, therefore, not, as might easily be supposed, merely the first fulfilment of the prophecy of our Lord Jesus Christ, in so far as Jerusalem was a place loved for the Father's sake, but it is the revelation of His kingdom extending over all the world. And the destruction of the vessel with which, until then, even Paul had supposed all the revelation and all the history of God's kingdom to be bound up, leaves deep its impression upon the character of the Church of God under the new covenant. Therefore, when the Lord comes in His kingdom, it takes place in such a way that everyone who has an open heart for His coming, and to whom has been proclaimed something of Him as the everlasting High Priest and King, must recognise that this coming itself is again a starting point of a newly-beginning life. When He came against Jerusalem, destroying and judging, there appeared in this judgment, for the eyes of those who knew Him, the majestic form of the glorious King. When the captive people were scattered into all lands, where thousands already believed in Him, these believers became aware that God had not only brought about an ending, but also had created a new beginning.

The destruction of Jerusalem is a beginning in the kingdom of God, and only after this event was it possible to speak as some of the apostolic epistles afterwards speak, when they give us a view afar off into the kingdom of Christ, and lead us, after a variety of experiences and countless agitations therein, to expect the glorious and blessed end. By this, I do not mean to say all the apostles must await the actual overthrow of Jerusalem in order to understand this ; but the approach of this overthrow they must have begun to learn by experience. They must have seen that it was not God's will, as they had hitherto thought, to use for all times the same precious depository of revelation. When the new beginning had come, the coming of the kingdom of Christ extended even more widely ; and through the whole Gentile world Christ drew near, knocked in the preaching of His word at the door of the heart, formed nations afresh, and there came into the life on earth, which had fallen into decay and was ready to perish, heavenly refreshing strength, and the tempests of nations approached—tempests which must spend themselves ere the nations would receive the life-power of the Gospel. In this the Son of man came in His kingdom. It was another kingdom than the world had hitherto seen, when at length millions and millions received, although it may be in the midst of much error and rudeness of manners, the crucified Son of God and Son of man as the only one in whom

a human soul can become blessed and glorified. There sounded in the midst of blood and tears, in the midst of the most revolting devastations which the world has experienced, in the midst of the most tremendous conflicts which human pride has ever waged, a song of praise, in which was heard something of the angel notes which burst upon the plains of Bethlehem.

Behold, such a coming of the Lord has ever a wider and wider extent ; and how can we any longer ask whether the Lord comes to us, whether the Son of man gives us to-day to recognise such a coming in His kingdom? I do not now mean merely *that* approach which John described in the Book of Revelation, in the words, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock : if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me ;" but I mean the great victorious coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Has this been experienced in this our time? Not long ago in our history the kingdom of Jesus Christ was as good as disappearing amongst us, and there might as easily, according to human judgment of Divine things, have come a judicial dispensation for us, as it came for Jerusalem ; the Lord might have broken the old vessel and have chosen Himself a new one, if that had been in His gracious purpose. But no, He has not done it. He has begun to purify the vessel, and we can truly say we have now once

more a manifestation of the kingdom of our Lord. It has begun, but will it also attain the goal? Will a general far-extending awakening of our people—will a renewing of those who preach and teach, and of those who hear, be the immediate result of this period? Then it is a manifestation of God's kingdom unto our blessing and life. But if not, the time may not be far distant when from us also the candlestick shall be removed and placed elsewhere; when we shall perhaps remain in the enjoyment of earthly prosperity, but have failed in the task which was imposed upon our land. We shall then, through indolence, unbelief, worldly-mindedness, and regarding only the earthly, have failed of the goal which was appointed us.

But let us rather each one direct the question to his own heart. Has there been for thee in this thy time a manifestation of Christ? Has He been too strong for thee, and hast thou felt thyself called by thy King? Dost thou fall at His feet, and knowest nothing more except His grace?

That, you will quickly and easily be able to see, if we pass over to the second point: HE COMES QUICKLY. Thus it is said, in the introduction to the last great apostolic prophecy, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass;" and at the close, "Behold, I come quickly." What, then, does this mean? The Lord speaks in our text: "There be some standing

here, which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom." We have seen how perfectly this promise has been fulfilled. But nevertheless, there was felt throughout the whole apostolic church a longing expectation of the coming of the Lord. We hear the apostles everywhere exhort, urge, and invite believers to prepare; and even in external things, so to order their lives as expecting the time of this wearisome conflict would not much longer last, but quickly the time of the Lord's victorious appearing and majestic sway be come. And does not this expectation extend also beyond the time of the apostles, after they had already received the crown of the Conqueror? There has been no century in the history of the Christian Church in which single voices have not been heard loudly proclaiming, that, according to the signs of the times, we must expect the Lord will come quickly—within the next few years. These were not the voices of those to whom the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in His kingdom was terrible; but the voices of the children of God who rejoiced in the prospect of enjoying on earth a redemption which was indeed assured to them in heaven.

Beloved, in this word *quickly* lies a touchstone for our hearts. If there is no joy for us in this word—if when our Lord calls to us, "I will not suffer you much longer to wait," there is not a door open for us through which light and life streams into the dark

chamber of our earthly being—then are we not of the number of those who love the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. But if it is a joy and delight to us that the Lord comes *quickly*, then even if this quickly means not “while you are a pilgrim here below,” if for us the coming of the Lord shall be changed into our going to Him, we, like all those who have finished in the joy of hope their course upon earth, shall, with child-like resignation, enter into our last joy; but the Church, the true communion of Jesus Christ, will, after our departure, cherish and proclaim the same expectation. Yet this remains a touchstone for each heart. For the Lord may come every day, even for the last judgment. His times are not our times. He may call suddenly into appearance all which we read of as the signs of His coming in His word and the word of His apostles; can bring to maturity in a decade of years, yea, in a year, what at other times in the history of the world has required a century, or even ten centuries, for its accomplishment. But on the other hand, when we suppose we have surmounted the last height, beyond which the glorious prospect opens up before us, there may yet extend for us a wide level, beyond which is another mountain range to be ascended. You know not His day and hour. If such a thought inspires you with regret that all your plans, enjoyments, and delights, or even all your labour and toil must be suddenly interrupted, if you move in other circles than those of which He is the centre,

His coming is for you no redemption, but a destruction. Your Jerusalem perishes when He comes. But if there is a soul which, notwithstanding all earthly enjoyments, notwithstanding all that which it has here obtained, yet cherishes only the one dominant thought, "Oh, that the Lord Jesus Christ were come, that this life of sin in me and all others were at an end, that perfect glorification were attained, and we walked in joy and peace before His face; that this earth, laden with the curse, were delivered and brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God," for such an one the word *quickly* is a glorious addition to the promise.

"There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom." To wait, to long for His coming, belongs to the life of apostolic Christianity. For this they ever looked, those faithful men of God, the pillars of the Church in all ages, and inquired either after His coming from heaven, or after their departure to Him.

Oh, that such asking in the Church, within our own circle, were a common one; that we stretched forth our hands to the Lord Jesus, and in spirit exclaimed, "Even so, come Lord Jesus!" Amen.

Signs of the Coming of Christ.



“And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed 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.”—MATT. xxiv. 4-6.

BELOVED IN CHRIST JESUS,—We have, in our last meditations on the coming of the Lord in His kingdom, laid down some general principles as to His coming, some of the main characteristics thereof, as they are learnt from the mouth of our Lord in different places of the Gospel narrative. But in our previous meditations, there must have arisen, in the mind of many a hearer, the question which the disciples of Jesus put to Him, and to which the words of our text are an answer : “What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world ?”

This question is fully warranted, if we have before us prophecies of a coming of the Lord, which, in the kingdom of God, ever receive their more perfect fulfilment. We might put the question more fully,

thus : How shall we distinguish the different kinds of His coming, and what are the infallible signs that another such oft-repeated coming of the Lord is before us, or that at length His final coming is near ? Of the SIGNS OF THE COMING OF CHRIST we must, therefore, speak in the meditations which immediately follow ; and since a whole succession of them are mentioned by the Lord, we will now take up the first sign of His coming, so emphatically and repeatedly expressed by Him, namely, THE HOURS OF TEMPTATION IN HIS KINGDOM.

We will then, at present, speak of the hours of temptation in His kingdom—TEMPTATION TO ERROR, TEMPTATION TO APOSTASY, and TEMPTATION TO DESPAIR.

Thy Church, O Lord, has been exposed to severe assaults. Thousands and thousands have, through Thy Divine power, been enabled to stand, and have been preserved in temptation ; but millions, also, have not stood, but have sunk upon the field of battle. Lord, help us, that we may not perish in the hours of temptation, which belong to our time ; that we may recognise them, and that we may then be strengthened through Thy Divine power, and armed for the conflict, that we may also obtain the victory. Amen.

It is true, my friends, and a matter of experience with you all, that there are hours of temptation every day, that our flesh and blood, the world around us,

and the kingdom of darkness, are unceasingly active to tempt and to seduce us from the simplicity which is in Christ. We know, not only from our own experience, but also from a thousand confessions of believers in every age of the Christian Church, that our life here is a constant warfare, and that we fall into divers temptations as soon as we are tried. But it is also a fact, which each one is not alike able to learn from his own life, but which the contemplation of the history of Christ's kingdom upon earth irresistibly proves, that at certain times more conflicts are necessary if we would stand fast in the truth and purity of the Gospel, and follow Jesus Christ, than at other times. We will not enter upon the question whether, in such times of trial, the Lord does not afford especial strength; we will not either raise the question whether it is just that to one generation a severer conflict should be appointed than to another. What we propose at this time is more closely to look at these hours of temptation as signs of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We read that the disciples of Jesus asked for such signs, and that the Lord gave them the answer, "Take heed that no man deceive you." A strange answer to such a question. They wish to know how they may recognise that His coming is near. What are the heralds on earth of His coming? In reply, He directs their regard to themselves with the warning, "Take heed that no man deceive you."

There is, my friends, such a thing as a looking about after the signs of the times, which cannot be acceptable to the Lord ; a spirit of curious research, in which watchfulness over self is forgotten, and one supposes himself distinguished by special wisdom because he is able to interpret the signs of the times. In answer to the questioning of such an one, the Lord replies, "Take heed that no man deceive you ;" "for," He adds, "many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many,"—as though he should say, a merely curious looking after any striking phenomena will not secure the recognition of my coming. On the contrary, you are only so much the more exposed to the danger of mistaking a supposed coming of your Lord for the true one, and so falling into error.

We must measure the temptations which come upon the Church of Christ by a sure standard, and this is the life of our Lord himself. If the Church is the body of Christ, if He is the head, and we who believe on Him are the members, then He is also our forerunner in all things ; as in His course through sufferings to glory, so also in His being tempted in all points. The great body of Christ on earth, the Church of God, must consequently pass by the same way of suffering, and experience essentially the same stages of temptation, which He had to pass through.

You will answer, A temptation to error, how would that be possible with Him ? To which I reply, that He

did not indeed fail under it, and that we must maintain that He, being such as we know Him, could not fail under it. But that does not prevent us from perceiving that yet, in many places, the temptation to error presented itself to Him. You will, perhaps, think that temptation to error is not conceivable for Him who could say, "No man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven;" and who, speaking of heavenly things, could say, "We testify that we have seen." How could He be led into any error, who, by an eternal Divine intuition, knew Divine things? My brethren, that were all perfectly true, if our Lord had not taken upon him flesh and blood; had He not voluntarily, from an impulse of an eternal love, laid aside His glory, humbled Himself, and entered into our servant-form, in which He must even assure us that He knew not the hour of the full manifestation of His kingdom, "which the Father hath put in His own power." Had our Saviour been only the Son of the eternal God, and not also the true Son of man, such objections were unanswerable. But since we know that He learned here on earth, and drew His knowledge from the law and the prophets, and from the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit which was shed upon Him in full measure, His knowledge was, so long as He remained here below, a human knowledge; though, truly, *that* human knowledge which, without error and without defect, became

henceforth the fountain of all knowledge in Divine things. *He*, also, was tempted to error, when the enemy came to Him, and said, "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." He was tempted to error, when they came and would make Him a king; He was tempted to error, when the people praised Him as a prophet, like whom none before had appeared—when the Pharisees and Scribes were reduced to silence before Him; and it was His victory that He did not depart from the way of humiliation which His heavenly Father had appointed Him, but testified, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." Yea, the temptation to error was ever present in the highest moments of His mediatorial life, namely, the error, that, because He was descended from above, He should transcend the narrow, human limits within which His life on earth was placed; that He should rise above suffering and trial, above conflict, and labour, and toil, above wearisome wrestling and seeking, and quickly attain the highest goal of Divine revelation to men, and be able to express what could be expressed only to heavenly spirits. He did not allow Himself to be seduced into this error. He was tempted, but remained victorious.

And what is the tendency of all and every temptation in the world? Ever to raise the Christian above the limits of humility. Even those errors which deeply affected the Church, because it appeared that their

advocates were more lowly than the Apostles, had this tendency. If their nature was perfectly to annihilate the God-created human power, and to allow man no spark of susceptibility for Divine things; if the central point of their doctrine was to regard man in his nature only as bad, and to expect only his perdition without the miracle of an entirely new creation; if they explained the redemption of man through the work of Divine grace as an arbitrary act;—all this bore indeed the appearance of humbling the pride of human power, but bore not within itself true humility: for even errors which seem entirely to annihilate the human, and to glorify the power of God alone, tended in their innermost nature to divorce human life from its responsibility before the Lord, to raise it out of the state of dependence in which it continually stands before God, in which it must esteem itself as nothing, and yet employ all its powers to be found well pleasing to the Lord. Under the guise of humility is concealed the pride of the human life, confounding itself with God and His almighty operation.

If, on the other hand, it has been taught that man must indeed first be brought into communion with God through Christ before he can live the life of Christ—but, then, his own power is sufficient to work out his path to glory and blessedness—it is clear in this case, that as Christ, according to the will of the tempter, should not in patience and humility

tread the way of suffering to reach the crown of victory, so also the individual Christian and the Church, forsaking the tedious and lowly path of growth which the Lord has appointed, should aspire in the proud sense of self-sufficiency to the crown, and seek to wear it here on earth. Into such error many thousands of Christians have been led; and we cannot say that it has become rare in our own time. Though it were nothing more than that we should make our Christianity—the precious possession of the soul given to us in grace—an external means, that through it we might have a claim upon the world and its possessions; and if (as it was then said to the Lord, “If thou be the Son of God, command these stones that they be made bread,” or, “If thou canst not do this, distrust thy Divine Sonship,”) we should be met with the question, What avails you your Christianity?—do you not live poorly on earth?—can your poverty be God’s gift and grace?—what is the worth of a gift for the inner life, which does not in some way reflect itself in the improvement of the earthly condition?—or if we think we may boldly ask of the Lord that, as His chosen ones, we should be led by more pleasant paths;—all this is one and the same error, old and yet ever new, which has become by no means alien to our own times. Yea, I maintain that in our days the temptation to seek worldly ends by means of spiritual and Divine things is especially prevalent; and if it should more

than ever before spread over the whole Church of Christ, we must conclude a special hour of temptation has come.

My brethren, error ever contains within it a measure of truth. There is no error which is not a perversion—at first sight, one would even say an excess—of the truth. But through error is the way to APOSTASY; and this also has from the beginning been the case with great numbers of those who called themselves after Jesus Christ. It is an apostasy from Christ as soon as an individual or a community does not daily and hourly stand in need of the Saviour; as soon as He is no longer your Saviour, as soon as, without Him, you can escape the burden of sin, your heart apart from Him can find peace. It is, then, in fact and reality present, even although it has not yet become a principle and a doctrine with you. Many do not proceed so far: they have no need to raise apostasy to a principle, to an explicit formula; they are satisfied to cherish it in their lives, to be called Christians and to serve Satan, but in case of necessity to be able to have recourse to Christ; whilst their life and actions through long years show no concern about this Saviour and the way of access to Him.

This apostasy will first become open and declared when men have joined the standard of another. "Many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ." We may reply, that no longer any danger can arise

from such fanatics. If any one came and said that he was Christ, we should treat him as one demented, and none would follow him. But, my friends, if any preaches a gospel through which man's self-righteousness remains unbroken and unlimited; if one proclaims a wisdom which is for every one easily comprehended and attractive, and which dispenses with the inconvenient thoughts of death and judgment, of hell and everlasting chastisement, which even at last resolves the distinction between good and evil into the necessities of the physical organization;—if men have the audacity to proclaim this from the pulpits of a Christian state, is apostasy from Christ far off?

Our Saviour himself was tempted to apostasy when Satan approached Him with the words, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." It was naturally not a question of acknowledging the dark seducer as His God, but only of appointing himself by human power as king, and opening to himself the way to the throne by false and Satanic means. Our Lord rejected the temptation with the words of victory, "Get thee behind Me, Satan!" Are we also following His example? Upon this hangs the fate of thousands in the Church of Christ, namely, whether they are going forward to apostasy or backward to truth; for the opinions and works of Satanic imagination, and of gross and material thought of men, are not foreign the one to the other, but spring from one root—from the root,

“We will not have this Man to reign over us”—from the natural pride which will not be corrected by the word of God, and will know nothing of the serious background which the Bible gives to our life.

My brethren, we have here the great temptation of the present day—temptation to apostasy. Even though it were not produced by false doctrines, it would be the result of the coldness and unspiritual aims of our times. Is it not, for example, an apostasy from our Lord Jesus Christ, if in Christian families prayer is no longer heard, the word of God remains a closed book, and Sunday is devoted to the common toil of life or to worldly pleasures?

Enough, to remind you that the temptation to apostasy is present, that in our days and in our city thousands and thousands have fallen under it. With sadness we must confess that, so far as this sign of the times is concerned, we are not far from a coming of Christ.

Finally, there is yet a TEMPTATION TO DESPAIR. This also our Lord has passed through; not only in the conflict which He endured in the wilderness, but also in that severer one which He endured in Gethsemane. There all turned upon the great question, Is our Lord the Redeemer, the Mediator between God and men? Will He be able to carry through the great, sacred, bitter work of redemption, or not? There He breathes forth the prayer, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” There He sinks

down exhausted, in bloody sweat, unable with human strength any longer to endure ; and an angel from heaven comes to strengthen him. But there also He pronounces the words of victory, reverberating through all time and through all eternity : “ Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done.” He trembles, but He despairs not. And therefore can His disciples and heralds say after Him, “ We are perplexed, but not in despair.”

And when our Lord immediately after prophecies, “ Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars : see that ye be not troubled : for all these things must first come to pass, but the end is not yet,” He has before Him temptation to despair. We are, thanks and praise be to God, not now as a whole, in a position to be exposed to this hour of temptation. We have peace and times of repose ; we bear our burdens, and they often seem to us to be too heavy, but the Lord continues to help us from day to day and from year to year. We have no need, therefore, to give especial prominence to this temptation.

But beloved, in the quiet hidden life are there not temptations to despair ? And do not many hearts actually despair ? Is it not so when we enter into the homes of the poor, and would touch their hearts to lead them to the Saviour ? Do they not answer, “ Why, then, have I no bread ? Why am I sick ? Why am I and mine so poor, and others so prosperous ? Can the compassionate God do this, whom you pro-

claim from your pulpits? Can the Saviour do it, who receives poor sinners?" Is not this to cast away the hope of God's gracious help? This, however, is a cold, God-forgetting, heartless form of despair. There is yet another form of despair, terrible enough, but not so hopeless as this—the despair of deepest sorrow, despair of Divine grace and help at the sight of one's own guilt. We have them—these despairing ones—in our community. And if there are souls among us who despair of God, they are what they are greatly through our neglect.

And now for ourselves. Hast thou never stood on the verge of despairing of thy Lord and Saviour? If not, thank Him, and pray Him to preserve to thee the power of faith, and to bestow upon thee the power of love, that thou also mayest protect others from despair with spiritual, and, where it is needful, with material help. Where, however, this despair comes upon a whole, a nation, a church—where this becomes the temptation of the day—there we must say: "The Lord must be very near with His coming; for, unless He be at hand, all will be lost." The chosen ones of God may be brought through suffering and tribulation; they may come to experience trembling and shuddering, as their Lord trembled and shuddered; but if in child-like faith they hold fast to Him, their Lord and Head, they will not be reduced to despair; their tribulation will have its end in joy, an end of victory and reward. These are, then, hours in which

the Lord comes ; He comes victoriously once more, and before His face the dark clouds flee away which till then had covered the heavens. So will it also one day be when the last end comes. Then many thousands will despair in regard to Him, and only a few chosen ones will be found waiting for Him. Then will the signal-shout of the archangel be heard, and the trumpet will sound, and the Lord will appear upon the clouds of heaven with great power and glory. His chosen ones will then be caught up to meet Him in bliss, and to rejoice with Him in His glory.

Therefore, my beloved, since we know not how quickly the hour of temptation may come upon *us* also—for we were not far from it at a time lately passed through—since we know not when the hour of the Lord shall strike and He shall come, oh let us be careful that He find us as His servants watching, watching in His peace, consoled and joyful in hope ; and when we pass under the trial, let us lift up our heads, and above all, and in all, become one with Him—in child-like faith embrace the Saviour. So may the judgment hasten upon us ; so may the flames which herald His appearing flash before our eyes ; so may the thunder of His coming sound forth ! Amen.

The Suffering-Path of the Church of Christ.

“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 unto the end, the same shall be saved.”—MATT. xxiv. 7-13.

BELOVED IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST,—In the series of meditations upon the Lord’s prophecies concerning His coming in His kingdom, the thought has often presented itself, that the progress of the kingdom of Christ upon earth and the path of His Church is not a merely triumphal procession, but a path of suffering. On this account we spoke of conflict, of temptation, of danger to body and to soul, to which they are exposed, who will be bearers of the name of Jesus among the nations of the earth. We must, however, unceasingly return to this point, because we cannot understand the glorious triumph of the coming

Lord, without first having taken deeper and enduring glances at the state of suffering of all that on earth descends or proceeds from Him. It is a universal law of God's kingdom, that after once the only begotten Son has come in human flesh and blood, and because of this humanity, yea, with this humanity has been made perfect through sufferings, and has entered into glory, henceforth all his members must go by the same way, and not individuals alone, but also the whole Church. The community of His members must enter through tribulation and patience into the kingdom and glory. As often as we take up one of the prophetic discourses of our Lord, we find in every case that He speaks, though somewhat varying the form in which He presents the truth, of the sufferings and tribulation through which they pass who follow, and are in communion with Him. We have in our present text not only a repetition of that to which we have devoted earlier meditations, but at the same time a new proclamation. THE WAY OF SUFFERING OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST is first UNDER THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD, then under the POWERS OF THE WORLD, and finally UNDER THE POWERS OF DARKNESS; and yet, as a goal, is set before us blessedness and glory.

We hear how our Lord, on beholding the city of Jerusalem, yet radiant in all its beauty and greatness, and looking upon the resplendent marble temple

upon Moriah, speaks these words: "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."* He casts a glance beyond the circle which His bodily eyes at this moment command, far out upon Jerusalem, and upon the nations of the world. When He said, "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom," his hearers understood that He had before Him the wide domain of nations unto the Euphrates, yea, to the farthest Asia, and to the remotest boundaries of the West; that already He saw in prophetic spirit His Church extending among the nations of the ancient world. And now, of what things does He speak? Of things which since man has once fallen—has become blind, darkened, and ungodly—could not but happen; which from century to century must ever be called forth afresh—of wars and rumours of wars, of seditions, of hatred and bitterness, of bloodshed and death. He speaks of things which we are accustomed to designate visitations and judgments of God, even when men are the scourge and rod in the hand of the Almighty and Holy One. Such Divine judgments, however, come not merely through men, but also through the powers of Nature. Pestilence, famine, earthquake, are mentioned. These extend through

* *Odîves, birth-pangs*; the end of which (v. 14) will be contemporaneous with the appearing of the Redeemer's glorious kingdom.

all time, and no one has lived on earth long enough to come to an extensive acquaintance with mankind, without either himself making the bitter experience of such judgments, or at least receiving intelligence of them out of other lands and nations. In our time, also, during the memory of those living, the judgments of God have rolled over us in mighty waves, and have, in all sorts of ways, precipitated thousands, yea, millions, out of time into eternity; and have left behind devastated lands, desolated families, poverty and distress, sorrow and tears; and have compelled the one class to lift up their eyes with sighing to the hills, from whence help cometh, while they have goaded the others to curse their existence, or blindly to rush into the excitement and intoxication of the flesh. We are here speaking of occurrences which indeed are not strange to us.

But you will ask, how this can be a prophecy of the coming of Christ? Does He not speak merely of phenomena which happen quite naturally, whose appearance at this or that time has its necessity in the constitution of our earth, and which, from the way in which all transitory and material being moves, are inevitable?

My friends, you know yourselves that when such chastisements break in upon the life of men, they, like all Divine acts, have not only one aim and cause, or two, but thousands of Divine aims are attained thereby, and thousands of causes contribute thereto.

You know well that these things have another appearance for the worldling, who goes forth in the pride of his own power, and desires nothing of the earth but some years of comfort, of indulgence, and of pleasant life, from that which they have for the thoughtful man, who in all things has regard to his soul and its everlasting destinies, but entirely withdraws from the things of the earthly present; and quite another aspect for him who, while he walks on earth already lives in heaven, the citizen of the everlasting city of God. That which the Lord here primarily will say is, that the judgments of God in history and in natural events, in the mighty tempests, which, according to the Divine will, have their necessity, but nevertheless, in the hand of the compassionate and holy God, are the instruments for saving souls, or, on the other hand, to bring to their merited destruction those who have chosen to perish; that these things very intimately affect the Church of Christ, the people of God of the New Testament.

The Lord by no means says, "Under the weight of these judgments you will sink down;" by no means does He present them as the most painful element in that which the suffering-time of His Church shall bring with it, but rather as the easiest to endure. It is the beginning of the suffering of the Church of Christ, and so also of the suffering of every believer, when the thunders of the Divine judgments roll in upon his life; even, as Peter says, "It is time that judgment

should begin at the *house of God.*" The members of this house see in these judgments the mighty hand of God, who supports them, who has had compassion on them in His only Son ; they recognise the Almighty and creative power of their God, and know at the same time that it is the heart of the Father in heaven with whom they have to do, who pities all things that He has made, and rejects none who cast themselves upon Him, and will suffer no hair to fall from the head of those who are His children in Christ Jesus. Therefore, these Divine judgments in the history of the world, and these convulsions of Nature, are sufferings indeed, but at the same time gracious revelations of the chastening compassion of their Father in heaven. The Church of Christ is of good courage when all around her is tempest and storm, when the earth is full of lamentation, when mighty empires collapse and sink in ruins, when the foundations of the earth tremble, when pestilence carries away thousands on the right hand and on the left, when the pale, hollow countenance of famine and want encounters her ; she consoles herself with falling into the hand of her God, and not into the hands of men. The Church of Christ and her members stand forth in these hours of judgment as those who lift up their heads, because they know that according to the word of the Saviour, every great judgment which passes over the nations is one of the trumpets of the archangel which call to the human race—The Lord comes !

At all times of the Christian Church, therefore, many have confessed the Lord when such events occurred, and when it became thus clear that human power and help could avail nothing; when all human strength bent and brake like a slender reed. Then also those, who before would know nothing of God and Divine things, have begun with fear and trembling to acknowledge that God judges the world. Then ran through the nations a questioning whether the last day might not be near, and whether the Lord might not come in His glory; and in the hearts of those who loved the appearing of their Lord Jesus arose a joyful longing and glad expectation, and as they looked up to Him they cried, "Come quickly!" Especially in her fairest, most precious, time of youth—the first centuries of her existence upon earth—she stood like a flower of God, or rather like a tree covered with heavenly bloom, whilst around her the sinking of nations offered an awe-inspiring spectacle of the transitoriness of all flesh. She stood there like a giant tree, beneath which souls could find a shelter, whilst the most powerful nations met in shock of battle and perished; so that only fragments of once mighty peoples have reached us, and our present life has been built upon their ruins. There stood the Church, wide extending her mighty branches; and in the glow and heat of affliction millions gathered to her, and were refreshed in her shadow.

My brethren! This is contained in the prophecy of our Lord concerning His coming, and is true not only for that time and for later times, but also for the last preparations for His glorious coming in His kingdom. Therefore, when judgments are abroad in the world, when the angel of vengeance passes through our towns and villages, or famine glares upon us with its repulsive visage; or when our hearts begin to tremble at the rending of the bonds which hold Christendom in peace and order;—then is it a time when we ask, “Will the Lord come?” and that we prepare our hearts for His coming, and learn to cry, “Come quickly; even so, come Lord Jesus!”

But this is “the beginning of sorrows.” Such national visitations, such judgments of God in the history of the world, are not yet the distress itself, only the beginning of the distress. It is only a premonitory judgment of the Lord, as a work of sifting and separation. A believing heart sings in the midst of it all:—

Give to the winds thy fears;
Hope, and be undismayed:
God hears thy sighs, and counts thy tears:
God shall lift up thy head.
Through waves, through clouds, and storms,
He gently clears thy way,
Wait thou His time; so shall the night
Soon end in joyous day.

But when it is the **POWERS OF THE WORLD**, under which the Church passes in its way of suffering, the trial becomes more severe. Even in war,

tumult, and sedition, and in the wild battle cry of barbarous nations against each other, the Church of itself is not assailed; it only suffers in common with others, because it is a member of sinful, fallen humanity. But there come darker nights of suffering, when the Church is the object against which all the powers of the world direct their hatred. The Lord predicts this in our text: "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."

Frequently, indeed, the heavy judgments of God are an occasion to those who know not God's holy will, even as revealed in the law and the prophets, or over whose eyes the veil is drawn when they read the law, so that they are not able to discover Him who is the end of the law—to seek for the offenders, the flagitious transgressors, who have brought upon the world the wrath of God. Thus it was not a rare thing in former times to point to the Christians, the lowly children of God, who in seclusion served the Lord Jesus, the people who followed the thorn-crowned leader. "Behold," it was said, "these are the odious ones who will no longer recognise and worship our Gods; on their account such trouble is come upon us." But in later times also—when no longer a little company of believers were opposed to a heathen empire, but a great Christian world existed, embracing millions of subjects—the hardened mind of the great multitude sought the guilty ones in those

pure souls washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. For nothing is more pleasing to the world than to ascribe all the evil that oppresses and tortures them to those whose presence is a judgment to the world, and who are, therefore, unendurable. This is the case with those truly living in Christ Jesus—burning and shining lights in the darkness of this world—who no longer are able to be yoked together with unbelievers, and no longer can be conformed to the world. The more such believers are found to have a truly spiritual walk after the example of Christ, and in His strength—in a community such as the Church or Christian society now is—the more certainly will they become exposed to this hatred.

I anticipate your thoughts. This was no doubt the case in earlier ages, when men were in this respect uncultivated, without the principles of toleration; but who now asks whether you seriously believe in God and everlasting life, in Christ as the Son of God, or indeed in the supernatural at all? Men were then heathen, cramped in mind by the national religions, averse to all that is new and strange; but with us a general wide-spread hatred for believers is scarcely possible. Oh, my dear friends, he who thus judges knows neither the later and inner history of the Church of Christ, nor his own heart! This hatred is not only possible, it is present; and we need not look far beyond our own city to discover something of it amongst those who, without penitence and faith,

claim to be advanced Christians—who think that with a mixture of a little devotion, a little morality, a little liberality, and a little Christian phraseology, they will pass muster with the Lord. They often bear this hatred for every true child of God long concealed; and when the opportunity occurs—when the barriers of order, of society, and of decorum, which the hand of God has until now maintained for the protection of His children and for the restraining of bitter hatred, are withdrawn—then it breaks forth most unmistakably.

Do you not remember how a few years ago the cry arose throughout Germany for power, liberty, and whatever other name may have been given to that which was desired; and how at that time a bitter hatred, a dark hostility, was manifested against those who confessed Jesus Christ in purity and simplicity, and for His sake would not take part with the seditious, not sit in the seat of the scorner? Do you not remember that this liberty, unity, and power in political life, was for many only a pretext, at any rate, not properly the goad which set them in movement? Did it not become manifest that they were opposed to the Church of Christ, and to all that which is living in it? Therefore, I say that this hatred is not strange to our time, and to our society; and it will once more rise, and before the Lord comes and His kingdom attains its glorious goal on earth, Christendom will once more make the experience that a

“hating and killing for Jesus’ name’s sake” can proceed not merely here and there from a narrow, corrupt, and degenerate Christianity, but from all nations. To this our Lord points us beforehand. If, therefore, once more, beloved, in our days or in the lifetime of anyone of you, such a hatred should break forth against those who in full reality call Jesus their Lord and Saviour, and desire to act accordingly; believe that the preparation for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ has entered a new phase—that this coming is near—and then ask, above all, your own heart, on which side you yourself stand. Ask, Am I also drawn with others to hatred against the children of God, or would I gladly place myself in simplicity, love, and humility, in the little company of those who are surrounded by raging foes? The latter will be possible only for him who is already living in personal communion with his Lord and Saviour.

My beloved! We read such words of the Scripture so easily, “Be hated of all nations.” And yet we cannot sufficiently realize the sad condition of a human heart—and all human hearts stand in need of love—which, surrounded only by hatred, stands alone, misunderstood; yea, as soon as its inner life is manifested, instantly rejected, hated, scorned, calumniated, perhaps dragged forth to death. In this condition were all Christians shortly after the apostolic age, and in this condition may all true believers yet again be. Where there are children of God, there are the

powers of the world against them, there there is a separation ; and there come different times of separation, which are repeated, until at last that hour of separation strikes which no more shall be repeated.

Think not, if such a time once more arises, I will speedily join the side of those who belong to Jesus Christ. That will not be possible, for we shall not even recognise this important time, if we do not already stand on His side. Such times of separation have already passed unobserved for thousands of professed Christians ; they did not intend to be the enemies of Christ, and yet became so, and were insensibly drawn down into the stream of universal hatred, and then with terror have descended to eternity.

So much concerning the path of suffering of the Church from the powers of the world. When it is said, " 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," it is clear that here persecutions are predicted of the Christian Church, such as have already taken place, and such as will return.

We must for the present not anticipate ; for we are speaking immediately only of the prophecies of our Lord himself, and not yet of those of the Holy Spirit through His apostles. I only point forward, therefore, to the apostolic writings, especially the Revelation of John, which speak more clearly of these things.

But even this is not yet the severest and bitterest trial. It is already, properly speaking, distress ; but the uttermost distress in the path of suffering for the Church of Christ, is that which proceeds from the POWERS OF DARKNESS. By the powers of darkness I understand the kingdom and power of the devil and all his servants ; so that the powers of the world and the powers of darkness cannot be separated by a sharply-drawn line. For who but Satan is it that stirs up the hatred of the world, in order to turn it against the confessors of the pure doctrines of the Cross ? Who is it whose deceptive impulses thousands and thousands follow as though under a charm, but this very prince of the world, who ruleth in the darkness of this world, and works lying wonders on the earth ? Yet these powers of darkness are something quite distinct, if we view them in their inner and spiritual effects upon the Church of Christ. It is said, “ Then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.” In these words the most terrible affliction which can ever come upon the Church of Christ is expressed, namely, that no longer alone the hand of the Almighty God is stretched forth in judgment—no longer only the powers of the world, impelled by the prince of darkness, rage against the little flock. In regard to this, the consolation is given us, “ The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” But when, within the Church of Christ itself, offence, treachery, hatred, the one

against the other, arise; when, within the fortress itself, separate parties break out and war against each other, and forget that they are soldiers of the one Chief, children of one Father in heaven, who has redeemed them with a price through Jesus Christ;—then desolate indeed must be the state of the Church. It is not so called, my brethren; men do not speak of *treachery*, but give the thing more specious names. The professed Church has at times, in guilty error, betrayed, sold, slain, children of God, on account of their faith and confession of Jesus, and believed they were doing it—or at least pretended to do it—in the name of love, and to the glory of God—to save the soul, while the body suffered. But what are the names with which men deck their actions? Let us look into the matter and contemplate it in its true aspect.

“Many shall be offended.” How, then, does the offence arise in many? How does it arise in the midst of the Church before our own eyes? When the Cross of Christ in its rude form, so unacceptable to the flesh, is presented as the great centre around which all must gather who will come to God through Jesus Christ; when it is seen that mere repetition of Christian phraseology, and the putting on of deceptive garments, avails nothing—but only a new creature, and the one qualification of having as a sinner received of God grace and forgiveness of sin, and of being clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ—against this the proud heart rebels, will escape from

this way of humiliation, and to this end, in expressions derived from the language of faith, hurls contempt and scorn upon the simple ones in Christ; and thus arises the offence. The name which it bears is Disunion. It always arises from a growing coldness of love in Christ, from a failing to recognise the love wherewith we are loved, and, therefore, also from the want of the love wherewith we should love others. If once the offence has arisen—that is to say, if many who maintain that they are the representatives of the true faith, will know nothing of what they call fanatical, gloomy, and pictistic Christianity; if a worldly Christianity, that will admit of anything, is opposed to this, and if they rebel against becoming true and faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ in communion with His sufferings—then the offence becomes general; it becomes the spirit of the age and of the community. From this offence, however, springs up a spirit of bitter separation, of treachery, and hatred. The true root, from which the original growth was made, is forgotten; all that is now thought of is the human branches and offshoots which have grown thereupon; and because the one has not grown exactly like the other, the one is scorned and condemned by the other. For the present, this is confined to speaking and preaching; but what for a considerable time has been practised in this spiritual domain, will be done, when the opportunity occurs, also bodily. First, there is a disputing and separation

on account of the different forms which time and events have given to Church life ; there is a rejection as unchristian of that which is only unwonted and unfamiliar ; love is lost sight of ; there is no longer any regard to the innermost germ of all Christian life and all Church life ; there is a judging merely according to the outward form ; and Christ himself is thus lost sight of, rejected, in the humble form of the children of God—that is the *betrayal*. From this grows *hatred* properly so called, if hatred is not rather the cause of betrayal. He who has betrayed Christ in His children, and has not, like Peter, turned bitterly weeping to Christ himself, such an one will hate Christ much more than one who has never known anything of Him ; for nothing does the proud heart less willingly forgive than that it has once been seen in its weakness and helplessness, that its inner wretchedness and unworthiness has been known by those who truly witness in the name of Jesus. We know well, from the history of persecutions, that the bitterest enemies of the Church were apostate Christians ; the most relentless persecutors, those who had once felt some traces of the grace of God in their heart. And we know that in the present day, and amongst us, those who most scorn all Divine things, are the very persons in whose heart once the arrow of truth was rankling. Where this is the case, the powers of darkness have found an entrance into the Church ; and there the path of suffering, for those

who will yet walk in fealty to Christ, becomes a very rugged one.

But even this is not all. There arise "many false prophets and shall deceive many," saith the Lord. This is the extreme of trial. The sufferings of the Church of Christ would be lighter to bear, even if its unfaithful members became its open foes; if they came out and said, "I will have nothing more to do with you, nothing more with the ordinances of God's house, nothing more with the communion of believers." But no, that which they have received of the light of God, is turned to the service of darkness, until the light itself has become darkness, and the lie is decked out with the appearance of Divine truth, and is mingled with it. Then arise doctrines of the lie,* which gives itself out as the true law of God, as the heaven-descended truth, as a new revelation, or as the highest product of the Spirit.

Beloved hearers! The false prophets who seduce many have already appeared, and ever reappear, in the history of the Church of Christ. Of false doctrines and false principles, so many have spread through the world, that we must wonder with thanksgiving and adoration that the true doctrine—the word of the Cross—has survived. God be thanked, it is yet present, this pure doctrine. But how great a multitude

* The lie, τὸ ψεῦδος, Satanic perversion of the truth; referred to in John viii. 44, 2 Thess. ii. 11, 1 John ii. 22. In each case the article is used in the Greek.

of false prophets proclaim to the people freedom from all want which oppresses them, and from all fear which troubles them, even from that of judgment and of eternity! How many writings appear with the lying boast that everything is in man's own power, and that he is the author of his own salvation; or with the wretched delusion that the soul of men is not destined for eternity, is only a physical and material thing; and that consequently there can be no longer any question about eternity, about heaven and hell, about redemption and forgiveness of sins!

Finally, it is also written, that because iniquity shall abound, "the love of many shall wax cold." If all that has hitherto been said shows that a trying path of suffering awaits the Church of Christ, that which is most trying is here brought before us.

Is it not the worst form of evil, if, at a time when outward things are calm and smooth, waiting for the Lord's coming, longing for Him, intercourse with Him, life in Him grows faint; if iniquity silently makes progress within the Church, and even lays hold of those who have hitherto stood firm in the righteousness of Jesus Christ; if even the most believing of believers, if the stewards of God's mysteries become weak in the faith, and things human and Divine are so mingled that thousands believe they need not give up the world to gain heaven; if, through this, the feeling that we are unspeakably loved by the eternal God in Christ Jesus more rarely finds utterance, and

while this one jewel of our existence for us shines less brightly, other things wear for us a brighter lustre ; if, unhappily, because so few hearts who are joyous in the consciousness of the love of God in Christ Jesus are to be found in our communion, so little love flows forth from it, and no one experiences or enkindles a true enthusiasm for the kingdom of God ;—then has the love of many waxed cold, and then, my brethren, the kingdom of God upon earth must perish, so far as in man lies ; then the Church, so far as it must draw its living power from us, must die.

But the Lord says, “ He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” He yet holds forth to us the goal ; the prize at the end of the course yet sheds its light back through all the steps of the Church’s suffering ; and though many, very many, see nothing of its brightness—though thousands dazzled by the false lights of the world have no longer an eye for it—it yet remains for the few. There is yet a little chosen company which fights the good fight, does not grow cold in love, casts itself, when it perceives a growing coldness, at the feet of its Saviour, and prays anew to be penetrated with the fire of His holy love. It places itself before the Cross of its Saviour, sees Him out of pure love faint and die upon the tree of the curse, rests upon the resurrection of the Lord, and sees Him ascend to heaven, with new power of love, to shed forth the

Holy Ghost. This little company continues on its heavenward way, suffers with patience, and looks with joyful heart and uplifted head towards its Saviour, and raises as its watchword the cry with which we began our series of meditations—Maran-atha! Amen.

The Power of Error.



“Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there ; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders ; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before.”—MATT. xxiv., 23—25.

BELOVED IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD,—After a somewhat lengthy interruption we resume the course of our meditations upon New Testament Prophecy. We have spoken of the Signs of the Coming of Christ in several of our consecutive meditations ; and saw persecution, temptation, seduction, to be the dark powers which herald the glorious King ; and our hearts trembled at the retrospect of that which these powers have accomplished in bygone ages of the Church, and in the feeling that their shadow is cast upon the present time also. But we all felt that the last word was not spoken of this dark and gloomy side to the preparations for the glorious kingdom of Jesus Christ. The words of our text speak of some-

thing more than persecution, temptation, seduction : they bring us into the presence of falsehood, and give us to see how this power begins with the CORRUPTION OF THE TRUTH, advances to the SUPPLANTING OF THE GOSPEL, and ends in the FASCINATION OF THE LIE.

Lord Jesus, we also know these gloomy powers ; but we hold fast to Thee ; we will not leave Thee ; we apprehend Thee ever afresh in faith, and desire to be Thy disciples. And Thou, our everlasting Head, dost not leave any of Thy children to perish, who desire not to be separated from Thee. Thou holdest us fast, and wilt bring us safely through, though all the powers of hell should assail us with a view to depriving us of our faith, taking away our crown, and tearing from our hearts the precious deposit of Thy gospel. Help us, Lord ; and may our meditations be blessed, that we may this day also apprehend Thee afresh, and be afresh apprehended of Thee. Lord, grant that we may endure to the end ! Amen.

The words of our text stand as part of a wider context. They belong to one of the last discourses of our Saviour, the prophetic discourse which begins with Jerusalem, and closes by proclaiming the return of the Son of man from heaven in great power and glory. The words immediately preceding them are words which clearly refer to the affliction near at hand in the destruction of Jerusalem, the ancient sacred City of God.

They read, "For there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, nor ever shall be. And except these days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elects' sake those days shall be shortened." And then the Lord continues: "If any man shall say unto you," &c. We might, therefore, easily suppose that all which is further spoken relates only to that great and impressive event, the destruction of Jerusalem. But if we read on through the words of our text, and continue our study of the Lord's prophecy, we stand at once on a wider plain, and behold to a much greater distance than that to which the time before this event extended. Before we are aware, we find ourselves to have reached that point in the discourse where the earth trembles, where sun and moon lose their brightness, and where even the stars fall from heaven, and where the trumpet of the archangel sounds, and the elect are gathered out of all the ends of the earth to stand before the Son of man. Then it becomes clear to us that the Lord proclaims not only that which is at hand and near, but also that which is distant and wide-extending; and that we must regard the one as a type, yea, as a beginning of the other. It is true the power of error was exhibited in the chosen, but blinded and hardened nation of Israel, in such a way as it was nowhere else in the history of the world. It is an instance without a parallel that the chosen covenant nation of the living God, over-

whelmed through so many centuries with gracious visitations, not only do not understand, but crucify the Son and Lord; and can afterwards boast as victors over him, and can go their way proud and rebellious: a people who have been so greatly loved, and from the earliest childhood cherished by the hand of Almighty God. But all this is written for our ensample, and we also, if we repent not, shall all likewise perish. That which has happened in the kingdom of God in a narrower circle, and on a lower scale, repeats itself in ever wider circles, and upon an ever higher scale, until all that the mouth of God has spoken is fulfilled, and that in humanity as a whole. The power of error which prevailed for a time in Jerusalem and the Promised Land, when God delivered His people into the hands of the Gentiles, and allowed the abomination of desolation to stand in the Holy Place, has not disappeared from actual life; but has ever afresh proclaimed itself in the history of the Church—now more, now less powerfully—and is still present. Yea, things have since been done in Christendom, in point of responsibility much more criminal than the acts of the Pharisees and Scribes, and the whole people of Israel. Has not the corruption of the truth, within the Christian Church itself, arisen, not very long after the ascension of the Lord; yea, even shortly before the terrible judgment inflicted on Jerusalem, and during that judgment itself? Do we not hear the apostles speak earnest

words of the deceivers who had crept into the Churches, who would not endure the sincere milk of the gospel, who brought into the Churches doctrines which made void the cross of Christ? We see, if we proceed down beyond the time of the apostles, errors of the most alarming and destructive kind arise in the different ages of the Church, with such power that those who yet held firmly to the pure truth of the gospel, became a terrified and persecuted flock. And can we deny that up to our own days corruptions of the truth have proceeded from high ecclesiastical authorities? Have we to seek them only beyond the pale of our Protestant Church? Have they not made their attacks in the very heart of the Church, and do they not continue thus to make them? The things, then, of which the Lord speaks in our text are not so very far removed from us, but deeply affect us now—our life, our children, the members of our communion, the future of our Church. On this account, let us well observe the power of error—as one of the signs of the coming of the Son of man—in its commencement as *a corruption of the truth.*

You know well that no lie presents itself at once in its most undisguised and boldest form; but that at first it usually introduces itself as a harmless opinion, or a more profound thought, or as the result of a broader induction from facts—a wisdom not accessible to all, but which yields its secret sweetness to the more gifted minds and select spirits. It usually relies for

support upon the truth, into which it appears to strike all its roots. It is only when, in the course of time, the rank growth springs up, that it becomes manifest it has its roots in a widely different soil. We know from the experience of our own lives, each one for himself, that there is something in pure Christian truth which remains very unacceptable to the flesh—for it has its crucifying, humbling, and deadening power. The natural man perceives not the things of the Spirit of God; but not only does he remain insensible to them, he arms himself against that which has its origin in the Spirit of God. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit: man in his unrenewed condition, as a fallen sinner, as an enemy of God, cannot feel the whole sharpness of Christian truth, and at once be in accord with it. The battle between the human heart and the Divine love, ever afresh bringing the power of the truth to bear upon it, often surges to and fro, long undecided; until at length the Lord proves too strong for the sinner, and he sinks down vanquished at the feet of his Saviour. But not in every case, unhappily, does the work proceed thus far; in thousands and thousands of instances the man shrinks from the trouble, the toil of this conflict; and his heart refusing to be chastened for the works of darkness, which it secretly cherishes, raises a firm bulwark against the truth.

And especially it is the bulwark of self-righteousness which the heart raises—the wide-spread lie that

we are such as can be acceptable to God—just persons, whose imperfections He will regard with leniency, who are not deserving of hell; need not to be delivered through Divine mercy; need not, as transgressors, to be acquitted through grace, for the sake of the crucified Son of God. Where this bitter root is concealed in the heart, where this bulwark rises undemolished between thee and Divine grace, there already is a mingling of truth and error, and the foundation is laid for the perversion of the truth.

So not merely in the completed form of error, frequently rather in its concealed form, attaching itself to truly Christian thought, must we seek that corruption of the truth which we regard as a Sign of the Coming of Christ. It meets us in our daily life. But *then* especially it is to be looked upon as a sign of the coming of our Lord in His kingdom, when it becomes identified in great measure with public opinion; when the greater number can no longer endure the simple gospel of Jesus Christ the crucified, but call for a doctrine in harmony with the lust of the flesh, with self-love, and pride in human strength. Whether they be doctrines and views which relate to the sphere of thought, and hold up to men the prospect of a deeper wisdom, and a knowledge extending far beyond the simple words of the Bible; or whether they be such as flatter the proud will of man, and represent him as the author of his own destiny, as the hero of his own life; it is always a

corruption of the truth, because it is no longer Jesus Christ the crucified alone who is presented as He on whom all in Christianity rests, and to whom all tends. All call themselves Christians, and the most decided enemies of the Lord will, in the last bitter conflict of the Church of Christ, still call themselves Christians. This is, indeed, the most fearful power of falsehood that it does not even leave unused and unabused the pure, eternal truth of God, incarnate in His only begotten Son. As Satan employs God's *world* for his perverted ends, so does he also employ, in the hearts of those who desire not to live in obedience to the truth, Christianity itself—God's *word and revelation*—to corrupt and pervert the understanding and heart.

It reads, "They will say: Lo, here is Christ, or there." It will not, therefore, be said openly and clearly, "We have done with the notion of a Christ; it is only the delusion of a past age, that man needs a Saviour, an incarnate Son of God." Not this, but, "Here is Christ, or there;" in other words, *they will, in the name of Christianity, deny the Lord.*

How, then, shall we protect ourselves against this? For it avails nothing, that we merely investigate and recognise the signs of the times. It is a question, also, for us how, when we discover these signs, we shall prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord. The answer is simple. If the corruption of Christianity is the power of a lie, one thing only can avail

against this lie—the pure Gospel. You have, consequently, no more to do than to deny yourself, and no longer to wish to pass for wise and prudent, strong and just; but only in your poverty to come to the Lord, to read His word with prayer for enlightenment; to submit to the admonitions it addresses to you; to allow yourself to be convinced, by this word, of your sin—not merely your imperfection, your guilt, your entire corruption, your lost estate. You have nothing more to do, but in a child-like spirit to accept the grace so often proclaimed and promised you in this word; and to rejoice that you, also, are included in the eternal counsel of mercy; and thus, with weak or strong faith, to remain in communion with Christ the God-man until the last breath. Then let the coming of the Lord be near or distant, then let the watchmen on the walls of Zion sound their trumpets to announce the victorious approach of the King in judgment; you have nothing to fear, but will lift up your head, for your redemption draweth nigh; you will rejoice to meet Him.

He among us, my brethren, who should be so unhappy as to be involved in this beginning of the power of a lie, the corruption of the truth, would not be able to stop at this point. He, on the other hand, who begins to take part in Christian truth, and does not consciously mingle with it his own foolish thoughts and heart's desires, but surrenders himself to the convincing power of the truth, as it silently

and in secret exerts this power in all its disciples, such an one, also, makes progress; for progress—one of the watchwords of our time—may be upwards or downwards. We have now to regard the latter, progress towards perdition. This consists in passing from the Corruption of the Truth to the SUPPLANTING OF THE GOSPEL. For a while, they, who are thus upon the way of declension, will not admit that they have passed beyond the limits of Christianity, even after they have long been building upon human strength and righteousness, upon human wisdom and prudence. In former times the Church, to secure herself against the corruptions of Christianity which crept in, was obliged to define boundaries between herself and the champions of falsehood, and to declare: “He who does not thus believe and declare this Gospel in unambiguous words is no Christian; and we cannot stand in any relationship of ecclesiastical or brotherly communion towards him.” This was formerly the case; but these well-meant limits and boundaries have long been overflowed, and we cannot but admit that one may live unassailed within the communion of the Church, and hold and teach the greatest errors in regard to Christ as the true God and true Man; may deny His deeds of miracle and grace, may deny the virtue of His atoning death, may deny the reality of His resurrection and ascension, may deny all the powers and foundations of Christianity. Crowds of false doctrines—which not

only place Christ in the background, but formally reject Him, rob Him of His kingly crown, and even tear from Him His high-priestly robe—are greeted by thousands with delight; are lauded as the expression of unprejudiced judgment, enlightened insight, and true liberality of sentiment—and that in the Church of Christ. Does not this deserve the name of a “Supplanting of the Gospel?” Is it not the power of the lie, a Satanic hostility against the only One before whom every attempt of the kind should recoil with awe? I will not say that this movement makes itself felt in the immediate present, and within our own sphere, with boldness. A moment of repose has intervened, and many circumstances lead us rather to the opposite experience, that many persons who, in their deepest heart, are strangers to the truth concerning the Cross of Christ, yet confess Him with the mouth. But beneath this momentarily calm surface lurks the enemy; and without, in any special manner, wishing to predict the future, I cannot but feel that we must assuredly look forward to a conflict with the supplanters of the Gospel—a conflict in which it must become manifest what the true Christ is, and what is meant by the prophecy, “There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets.” The blasphemous audacity of man’s pretended wisdom has not, in our days, soared so high as boastfully to proclaim itself the true God-man on earth. Hints, that as yet awaken astonishment, have not been wanting

in this direction. The time, however, is yet before us, in the preparation for the Lord's coming, when the corrupters of the truth will claim to supersede it, and make themselves known as the redeemers and saviours of humanity. Those on that side now speak softly and with bated breath, and point us to the wisdom of the State; to the capacities of science and art; or to that which human intellect has discovered in the way of overcoming the difficulties of time and space; and call these the true redeeming miracles of God. They promise even greater things than these, and hold forth the prospect, that could all men be brought into a closer connection, and their united energy be wisely directed to a common object, the time of Paradise—expected and longed for—would be come; and the glorious kingdom of God would be perfectly established upon earth.

My brethren, do you know the danger of these presumptuous thoughts? Does not that danger the more threaten us, because there is a measure of truth in them? The combination of human power is able to do much for the accomplishment of earthly things; and the kingdom of God requires and demands this power, and employs it as a means. But not all the united powers of the human race, from the first sinner to the last, who shall witness the return of Christ upon the clouds, would avail, to express myself figuratively, to raise even one withered leaf from

the abyss whither the storm of sin has swept it; to bring even one human being, laden with the curse of condemnation, a single step nearer to God. Therefore it is a superseding of the Gospel, and a decided hostility against Christ to cherish the delusion that there is any redeeming power freeing human life from its burden and distress, which does not flow from Christ; from that Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified in Israel, who was buried, who rose, and is ascended into heaven. In this hostility, all corruptions of the Christian truth will certainly issue. Their innermost thought is always this redemption without the Cross; and that such is the case will one day be clearly seen. Do not think the present culture, the present wide-spread intelligence, is a security against this wretched end of many; or, at least, against the guilty delusion of saying, "I am Christ, the true Saviour," or against turning in thousands to one who thus proclaims himself. Shall I show you a picture taken from the life of the present day? If not as yet here in Berlin, yet in other lands of Christendom, which fairly compete with us—perhaps might shame us—in regard to a wide-spread knowledge of the Gospel, there has arisen a sect of persons who still wish to be called Christians, but who acknowledge an unprincipled man as their Redeemer and Restorer, or at least as the Comforter, the Holy Ghost descended in person upon earth; and have the shamelessness, on account of this pretension, to call themselves the

“Latter Day Saints.”* What is possible with thousands in Christendom, on either side the Atlantic, shall this be impossible with us? No; when the hour comes and the power of darkness is set free, then, indeed, will be needed a firm clinging to Jesus Christ, not to be seduced into error. When the lie becomes the prevailing spirit of the age, where shall the unhappy man find security, who is yet a feeble reed in the faith? Let us once have miracles able to satisfy the desires of the flesh, and they will straightway be accepted as the miracles longed for and sought after. But the kingdom of darkness appeals not to the curiosity alone, it appeals, also, to the spirit of gain. Will this be less the case in the age immediately preceding the coming of the Lord? And will not the flesh then, also, find that which ministers to it, and cry out about the miracles and brilliant deeds which eclipse even the works of the Lord and His Apostles? But we have said enough to make the supplanting of the Gospel, as one of the signs of the coming of Christ, clear and intelligible. Only one word as to that which is the final and extreme manifestation of error. Where error becomes a power, in that it opens up pathways to the flesh, and presents to man’s vision fair hopes, and promises golden mountains, there gathers about the captive man a charm—THE FASCINATION OF THE LIE—from which he cannot escape, and which the hand of God rarely breaks. You will

* A later and more imposing form of the same delusion is the *Spiritualism* now so prevalent in the United States.

be ready to ask, as the disciples asked the Lord, "Who then can be saved?" Who can be delivered in the time of error's seductive sway? The question intimately concerns us. The full strength of this power may yet assail us in our lifetime.

And the same answer must be given to us: "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." The chosen ones are only on this account not seduced, because it is "not possible." And the sign of their being thus chosen is, that they unceasingly hear the voice of Jesus Christ in their heart, that—conscious of their weak faith and coldness of love, of their many sins and acts of disobedience—they are nevertheless rich, and strong, and powerful, because they know the Lord will not allow His sheep to be plucked out of His hand.

This is the glorious power which is victorious over the Satanic power of falsehood. With Him, exclaims the believer, I am safe. If Christ be with me, and I am His, the enemy may exert all his force; millions may fall beneath the seduction of error, and tread the path which leads to destruction, I cannot forsake my Saviour. That is the mystery of this impossibility. Therefore, may our glance at this sign of the times draw our hearts nearer to Him; more powerfully than before may they be attracted to this Jesus, that we may say, "Without Thee, Lord, can I do nothing; without Thee, I cannot exist;" yea, that when we are called to endurance in the conflict of death, the last sigh may declare, "My Jesus I cannot forsake." Amen.

False Security.

“But 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.”—MATT. xxiv. 37—39.

MY BELOVED IN CHRIST JESUS,—We have to-day* entered into the house of God with joyous feelings of thanksgiving; inasmuch as the present day calls us to offer to the Lord praise and thanksgiving for the rich blessing which He has granted us in the harvest of the year. And this praise must so much the more readily spring forth from our hearts, since we have looked forward to this harvest with feelings of anxiety and dread, and have asked, Will the Lord further chasten us? and what will become of us if He take not His hand off from us, but further cause us to

* Delivered on Sunday, October 19, 1856, the day appointed for the harvest thanksgiving.

experience a time of scarcity and want, with the prospect of famine before us? But, my brethren, such thanksgiving festivals return every year; and if from individual hearts, before oppressed and afterwards relieved, joyful songs of praise ascend to the Throne of Grace, yet we cannot assert that a festive spirit of thanksgiving is the prevailing tone amongst all classes of our population. Cares remain ever rife; the questioning of unbelief is heard ever anew; and if the full sufficiency of the harvest blessing is not at once perceived on all hands, men's predictions of future ill are ever on the increase, and the heart trembles, becomes despondent, turns away from the Lord who alone gives help, and has recourse hastily and fitfully to this and the other expedient; and if this fails, abandons all in despair.

Be not surprised, therefore, if in presence of this fact, which none of you will attempt to deny is a characteristic of our time, I read the text you have just heard. It is, at the same time, the word from the mouth of the Lord which must come before us in the order of our meditations on Christ's coming in His kingdom, as presented in the prophecies of the New Testament. For we have to-day to consider a very important and easily-recognised sign of the coming of Christ, namely, **THE FALSE SECURITY GENERALLY PREVALENT AMONG CHRISTIANS.** It is one of the clearest signs of the coming of Christ—and our text presents it to us as such—and bids us

seek to discover the DEEPER CAUSE OF THIS SECURITY, more closely examine ITS MANIFESTATION, and then also fix our attention upon the JUDGMENT WHICH SHALL SUCCEED IT.

Enter not into judgment with us, O Lord ! Behold our festivals of thanksgiving become days of confession : for we must confess before Thee that we are an ungrateful, unbelieving, dissatisfied people ; yet, with all our complaining and sighing, unconcerned ; and this because we do not regard the signs of Thy coming—because we do not look deeply into the wondrous working of Thy holy counsel. Lord God, heavenly Father, forgive us, and arouse us out of our sense of security ! Behold us in Christ Jesus, Thy dear Son, and give unto us, through the Holy Spirit, new hearts, which shall be able to render songs of thanksgiving, because they know something of Thy gracious deliverance—of the manifestation of Thy glory towards us sinners in great things, and universally as well as in small things, and on particular occasions. Bless us, Lord, at this hour. Amen.

My friends, the gospel for the present day* also points in the same direction as our text, to the gracious invitations of the faithful and compassionate God, as they have been given ever afresh from the beginning, first within narrower circles, and then more and more widely, unto all people ; and at the same time to the dulness, indifference, and false security

* Matt. xxii. 1—14. 22nd Sunday after Trinity.

of those to whom they came. Both are texts which refer to the last time—to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in His kingdom, and to the conduct of those for whom the wedding feast is prepared, and who are called as guests thereto, to behold the King's Son in His radiant glory, and to rejoice in His feast.

“But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” We need not here inquire which coming of the Son of man is more especially intended; whether that which is repeatedly and clearly indicated in the Scripture section to which the words of our text belong—His judicial coming to the ancient covenant nation; or His coming with great power and wonders for the completion of His kingdom on earth, and for the vanquishing of its enemies; or the last coming of the Lord with the trumpet of the archangel, and the flames of the world's judgment. Enough, it is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in His kingdom; and this is yet before us, belongs for us still to the things of the future. Wherefore we are called to an earnest consideration—especially on such days as the present, when, as a Christian people, as a company assembled for thanksgiving and supplication, we come into the presence of our God—a consideration of the *prevailing false security* as a *sign of His coming*.

I have remarked that we must in our text first look to the deeper cause of the present state of security. I might begin by showing you that it is present; that

it is found not merely here and there in an individual, but manifests itself as the prevailing spirit of the age. But I should think I was doing something of a very superfluous nature if I were to set about proving this. For who is waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus? How few they are who go forth with joy and hope to meet Him, and have no more ardent wish than that He should come rather to-day than to-morrow! How few are there also who think with fear and trembling of His coming! The majority banish such things from their minds, and consider that all which belongs to the prophetic word of the New Testament is a secondary matter; not calling for our attention, provided only we do not lose sight of the fundamental truths, or at any rate of the moral teaching of the Gospel. It is, however, precisely of these things that the Lord says, with much emphasis, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Precisely upon these words of New Testament prophecy does He (Matt. xiii. 43) impress so mighty a seal of His majesty as the God-man, saying, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." I enter, therefore, upon the CAUSE OF THIS FALSE SECURITY, which is a sign of the coming of Christ. It is written in the text, "And they knew (perceived) not, until the flood came;" and before, "Until the day that Noe entered into the ark." They did not regard the sign that was before their eyes, the building of the ark; the command which Noah had—as he proclaimed to

them—received of God ; the space of one hundred and twenty years which was granted them for repentance. And when we open the Book of Genesis we find another thing they did not regard ; for the Almighty God says, “ Men will no more be chastened by my Spirit ;”^{*} or in other words, They receive no more conviction of apostasy, by the sacred memory of all which the fathers have transmitted to them from the time of Paradise. The Divine arrangements for deliverance, the Divine means of salvation were set forth visibly in the person of Noah before the eyes of this dark, rebellious race ; and the Spirit of God, who was yet working in their hearts, said to them, “ This is the work of God : there is need for repentance and conversion from evil works ; there is need to attach ourselves to this despised and ridiculed man, this Noah, the preacher of righteousness.” But this they regarded not. They were well pleased with the fair, God-created earth, and they rejoiced in the fruitful harvests which every year brought them ; in the abundance of every kind which the heart of man could desire, which the yet fresh and virgin soil, in the spring-time of its existence, bare to them ; they rejoiced in their own power and strength, and, as we read, also in their own arts and inventions ; they boasted, without doubt, of being a race which in its light of understanding, its force of will, and in its consciousness of its own strength—in a word, in

^{*} Luther's version of Genesis vi. 3.

its whole personal life—stood there as a power as contradistinguished from God, a power which even the Godhead must learn to respect. It is true it was the race of Cain the fratricide, upon whose forehead was set a brand of evil ; the restless, inconstant, fugitive race. This race, however, had formed combinations, waged wars, put forth force, fought its way with the sword, and at last united with the nobler and more spiritual race of Seth, and drawn them also, for the most part, into the stream of corruption ; at the same time gaining from contact with the nobler race an augmentation of its own self-confidence and pride, so that at last the house of Noah alone remained unperverted.

If the cause of the false security in the days of the flood is to be sought in the fact, that they rejected the admonitions of God, and opposed to the humiliating testimonies of the Spirit of God their own consciousness of power ; if they lived in the delusion, “ a race like ourselves, possessed of all the gifts and powers of the earthly life, can never become extinct ; ” if they regarded the words of a solitary Noah—as opposed to the million voices which resounded with the praise of their own power—as the talk of a headstrong and foolish old man, we at once perceive that the centuries between that time and the present have made no such great difference as to render the same ground of false security an impossibility in our day, and perhaps in a no distant future. Yea, it seems, in speaking of those primeval days, as though we were

speaking of our own time. I ask, Is the work of the Holy Spirit, who chastens the world for the sin of unbelief, no longer disregarded? Have all become prepared to bow to the authority of the Holy Spirit, and to justify Him when He says, "Thou art a child of death; if God deals with thee after thy works, thou art for ever lost; and if thou shouldst be placed, with all thy doing and willing, in the righteous balance of God, it must be said—too light, too light?" Does not the sign of salvation stand before *us* also in the Cross of Christ? Have we not also the man who is the preacher of righteousness, yea, righteousness itself, the Lord Jesus Christ? Are, then, our eyes, our hearts, our hands, uplifted to the Cross of Christ? What do we hear when we take up our newspapers, these organs of public opinion; or listen to the orations pronounced by its living representatives? What do they speak forth? Is it the confession that we have sinned, we and our fathers? Is it a sense of humiliation before the Lord our God? Or do we not, for the most part, hear the praises either of the nation, or of the age of culture in which we live; how discovery follows discovery, one means of diminishing labour is succeeded by another? Or we hear the praises which individuals bestow upon themselves, or upon each other, for the services they have rendered in regard to these things. You must confess the voices of human praise are more frequently heard than the voices of humiliation and the confession of sin. And what is

said in regard to the future? I know well that, now this, now that, of a favourable or unfavourable nature, is predicted of the outward progress of our Church, according as its momentary position inclines to the one or to the other, or according as the inclinations and wishes of the speaker determine. I do not, however, mean this; but, What is said of our Christian social life as a whole? Are many looking for the intervention of a Pentecostal life, a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, whereby our life—even that which is best in it—may be transformed, renewed, sanctified? Are they beseeching the Lord to grant this? Is it not rather the commonly-expressed opinion, that if only more prosperous times were granted us, and greater alleviation was found for the burdens of life, it were tolerable enough on earth, even in its present condition? Whether the burden of sin, which is every year more heavily pressing upon individuals, and upon whole nations, is removed or not, is a matter of little concern. Now and then, indeed, people look with terror on the increase in the number and magnitude of crimes, and exclaim with dismay, that our houses of correction are too small to hold all the criminals committed to them, and that those who return therefrom remain a pest to society. Through such single rifts in the clouds, if I may so speak, people look into the future, and shrink back in alarm. But it goes no further, because the chastening of the Holy Spirit is not yet regarded, and the question is

not entertained, How shall we become the children of God, and free from the curse of the reigning power of sin, of the devil, and of death? In this is manifest the cause of the false security prevailing on every hand. Such it was formerly, such it is still, and such it will be, when once again (as in the time of the Flood) the sleep of the world shall be almost universal. Then there were only eight whose eyes were opened; and among these eight even, not all were pure. Oh, how many families among us, and how many single individuals, pass for Christians, who have never yet, in true repentance, received the absolution of their sins; who know, properly speaking, nothing of this absolution, except as it is pronounced by the minister before any can become partakers of the Lord's Supper! This is a false security, in the midst of Christian truth. If you know not that your sins are forgiven you, you are yet living in this state; and it is not in any degree owing to you if this important sign of the speedy Coming of the Lord is not already present. I cannot, and do not wish, to assert *that our age is the last, the ground on which we tread the immediate threshold to our entering into the kingdom of the Lord in its completion; but no one, on the other hand, can maintain and prove the contrary; and no one, above all, can say that a transition might not be suddenly made from our present condition to one of universal false security.* I will only suppose the case that the Lord had removed the present distress,

which He has imposed upon us; that glorious, gracious harvests should be given us one after another, and all that is necessary to a life of indulgence on earth should be conferred upon us richly. What would be the probable consequence thereof? If through such Divine goodness many an occasion for seeking God would for thousands cease to exist, is it to be supposed that this would lead our people to repentance? My brethren, let us first look at the MANIFESTATION OF THIS FALSE SECURITY, to which our course of thought leads us, and the answer to this question will be plain. The text describes this manifestation in the words, "They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage." In another place, it is further said, "They did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded." / Singular language! Are not these, then, things which have their ground in the divinely appointed order of society? The Lord will not, surely, forbid these things, and form an inactive, indolent race? He will not recommend merely outward abstinence as the true preparation for His coming? Certainly not. But the guilt of these antediluvians consisted in this: they ate, they drank, they married and were given in marriage, not according to the order of God, and within the sacred limits imposed by Him—made these things an obstacle to their hearing God's voice; and amidst the ordinary enjoyments and engagements of life, left themselves no

time for quiet self-examination, or for joyful approach unto their God. And in these words is one of the most terrible dangers of the present time described. Would it were only the extraordinary and rapidly-passing events of our lives which made it difficult for us to listen to the voice of the Spirit of God! But such inroads has the spirit of the world made, that earthly cares and pleasures consume the whole of life. I appeal to the testimony of every father, every mother, every one in responsible office, every labourer, every merchant, each in his sphere. To such an extent is this the case, that the ordinary business of our vocation—or what we consider, and make such—leaves us, as is commonly said, no time for the things of eternity, and prevents our thinking of that which is necessary for our souls. If we could see the hidden things of the heart, how many should we find now present, who, in answer to the question, When do you pray with your family? when do you read the Word of God with them? would reply, “I have not time. Under my circumstances, it is impossible.” The great dangers of the present day, my brethren, is lest the ordinary duties of our calling, devolving upon us in the order of God’s providence, should prove a hindrance to us in the service of God, in the enjoyment of His word, and in the reception of those heavenly blessings without which man is not designed to live in this world. And if many of us who are here to-day must give such testimony, what must be

the testimony of the hundreds of thousands who never enter the House of God? "Marrying and giving in marriage" is also enumerated among the hindrances to preparation for His kingdom. We cannot in this, as before, in "eating and drinking," confine ourselves to ordinary occurrences, the affairs of daily life. We are led by this allusion to think of the festivities of life, the assembling for the purpose of enjoying the fair gifts of the earth. Is this, then, forbidden? Has not the Lord given, in the Son, all things unto His children? Shall they not rejoice to be born men, because Christ is not ashamed to be called their brother, because they are called to His glory? And shall not this joy be a common one? Shall it not be associated with particular days and hours, as well in the home as in the church? And can earthly enjoyment be entirely divorced from spiritual joy? Is not the receiving of the gifts of God with thanksgiving—consequently, eating and drinking—a lawful enjoyment? Questions like these may also be raised, Shall not man and woman be united in marriage? Shall not, when hearts have found each other, festive joy accompany their bond of union in God? Shall no voice of rejoicing be heard where the most joyous event in a family causes earth to appear the outer court of Paradise? None of these questions call for an answer in the negative. And yet, have not these social enjoyments—social obligations, as they are now termed—become hindrances, in a very high

degree, and especially in our larger towns, to our regarding the voice of the Holy Spirit? Do they not leave the heart exhausted, listless, incapable of prayer, disinclined for the Word of God? Does not vanity play its part in them, and the lust of the flesh in a more lawless or a more refined manner, pride, self-admiration, mutual flattery, and falsehood?

Beloved hearers, into what a domain we are glancing. I will not further depict it, for you know it all. You will answer, *I must*; my position requires it; my social relations demand it; I cannot withdraw. Very good. But your social relations for eternity? You are called to the company of just men made perfect, to the many thousands of angels, and to the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Will you rather go where only the fire is prepared for the devil and his angels?

Beloved, *one* sign of the speedy coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in His kingdom is certainly not wanting among us. And this calls us to earnest self-examination in regard to that coming. Have you a joyful longing for it? Does He come to you as the bridegroom to the bride? Do you call to Him, "Come, Lord Jesus?" Or do you put from you the thought of this coming, with a contemptuous epithet, as the hope of enthusiasm or of religious weakliness? If the latter, the cold hand of false security is pressing upon you. I implore you, awake! awake! for a JUDGMENT IS PASSING OVER THE EARTH. The

mouth of the Lord says, "They knew not until the flood came, and took them all away." They thought so many centuries have already passed away, and we have not acted worse than our fathers, who lived such prolonged lives on earth, and saw so much. It is true they also had witnessed terrible natural phenomena—inundations, and such like—but none, as yet, which swept away the whole human race, covering the whole earth, so far as it was inhabited by man. On this account they mocked and laughed at the foolish faith of Noah. To men of their physical knowledge and wide experience, faith in God seemed narrow and weak.

Dear friends! However true it is that we must immediately explain the things of earth by the powers which God has created, and implanted in matter; however much it is our duty to obtain an intelligent insight, and to deal with the connected whole of earthly things in the order of cause and effect; it is yet incontestably certain, that the word and eternal power of God in Christ Jesus refuses to submit itself to the formulas of our poor intellect; that, on the contrary, by its manifestations, light from Eternity bursts upon us, and the stream of everlasting life rolls in upon the earthly state. At this point the natural explanation ends; and it is folly to make the laws of created life the standard of the deeds of the Creator. And he who, spite of this limitation, will attempt to apply human laws as the standard of the

Divine conduct, may win for himself a high reputation for wisdom amongst men, but remains a fool in the eyes of God, and of those who are able to judge spiritually that which is of the Spirit of God. If we can fall in with the talk of our age, which sounds almost like a repetition of the mockery of the Cainites directed against Noah, namely, that what happens, happens by necessity—that every cause has its effect—and, therefore, a miraculous, supernatural intervention of the God-man in the history of the world, an eventual completion of the kingdom of God on earth, a coming of the Lord, is not conceivable; then we have advanced very far in this security, because we not only live in it, but declare living in it to be true wisdom, raise it to a principle, and close for ourselves by a logical system the way of exit therefrom. *Judgment* is then, so far as we are concerned, very near. If we adopt as our own the inconsiderate language of the poet, “The World’s history *is* the World’s judgment,” and put from us, with a little worldly prudence, the unwelcome thought that the Lord Jesus will come in the clouds of heaven, and will judge the quick and the dead, whilst not a span of the world’s history is rightly understood by us all, since it is known in its secret springs of action only by Him who tries the hearts and reins; if we banish, with such high-sounding words, the fear of judgment from our souls, or even persuade ourselves that earnest thoughts of judgment are to be dismissed as

secondary questions, suitable only for pious women, but of which an enlightened mind must be ashamed ; then are we so deeply sunk in this false security that even the awakening call sounds for us in vain. It will be heard indeed again, but then too late ; for it awakens no more to save, but to chasten. As the flood burst forth—as the waves rolled over the earth—as they rose from hour to hour—as the heights were gradually covered, and the poor, pallid beings sought deliverance in vain—oh, how gladly would they have clung to that sign of grace, the ark of Noah ! How many a one also will wish on the last day, “ Oh, had I but believed in this Jesus Christ ! But now it is too late.” Even now it may become “ too late.” The judgment is begun already. The world’s judgment runs through the world’s history, but has not yet found its final and majestic revelation.

My brethren, do you suppose that at our last hour the hammer of death will first knock lightly at the careless heart, and then gradually louder, in order that it may receive the awakening note ? Yes, there *may* be such a note, and sometimes there will be called forth from a soul, even at the last, the cry, “ Lord, save me, I perish.” But what if the heart is no longer a resounding bell—if it has become dulled and deadened by the thoughts, phrases, and systems to which I have before adverted ! In this case no response will be heard from the breaking heart.

And on this account, listen to the warning cry! The *judgment* is near at hand; and no one of you knows whether the angel of judgment is not even now standing behind him with uplifted sword. What, then, is to be done? We must give heed to the signs of the coming of the Son of man, not as a matter of idle curiosity, in order to be able to calculate the world's history beforehand, but that we may know how it stands with us, and may be brought into the true position in regard to the Saviour; that as wise virgins, whose lamps are trimmed, we may at midnight hour hear with joy the cry, "The bridegroom cometh!"—may go forth to meet Him, and enter with Him into the wedding chamber, and there celebrate the harvest-feast of souls—the harvest-feast in which we shall praise the Lord in new tongues for all the temporal and spiritual harvests He has granted us here on earth.

May the word spoken in weakness, beloved, produce this effect in all of you who have hitherto lived in false security! May the Holy Spirit chasten, correct, renew, console you, and finally give testimony to your spirits, that you are the children of God! Amen.

The Unibersal Proclamation of the Gospel.

“ 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.”—MATT. xxiv. 14.

WE have, beloved in Christ Jesus, already spoken during several Sundays, of the signs of the coming of Jesus Christ in His kingdom. They were precisely those signs which call for the courage of faith and patience in believers, that when these signs appear they may be upheld and endure unto the end. We spoke of temptation, seduction, persecution, and days of anguish, which should come upon the earth, of mighty convulsions which should herald the King of Glory. To-day we have before us a proclamation by the Saviour of one of the signs of His advent, which is essentially different from all we have hitherto contemplated, in that it is one only *welcome and gladdening* to the heart of a true Christian. After all the other signs have appeared, it may yet remain un-

certain whether the coming of the Lord is near. For who will say whether the evil, the power of darkness, may not yet become greater than it is at a particular time? Who will maintain that the powers of temptation may not show themselves stronger, the errors more seductive, the lie more black, than has hitherto been the case? The coming of the Lord in His kingdom, the culmination, completion of this coming, has often been falsely supposed to be near, because it was thought things could not become worse; and experience has shown that this expectation was premature. Every age has the feeling inherent in it that evil has reached a degree, a power, which it cannot surpass. But the Lord only knows how powerful, how terrible, how destructive, how deadening, the power of Satanic falsehood may become upon earth. And, though we compare the many monsters of sin which meet us in life, or which we know from history, with Judas Iscariot, we are not able to deny that in this traitor to his Lord, a dark form meets us, compared with which most others have still some trace of light. But there may come a time in which humanity will separate itself into two divisions—the one, of decided friends, confessors, and witnesses, martyrs of the Lord Jesus; the other, of decided foes, entirely ruled and blinded by Satan, as the arch-traitor was. There may come a Judas-age on the side of unbelievers and haters of the Lord. We do not, therefore, share in such hasty judgment,

and are unable to infer with certainty, from all of a painful, dark, and terrible nature which precedes the coming of the Lord, that this coming is at hand.

But here we have a sign which enables us to judge infallibly, clearly, and plainly, whether the coming of the Lord is near, or still distant. In contemplating this sign, THE UNIVERSAL PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL, we cannot but consider first the fact REGARDED IN ITSELF; and then, IN ITS RESULTS.

The Lord says, "And this gospel shall be preached." He connects, therefore, that which He here speaks with the preceding words concerning the great distress, the wars and rumours of wars, false Christs and false prophets, sedition of nations and families, and wide-spread offence and treachery. After all this follow the words: "And this gospel shall be preached." This certainly does not mean that, as soon as all these things are past, the Gospel shall be preached in all the world; but this preaching of the Gospel runs through the midst of all these terrible things. The gist of the prophecy lies in the words, "The Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached *in all the world.*"

Now for THE FACT. Could the Apostles, the first disciples of the Lord—could the Apostolic Church—believe the coming of the Lord to be so very near? Could they do so, fully understanding this prophecy of the Lord? When we consider, beloved, in what a short time the tidings of salvation through the incarnate and crucified Son of God sped like a fire through

the lands of the then known world ; how that which was spoken in Jerusalem with closed doors, within a few years made itself heard even on the imperial throne at Rome, and the sound thereof went forth even to the distant Babylon ; how, within fifty years, hundreds of thousands of confessors of Jesus, the crucified Saviour, were dwelling in all the countries of the civilized world, we cannot be surprised if the first Christians expected a speedy advent of the Saviour, because they might expect an equally rapid illumination of the lands and nations yet remaining in darkness. But we now know that the Gospel of the kingdom did pass beyond, and must needs pass beyond, the world then known to the inhabitants of Palestine ; that on every side the ancient civilized world was bounded by mighty masses of nations, upon whom here and there a faint glimmer of the old heathen culture fell ; and that these nations required centuries of time before the Gospel had shone upon them all. I mean the nations of whose existence the Apostles themselves had a knowledge. And before this had taken place new hordes of barbarians burst into the old world, and circumstances within the Church itself hindered the outpouring of the gracious light upon the dark nations. But even though the Gospel of the kingdom had been brought to all the barbarous hordes which were beating at the gates and the frontiers of the Roman empire, and had they all been equally irradiated with the golden light of free-

dom in Jesus—as, for instance, Italy, Greece, and Egypt were—yet, with all this, only a small part of the work would have been accomplished; and through other strata of nations—deep into farthest Asia, down into the interior of Africa, up to the frozen regions of Northern Europe—the foot of the messenger must wander before it could be said that the Gospel was proclaimed to all the then known and accessible nations of the earth. And even then, there were whole nations shut out from the knowledge of that age by the intervening ocean, and more than ten centuries must elapse before they came into contact with the Christian world.

You will admit, from this rapid survey, that from the stand-point of our knowledge of the world, we might easily say the coming of the Lord in His kingdom must *then* be a very distant event, even though the progress of the Gospel should be such as the Apostles and their communions hoped. But what really took place? Was, properly speaking, “the Gospel of the kingdom” preached to all the peoples of the ancient world of civilization, and to the nations bordering on them? Did it not happen that only too soon Christianity, both within and without the Roman empire, entered into unhappy combinations with that which was present in the old heathen world, and which had grown up with the ancient life of nature in the nations, with their heathen mode of thought? Must not a Christianity arise from this admixture

such as no apostle would have recognised as a genuine copy of Him who was Christianity in person—our Lord Jesus Christ? And in place of the kingdom of the Son of God from heaven—the dominion of the lowly Lamb of God, the Crucified Victor—has there not been founded a worldly kingdom of the Church, and with it a Christianity of the flesh? Therefore, the pure Gospel of the kingdom was not proclaimed, even in those circles where it would have been possible, in such a manner that we could say there was no one who had not heard the voice of the Good Shepherd. It is true, there lay hidden under the earthly admixtures and obscurings the noble living germs of Divine and regenerating truth; and here and there these fell upon prepared hearts, upon whole hosts of waiting souls, and wrought the work of true conversion. This, however, was not the rule, but the exception. More than ten centuries passed amidst these dim and glimmering lights, and the pure bright sunshine of the grace of Jesus Christ, of the only salvation in the name of Jesus, appeared only to a few chosen souls.

Therefore, my beloved, even where the banner of the Cross has been planted, and where it has been surrounded with the pomp and splendour, the protection and power of ecclesiastical display, there is need of the preaching of the Gospel “of the kingdom,” *i.e.*, that the Lord is King alone, He alone High Priest; there is need of the preaching which

turns the eye from the word and glory of man, and turns it only to the Lamb without blemish and without spot, through whom we have been redeemed from our vain conservation after the manner of our fathers. To this end the Gospel has not yet been carried through all lands.

Yet, a glance at ourselves and at the communions who—if they wish it—can have the light of pure truth, before we have concluded our remarks on the universal proclamation of the Gospel. Whilst we praise the Lord, that He has given the clear light to shine forth out of the twilight, and that the primitive form of the kingdom of Christ has again, in the Reformation, burst through the human coverings which concealed it, must we not, at the same time, confess that, through the Reformation, only a brief flash of light, a momentary irradiance, took place; transitory in this respect, at least, that only too soon the same human and earth-born darkness returned, even though in a lesser degree than a thousand years before? On this account, let it be clearly understood that even within the Protestant community the Gospel of the kingdom in many cases needs preaching for the first time. How many individuals and congregations, even among ourselves, are professedly Protestant Christians, who have never heard the word of the Cross preached simply, powerfully, pure and free from human invention? There must, therefore—since we cannot expect heralds to come to us from without

—be the awakening of a new life in our Church ; and the preachers and teachers, yea, and the fathers and mothers, who have also a stewardship to fulfil in the mysteries of God, must learn to fulfil the duties of their office very differently from what they have hitherto done. There must yet be power and movement again in the Church, before it can be said that even in our lands the Gospel of the kingdom has been preached to all.

And then you know how the thick shadows of night yet rest upon wide-spread portions of the earth ; and how the messengers go forth, in the hand of God, to the east and to the west, to the south and to the north, to give effect to the treasure which they bear in earthen vessels, where this treasure has been hitherto unknown, and to bring nigh those that are afar off. And if a great number of these messengers have already gone forth, and are found by thousands in their places of labour, and already hundreds of thousands from among the heathen praise the Lord Jesus Christ as their only Lord and Saviour ; and if the preaching of the kingdom has made a new beginning in the distant islands and remote countries of the heathen, yet we cannot deny that there is ground for the question—What is that among so many ?

What, then, if after all this, taking a general view of that which concerns the fact of preaching, we must come to the conviction that the final coming of our Lord is not yet at hand? Shall we on this

account set about reckoning, and draw the disheartening conclusion—It has required eighteen centuries for humanity to become penetrated to the present imperfect extent with the light of the Gospel ; it will therefore require at least another eighteen centuries before the pure light of the Gospel extends over the whole earth? This would be a deceptive and unwarranted conclusion. We shall rather consider that in the apostolic age as much was accomplished in half a century—yea, spiritually regarded, infinitely more—than in five centuries of the subsequent period of twilight. The Lord is not bound to our calculations, or to our standard of time. He has, as our old proverb says, His hastening and His delaying. The history of the kingdom of God seems often to drag itself slowly along, and after decades of years, yea, half-centuries, have passed, it seems to stand at the same point, and we are hardly able to trace any progress ; while at another time, a few years suffice to give to the spiritual world an entirely new aspect. As in our winter months the movement and activity of Nature is scarcely perceivable, and yet, when spring-time bursts in, often in a night all is covered with fresh verdure, so is there also in the kingdom of the Lord winter and spring ; and we might almost venture to assert that we live in the dawning of a time of spring. The reasons are not far to seek. That which has been done during the past fifty years, and still more during the past thirty years, for the extension of

the Gospel without, and for the purer proclamation of the same within our own land, is to be compared only with the time of the Reformation, or with the earliest and apostolic age of the Church. I must, however, yet once more say that our spring has only dawned, and that it depends in great measure upon the life of faith, upon the self-surrender, the love, the fidelity of the evangelical churches, whether the Lord's will be now accomplished, and His kingdom soon come. It is one of the most glorious privileges of believers that they may, so to speak, advance onwards the chariot of Divine judgments; that they are not merely spectators of the fact that the ways of God issue in glory, but also themselves help to break up those paths which end in eternal light.

Beloved in Christ Jesus! If it is now clear that the kingdom of God in its completion is—according to merely human understanding—yet far distant, it is at the same time evident that it may be far nearer to us than we imagine. But what arises for us out of this contemplation? It bids us ask for ourselves, and each one for his house, Are you familiar with the Gospel of the kingdom? Does Jesus Christ rule amongst you, and in you, with unlimited power, subduing all things under His feet? Is His glory the first concern in your families, in your vocation? These questions may be summed up in this: Has the Gospel of the kingdom among us not been preached in vain? For I must once more return to my asser-

tion, that many congregations have not yet heard the Gospel sound forth clearly from the mouth of the preacher—at least during the memory of those living. But, among Protestants, the Bible lies open in the houses, and is epitomized in the catechisms used in the schools ; and there is scarcely one among Protestants in our town, or in our land, who has not, or might not have if he wished, a knowledge of Jesus Christ sufficient for his salvation. When, therefore, we ask if the Gospel of the kingdom has been proclaimed, we do not confine ourselves to the faithfulness or unfaithfulness of those engaged in its public proclamation, but speak of the fidelity with which this duty has been fulfilled by each one in his sphere. Yet once more. What does this contemplation suggest to our hearts? It is at least a solemn exhortation, not slothfully to look on, or still less to remain in ignorance and unconcern, when, from one and another body of Evangelical Christians, missionaries are sent forth into the lands of the heathen. We must either be shamefully and sinfully negligent of our duty as Christians, and therefore be called to a stern account for such neglect, or we must take an active part in labour for the conversion unto life of those that are afar off, and of those that are nigh.

Thus far does the contemplation of the *fact* lead us. But now as to the designed *results* of this proclamation of the Gospel. The thought may present itself to you, that there is little hope of ever attaining

to that condition to which the preceding part of our discourse seems to point. It seems to say there will one day be a time when all will have heard and received the Gospel; when there will be no more heathen, no more Jews or Mahommedans, or even a Romish or a Greek Church; when the human race will form one living Christian Church, in which no dead members can be found. At the same time, you will recall to mind that the Lord has not promised this, but has said, "Let both—the tares and the wheat, on the field of the world—grow together until the harvest;" and has afterwards told us, "The harvest is the end of the world." Accordingly, unto the end of the world there will ever be tares in the field—ever a mixture of believers and unbelievers in the Church itself. Your objection may go even further, and lead you to conclude that the coming of the Lord will be His appearing at the final judgment, and not in the beginning of a period of triumph for the Gospel upon earth.

That were a perfectly just conclusion, had the aim of our discourse been to show that there would be a time in which all had not only heard, but also lovingly accepted the Gospel, and had made it the supreme power of heart and life. But this was not my meaning, and could not be so, since it stands otherwise written in my text, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations."

“For a testimony concerning them.”* A testimony *for* the nations, and a testimony *against* them. A testimony *for* the nations. This it will be—by virtue of its inner nature, and in accordance with all past experience—for thousands, yea, for millions. Great masses of men are being saved through the Gospel, and have already become children of God, when they were once children of the world, from being fools, have become friends and servants of Jesus Christ, and, through him, of the Father in heaven. Through the testimony of the gospel—which has only one theme, “the kingdom,” *i.e.*, the Head of this kingdom, the only King, who is at the same time Prophet and High Priest—multitudes of men have been snatched from the chains of darkness, and rejoice in the God of their salvation as long as they are pilgrims here on earth, and will not cease to sing above: “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.”

But beside them will always be such as will not that “this man should reign over them”—who are ashamed of the word of the Cross—who will not owe it to the Crucified that they become all that they are—who think of attaining, in their own strength

* Luther's version, with which the English authorized version of Mark xiii. 9 nearly agrees. The authorized rendering of Matt. xxiv. 14 is, however, more exact.

that which they call their salvation—who feel within themselves the power either to win heaven or to despise it. *Against* such dark, proud spirits will the word of the kingdom be a testimony; for when the final completion of that kingdom shall be brought about—when the dead arise, both small and great—they shall recognise in Him who sits upon the throne the same king whom they have rejected. But even before this, and *with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in His kingdom*, the judgments of God will burst upon them, and the Lord will already begin on earth to make His foes the footstool of His feet. *In this time of triumph, they who have been persecuted and oppressed for the name of Jesus, will share something of the inner majesty of Him whose fellowship of suffering was precious to them; and those others will experience, at least, a foretaste of that despair which will receive its full expression in the judgment of the last day.* Let us not imagine, my friends, that because many nations do not possess the Gospel in its purity, it will on that account cease to have for them a decisive importance. “I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place,” are the words of the Lord to the Church which would not behold the light it possessed. Many a candlestick has been removed from nations because that fidelity was wanting, which, even with little light, discovers the way—that humility, which rests not in its own strength—that simplicity had disappeared which

cleaves to the Saviour himself, even when His form is only dimly to be recognised ; and this because those who professed the name of Christ were, under pretext of this name, seeking that which is earthly. For a people who yet repeat the Gospel in words, who externally—whether in word or symbol—make their boast of it, the testimony of this Gospel is at hand, for by this Gospel it will be condemned. As it is with whole nations and churches, so it is with individual souls, and with families.

Beloved, God is not mocked. When we consider what became of the Eastern and Greek Churches twelve hundred years ago, and behold the flames of judgment which rose over them, we cannot but be anxious about the fate of our Protestant Church. If we must say that, while the Bible is expounded in a thousand pulpits, while all the means are at hand for an evangelical training, self-righteousness and confidence in human merit prevail amongst the masses of the people, large communities, whole cities, sleep the sleep of spiritual death, and the mouth of the Shepherd is either silent or testifies falsely, and teaches such doctrines as are only the commandments of men, then are we compelled to cry forth out of the depths : “ Enter not into judgment with us. Take not our candlestick out of its place. Grant us yet further delay ; but grant us also grace that what we have heard, what we know, what is familiarly in our mouth, what has even passed over,

in our language, into proverbs, may not have been proclaimed only as a testimony *against* us."

But the end will come, when once the word has been proclaimed, to all, in such a way that it shall be only their own fault if the Gospel of the kingdom becomes a testimony *against* them. Whether this final end is near, when the Lord shall impose a check upon His enemies, and spiritually reign with kingly power, we know not—are not able to calculate and determine it. But one thing I know, that for us, for me, for you, for our homes, for all the circles in which we live, and which are committed to us for our labour, and our guidance thereof—for our congregation, for our Church, for our Fatherland—all will depend on the question, whether the Gospel becomes to us a testimony unto life everlasting, and we now have peace through its Divine power in our heart, and allow it to shine forth in our whole life. If it be thus with us, we await with joy the coming of the Lord from heaven; and our wish is then that His appearing may be near. But though it should remain afar off for us, so that our life's course be finished on earth before we witness this event, yet we know that the development of God's kingdom upon earth remains—even for those above who are around the throne of the Lamb—with the great and gracious deeds of God in the world, the most precious and attractive object of contemplation—for the admiration of His ways and judgments, and rejoicing in His compassion and everlasting love. The

progress of the Lord's kingdom, and His coming in His kingdom, will not be less important for us, though our life incline to its end, and we lay down our head and fall asleep in peace; because we shall then have our part above in the gracious march of His kingdom, and rejoice in anticipation of the moment when the Lord shall complete His Church on earth, and His countenance shall shine forth with greater brightness than heretofore it could.

Oh, brethren, may this be our longing desire here on earth or in heaven above, to have part in the victories and final triumph of our God and Saviour! This will be ours if, through His Spirit and His Divine power, the Gospel becomes in our hearts an all-powerful witness that we are redeemed from the kingdom of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. *Amen.*

The Days of the Son of Man.



“And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, See here ; or, see there : go not after them, nor follow them. For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven ; so shall also the Son of man be in his day.”—LUKE xvii. 22-24.

WE have, beloved, entered on that succession of Sundays which bring to a close the Christian year, and in which the days of the Son of man, the great turning-points in the history of the kingdom of God upon earth—all pointing forward to the last judgment, in which they will eventually terminate and find their point of culmination—are brought under the attention of our congregations. This fact alone had been sufficient to determine our choice of a prophecy of the Lord, such as that we have just read ; but we have at the same time reached the last of the contemplations, with which we have been for some time occupied, on the prophecies of our Lord Jesus

Christ himself, concerning His coming in His kingdom. The last of these meditations which follows those on which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we have been engaged—the recognition of the signs of Christ's coming—must necessarily have regard to the question, *What is precisely that end, of which, in all our glances into the future, so much has been said?*

Our answer to this question is supplied in our text. It speaks of the *DAYS OF THE SON OF MAN*, and gives us to look upon the *TIME, OR THE "WHEN,"* of the appearing of Christ; then upon the *PLACE, OR THE "WHERE,"* of these days of the Son of man; and, lastly, upon the *MANNER, OR THE "HOW,"* of the glorious appearing of Jesus in His kingdom.

Lord, grant us Thine help, that in humble and filial spirit we may follow Thy Word. In none of the revelations which Thou hast made do we feel and experience so deeply and so strongly that we know nothing, and that Thou alone canst enlighten us to understand Thy kingdom, so far as it shall be given us to understand it here on earth. Help us, then, Lord, through Thy Holy Spirit, that in our present meditation we may abide within the sacred limits which Thou hast drawn, and at the same time leave nothing unregarded of all that Thou hast spoken. Bless us, faithful Lord and Saviour, for Thy name's sake. Amen.

It may have happened that, when I promised, from the words of our text, an answer to the question,

“What is that end to which all is tending?” the thought arose in the mind of one and another that no clear, distinct, and unambiguous answer could be obtained ; for here again it is of the *days* * of the Son of man that the Saviour speaks, and not of one last, decisive day.

And indeed, if we recall to mind the texts which have hitherto been our guide, and which were for the most part taken from the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, we find—and we must acknowledge the difficulty—that *the* end is there spoken of, and yet a different end is afterwards described. The explanation is to be found in the fact that, as we have before stated in our exposition, a three-fold end clearly underlies the description of our Lord—namely, the end which befell the Holy City, the sacred depository of the revelation of the Old Covenant, and of God’s whole preparatory dispensation of grace, in the destruction of Jerusalem ; the end which is reached in the ultimate triumph of the Gospel, in the attaining of the earthly goal, the last height of the new life begun in sinful humanity, which, consequently, has not been brought about until this hour, and to which—just because it is a ruling of the Divine life in the earthly, the triumph of the Gospel among the nations of this earth, formerly held under the dominion of sin—no

* Our Lord is speaking of the days of His kingdom’s triumph ; beginning with His coming in glory for its completion, and extending to the final judgment—a triumph foreshadowed in the fall of Jerusalem.

last point of final accomplishment can be assigned. Beyond this, again, there must yet be an end, the end best known and most familiar to us, namely, the Great Day of the Lord, when He shall come to judge the earth in righteousness, and to give to every one according as his work shall be.

In like manner, our text speaks of "one of the days of the Son of man," for which, not only the disciples then living, but those also who should believe through their word, would long. He says, "The days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it." The question as to the time of the appearing of the Son of man is thus placed in the foreground—the time, namely, of all the manifestations of the Lord, of the mighty victories of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, as they are immediately after severally indicated. Even the destruction of Jerusalem was, in point of time, only determined to the extent, that "this generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled."* On the other hand, the further victorious coming of Christ to rule over the nations upon earth, in consequence of which His name shall throughout the whole world be above every name, and not merely a strong defence for a little flock who flee thereto and are safe, but a palace in which nations

* That the Jewish race, as such, will not pass away until the Saviour's coming to complete His kingdom, seems also intended in this prediction. Compare Matt. xxiii. 39.

upon nations find their home, is, in point of time, left in uncertainty. The Son of man, in the days of His flesh, "knew not the day nor the hour" which the Father had reserved to Himself. And, finally, it is written of the last judgment, that it shall come as a snare upon those securely sleeping: suddenly, as a thief in the night; but at the same time no human wisdom is able to calculate how many generations, yea, how many thousands of years, will yet elapse before this final judgment arrives. If, then, the time of the days of the Son of man is thus undeterminable, of what immediate significance is the subject for us? Wherefore do we speak of it from this place, consecrated as it is to the work of edification? Why do we not simply lay the question aside, with the despairing remark—this is one of the things beyond the sphere of human knowledge? One reason decides us against so doing. The Lord says to His disciples, without reproof, without prohibition, "The days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man." This desire, therefore, enters into the life of a disciple. And what kind of time, it may be asked, will it be when an intense longing arises in the hearts of all disciples? This much is certain, that it will be a time of distress, a time of sharp conflict, of severe affliction, in which the disciples will not only despair of their own strength, but will scarcely be able to believe that the Divine powers of redemption, which have been brought into the world

through Christ, will remain masters in the field against the kingdom of darkness. Such times have been in the Church, and they have ever returned, and will yet return in the future. At such times, the few true disciples of Jesus Christ who are to be found, sigh within their chambers, from hearts deeply moved and troubled: *Come, Lord Jesus!* In such seasons they would fain see something of the light of the glory of Jesus Christ, their exalted Saviour, piercing the darkness which surrounds them. You will comprehend, beloved, that such longing, wherever it is awakened, must ever express itself in the question, When, when will it come? will it be soon? or must we yet long wait? Will our lifetime pass away without it, or shall we, perhaps, in the late evening of our pilgrimage, behold on earth the glorious light of the Victor's coming? Such questions are permitted; yea, they may not be wanting, even though they ever call forth the answer, "Thou canst not, and oughtest not to know it;" for a disciple who waits not for his Master—a servant who counts not the hours and minutes till the coming of his Lord—is no true disciple and servant. Therefore, the question as to the time is no question of idle curiosity, to which the reply may be made in a tone of correction: "You have no need to know, and ought not to inquire about it." It is the question of a disciple, necessarily forcing itself from a heart attached to the Saviour, and especially justifiable in our days. I do not say that we are as yet living in a time of

especial affliction for the Church of Christ, in persecution and oppression, so that the truth of the Gospel may not be boldly spoken, and the testimony of Jesus Christ the Crucified is repressed by outward force. We live, rather, in a time of freedom, in which the Gospel, widely preached, raises its voice in the Christian and heathen world—a time for the coming of which we have, in humility, to thank the Lord. But the sight of the fairer side of such a period ought not to extinguish the longing for the day of the Son of man—for the dawning of the kingdom of Jesus Christ upon earth ; otherwise, it were better for us to be denied all joy on account of present blessing. The light that beams upon us casts massive shadows ; and the more clear the shining of grace, the more melancholy does it become to witness the sinking of immense numbers of men in ever deeper spiritual darkness. Not yet do we behold with our eyes the triumph of Jesus Christ ; not yet do we feel that in a short time the world, with tears of thanksgiving, will cast itself at the feet of the Lamb of God. As yet there is occasion enough for the question, “ Lord, how long ? ” The hosts are mustering on either side ; the Prince of Darkness is collecting his troops from the bosom of the outward Church itself. Is this a moment when we can be indifferent ? Must we not long for the dawning of the day of victory ? and that not alone because we fear the threatening conflict, and would rather triumph than resist unto blood,

but because we can only behold with grief how greater numbers are ever ranging themselves on the side of darkness. We pray that the day of victory may be soon, that we may not live to behold one and another—perhaps, even many—of those who are dear to us enticed to the opposite side. We must, as disciples of Jesus, desire that it may soon become manifest before the eyes of all that in Him alone is salvation ; and, yet more, that only they may be opposed to Him who in their hearts cherish a conscious hatred against Him, and that the wavering and undecided may come to a right mind before they become gradually the decided foes of the Lord.

Beloved brethren and sisters, where is in the present day the longing for the coming of the Lord ? Is it seen in our life ? It is true there is found therein a restlessness, a pursuing after the golden aims, a neglecting of that which is at hand for that which is more distant, a longing for something new. But the longing for the coming of the Lord does not permeate our life. Otherwise, we should attach but a very subordinate value to wealth and possessions—things which only embellish the earthly life ; should regard these things as lying only outside the path, while our eyes were fixed upon the goal whence beams the glory for which we hope. You know yourselves, that if the whole heart's desire of our Church, of this congregation, could be comprehended in one word, this word, alas ! would not be, *Come, Lord Jesus !* On this

account, indeed, many among us do not ask after the time—after the days of the Son of man. Yet another word. He who looks into the life of faith, and into its earnest manifestations, so much of it as is present in our time, and in the circles in which it is, and beholds there the separation, the diversity of aim, the carnal, the small, the human, the childish, the foolish character of that which mingles in the affairs of our Lord's kingdom, such an one cries from the depth of his heart, Come, Lord Jesus! For the fear grows upon one day by day, that even what the children of God endeavour may issue in Babel confusion, because so very little manliness in Christ, and so little noble simplicity, is to be found in the present Christian world.

But now hear the Lord further. He who sighs for one of the days of the Son of man is saddened by the answer, "You shall not see it"—a painful answer to our longing; and yet a consoling one, since it comes out of the mouth of the Saviour. The world also answers, "Where is the promise of His coming?" "There *is* no such day of the Son of man; these are only idle terrors, the creation of your own brain." In the mouth of Christ, on the other hand, even the denial of our request is a confirmation of His promise, and the *no* carries with it a *yes*. This the disciple understands, and bows his head, knowing that the Lord stands by him in all conflict of hoping and waiting, and that, though he should not on earth see the day of triumph,

that day will surely come. He is consoled in the reflection, Not my request, not my desire, not even my prayer, will bring in the day of the Son of man, for which I long ; but it *will* come in the order of God's gracious wisdom ; it will come when, perhaps, but very few desire it. God's hour must strike before this can come, but for His children all hours are God's hours ; and though I shall not live to see the victory, yet, if I am preserved in the conflict faithful to the end, my goal is won.

And now we might, with human curiosity, inquire after the "WHERE," and receive the same answer. It concerns you not—is not for you to know. The mouth of truth says : "They will say unto you, See here ; or, see there : go not after them, nor follow them." Here it is not merely said, You shall not determine "where," but, if others determine it, you shall not follow them. What is the import of this command ? We know that this whole discourse was spoken, not in reply to the question of the disciples, but to that of the Pharisees, "When shall the kingdom of God come ?" Interrogated by his disciples on the same subject, He had replied, "Such shall be the signs of my coming !" To the Pharisees He replies, "The kingdom of God cometh not with outward show : it is (already) in the midst of you." And now He turns to the disciples, and speaks of the days of the Son of man. What follows is, therefore, thus to be understood—When, outside the circle of the

disciples, it is said, " See here," or, " See there," this cry has regard to that which appeals to the imagination and to the senses, to the kingdom of God as the unbelieving world desires it, and such kingdom is only a mimicking and caricature of the true kingdom of God. Such an appeal the believer himself will be able to disregard; for this he scarcely needs the express warning of his Master. He who is not able to distinguish between human honour, human power, and human error, which become the centre of new combinations in society, and Christ in His glory, can be no true disciple of Jesus. But the disciple even is exposed to the danger of conceiving of the kingdom of God in a carnal and earthly manner. This danger arises from the nature of the subject itself. Thanks be unto God that we have not to look for a purely spiritual kingdom alone, but that " days" of the Son of man are predicted—times of manifest triumph—in which the kingdom of Christ shall flourish on earth. If, then, we lay such stress on this earthly side of the fulfilment as is laid by many, we run the risk of thus erring. Therefore, the cry of " Lo, here," or " Lo, there," spoken in the name of this or that religious body, has for the believer no sufficient authority. I even hesitate not to declare that the cry of *the Church*, so often heard by us in the present day, is one of the spiritual dangers of the time, against which our Lord warns us. We are directed to be on the watch for all blessings—to receive and to extend them—as they

are given by the Lord, especially (but not exclusively) within the Church, within *a particular* Church; not, however, in our doctrinal confession, to shut ourselves up permanently within the limits of human formulæ. If we do so, and identify the Church, or any particular Church, with the kingdom of God, we shall become insensible to the true kingdom of God, and unable to recognise it when it one day appears. When the Lord comes from heaven, not visible, indeed, but yet clothed with power, many will, in the name of this or that Church or communion, this or that Christian society, refuse to go forth to meet Him—will turn their back upon Him, and close their eyes; and the glorious hour of the kingdom will, for them, strike in vain, unless their eyes should be opened in the eleventh hour, with repentance and grief, to bewail their neglect of watchfulness for the Lord's coming. You see, my beloved, the danger is actually present of neglecting the kingdom of the Lord on earth, because, contrary to the Lord's command, the heart has been won by the cry of "Lo, here," or "Lo, there," and, therefore, in false satisfaction, has lost the spirit of waiting.

After this it is hardly necessary to remark, that to the question of "WHERE" belongs that which, in a particular country or city, is declared to be the coming of the kingdom of God. If, for instance, we suppose that the kingdom of God is come amongst us because we are satisfied with the ecclesiastical constitution of

our land, and that whatever is not in accordance with this, is not of the kingdom of God ; or if, on the other hand, we should say, "Our present Christianity is no longer God's chosen instrument ; as long as this endures, the kingdom of God cannot come. To find the kingdom of God, we must look for it beyond the seas ;" or if one should say, "The old Christian lands are not capable of receiving such a manifestation ; it is reserved for the new heathen world, and we must all perish beneath the judgments of God before that kingdom appears ;"—all this is only a crying, "Lo, here," or "Lo, there ;" in regard to all which it is said, "Go not after them." "For"—and these are the last words of our text, which describe the manner, or the "HOW" of the appearing of the Son of man—"as the lightning that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven, so shall also the Son of man be in his day." Here, also, an objection might easily be raised—an objection taken from the expression, "One of the days of the Son of man." It might be asked, Was not the destruction of Jerusalem an isolated event, affecting a single nation of the earth ? Could it be compared with the lightning flash, which lights up all that is under heaven ? Is it not, therefore, wanting in the characteristic of the days of the Son of man ? Answer : The days of the Son of man are ever-increasing revelations, and that first one was comparatively small as placed beside the future

consummation. The objection, from the limited nature of the event, however, I cannot admit. The destruction of Jerusalem has had a two-sided effect on the whole of humanity ; Israel was scattered through all the lands of the earth, and holds forth this terrible fact to all in the present day, not only to Christian, but also to heathen nations. And from the destruction of Jerusalem the Gospel was, as I have elsewhere expressed myself, very differently regarded. Until then, all the disciples of Jesus, all the Apostles—even the far-seeing Paul not excepted—had constantly regarded Jerusalem as the centre of revelation ; thence must all proceed, thither must all return. From this time forward, its theatre was not a limited extent of nations, a brief space of time, in the eyes of the Apostles who outlived this catastrophe. They now recognised the great and wide prospect which Christ had opened in His prophecies. Now, for the first time, were the apostolic prophecies possible, which embrace the whole course of the ages until the new heaven and the new earth.

If, therefore, the downfall of the Holy City had been a subordinate fact in the kingdom of God, as it is not, no one could deny that the coming of the Son of man, even in this preparatory stage—since it was a means of salvation passing over to the nations, and a type for them of His last coming—bears a resemblance to the lightning which shines from Heaven. Through eighteen centuries has the inner

vitality and Divine strength of Christianity, of Evangelical truth, been proved in the experience of millions upon millions, and has testified amongst the wildest and roughest nations of the earth, that this Word of the Cross makes strong with the strength of salvation. And this is the stream of living water which has flowed forth from Jerusalem, the broken vessel.

Now, my beloved, if the preparatory stage for the greater days of the Son of man had, and yet has for humanity, such lightening power and lightening brightness, what will it be when the great day of victory appears, and the king comes in His glory—when His wisdom and power, now hidden from many, become manifest on earth—and when, at last, a true dominion of the Gospel shall be established over the whole earth! What forces and powers of salvation will then be made known; what terror, what trembling and dismay before the tempests of His heart-piercing word; and what joy on account of the living power which is in Christ Jesus, will then come to light! What is now experienced from time to time by a very few will then pass through whole masses. Then will the prophecy be well understood: “As the lightning that lighteneth from Heaven, so shall the Son of man be in His day;” and this lightning flash will go forth, with a very different force from anything we have witnessed, victoriously into the lands of the heathen. Most perfectly, indeed, will this appearing be manifested on the

last of the days of the Son of man, when He comes in the clouds of heaven with great power and glory, and all His saints with Him. Then will the lightning flash descend into the graves of the dead and into the depths of the sea, yea, unto the lowermost hell.

Dear brethren, the manner of our Lord's appearing in His kingdom is for us very important, for it enables us to recognise the word of the Gospel as a lightning flash from eternity, as well when it proceeds as a sharp two-edged sword out of His mouth as when it comes as the word of the Cross to save all that believe. The light which the flash of the Lord's appearing will shed over all lands when it gleams forth from Heaven is, therefore, to-day very near to us.

My dear friends! shall we not now—even though no one of the days of the Son of man fall within our short life, and we stand only in the time of preparation—seek to be prepared for something greater? Shall we not allow our souls to be irradiated and penetrated with the heavenly brightness of the true light? And, especially, we who are communicants at the table of the Lord, shall we not, to this end, be partakers of the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfected Saviour, that we, as His disciples, may rejoice in His light—may be gladdened by His lightning flash, and in His brightness may pursue our further journey in humility and poverty of spirit, and yet in strength of faith and joy of victory? The Lord, the Almighty gracious God, grant us this according to His great faithfulness! Amen.

SECOND PART.

The Prophecies of the Apostles.

The Apostasy.



“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by 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 Christ is at hand. 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.”—2 THESS. ii. 1—3.

BELOVED IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD,—You will already have perceived from the text I have read, that I purpose, with the Lord’s help, to keep my promise, and to continue the course we entered upon in our meditations on the prophecies of the New Testament in the former year. We have, so far as we were able in our poverty and weakness, brought before you the prophecies of our Lord himself, these foundation-prophecies, out of which afterwards grew the apostolic prophecies, even unto the great and wondrous visions

* Greek.—The Apostasy.

of the apostle John. Now, I have read to you the first apostolic prophecy, one of the oldest of all which are preserved to us in the New Testament. In the second of the letters which Paul wrote to the Churches founded by him, or to single persons—the first epistle to the Thessalonians is the first—there is found a very distinct and explicit prophecy, more nearly defining and sharply marking out the predictions of the Lord as to His coming. It is that concerning the *Day of Christ*, or rather concerning the *Heralds of this Day*. If we have found many things in the prophecies of the Lord which we could only comprehend under the expressions, “Signs of the Time,” “Signs of the Coming of Christ,” here, on the other hand, the heralds of the Day of Christ, and of His coming, are placed before our eyes. But yet one thing I must promise. When I read these words of the text, it might, perhaps, appear as though in our days also, and in this our circle, it were necessary to warn against being in any way led to adopt the view that the day of the Lord is very near; and that, therefore, it is needful to teach that it is not yet thus near, and can only appear after this and that precursor has arisen. Ah, my brethren, I wish it were only so, and that our longing after the coming of the Lord burned with a flame so high as in the Church at Thessalonica—that for us the warning were necessary, not to think the day of the Lord too near! Not on this account have I read these words, but because there is

expressed in them the single word which makes a leading precursor of the coming of Christ—THE FALLING AWAY. "Except there come the falling away first;" and of this falling away let us to-day speak, with hearts troubled indeed, and bowed down, but yet turned towards our gracious Lord.

First of all, we must come to an understanding of what the apostle means by this falling away. What is "*the falling away?*" A FALLING FROM WHAT? HOW BROUGHT ABOUT? And WHO ARE THE FALLEN ONES? These are all questions that force themselves upon us. We must, consequently, first determine *what this falling away is*; and afterwards, we shall feel impelled to glance first at the *time in which we live*, and then into *our own hearts*. For, my friends, a falling away is present, and the question now is, Who are the fallen?

God of compassion, preserve us, that no one of us may be numbered among the fallen or the falling; awaken the sleeping, arouse the indolent, give new courage to the weary and fainting, that they may arise, return, and be preserved from Apostasy. Amen.

From what has been already remarked, you see, beloved in the Lord, that I do not purpose making the first two verses of the text the object of our inquiries, but that I confine myself to the few words of the third verse: "It shall not come, except there come the falling away first."

That the apostle Paul, when he speaks of the falling away, of the apostasy, can mean no other than a falling away from the only One in whom a poor sinner can be saved—Jesus Christ—is clear. We shall, indeed, hear, in a later contemplation, if God will, that the falling away may, and will proceed further than an apostasy from Christ, yea, that it necessarily must go further; that the apostasy from Christ leads to an apostasy from all that is called God or God-like. For the present, however, we have not yet to occupy ourselves with this extreme manifestation.

Apostates from Christ there were, even in the apostolic time. There were men who at first were led to the Church of Christ by some motive of the heart, pure or impure, but in whom the false, selfish, and worldly nature was not crucified—who had nothing in common with the Christian Church, except phraseology and outward form of life.

These men remained in the Church a while, perhaps unsuspected of any but the Apostles—or even of them—passing for genuine brothers and sisters; but when it became necessary to prove their communion with Christ, when severe temptations assailed, or persecutions arose, then they withdrew, yea, even became betrayers, enemies, and persecutors of believers. There were also others in whom worldly ambition was operating, and who were impelled by a desire of taking a high place in the new

life, the new world which was created by the preaching of the Cross; who brought themselves into prominence with great show of zeal, but, unperceived, sank back into their old form of life, into Jewish and legal ceremonies, or into a heathen mode of thought, customs, and preferences; and who then became the ministers of the flesh and teachers of lies, who occasioned the Apostles so many tears, and so much distress.

So greatly was apostasy present within the range of the Apostles' labours, that John, when he points forward to the Antichrist, must exclaim, with soul moved with sorrow, "Even now there are many Antichrists;" and adds, "They went out from us, but they were not of us." This significant cry of grief tells us that the threatening apostasy is to be sought nowhere else but in Christian circles, within the Church of Christ, where the confession of His name is made.

The Apostle, naturally, does not intend to say that, if one and another falls away from Christ, and secretly cherishes such impurity of character, feigns uprightness, yea, perhaps, even believes himself to be still upright—for the delusions of the human heart are great—nevertheless, is entangled in falsehood, that then the day of the Lord is at hand. He clearly speaks of an open falling away, as he immediately afterwards says, "And the man of sin be *revealed*." The falling away which is a precursor of the day of

Christ is a general falling away, a far-extending and prevailing apostasy from Christ amongst the number of those who call on the name of Christ, which, consequently, will be manifest, and will proceed to show itself in a shameless opposition and hostility.

Does the Apostle indicate by a falling away, a departure, as often takes place in the Church, from the general standard of doctrine and form of communion, the origination of a particular sect, the division in the unity of the Church, through which one, two, three, or four sections of Christendom are created, of which each bears something of the truth in itself, and has and retains an undeniable connection with Christ, but in other respects has in it more or less a preponderance of error? No; we see as clearly as possible from what follows that the falling away which the Apostle looks for, as the precursor of the day of Christ, is such a one as becomes characteristic of the age—a conscious falling away from Christ, universal and complete. *What, then, is this?* Can any one fall away from Christ, and calmly go on his way, because Christ for him remains only one of the forms and persons, and His kingdom one of the things, which once in some way affected the history of his life, but now lie long forgotten behind him? Assuredly not. The Apostle speaks of the falling away of those who have experienced Christ's living power in any degree—who have tasted something of the powers of the world to come. If they fall away,

they become not superficial critics with secret hostility, but embittered opponents ; they cannot endure the word of the Cross, the Lord himself ; and everything that reminds them of Him, and every approach on His part, though a distant one, is for them an aversion, because it is Christ in judgment. Then breaks forth the inner rancour and rage of the flesh against Christ and His kingdom, and expresses itself undisguisedly in furious hostility.

Did this, then, happen on a large scale in the time of the Apostles, or shortly after ? I know perfectly well, it has been the custom at all times to apply this text to that in the kingdom of Christ which was in opposition to the purity of doctrine, to blamelessness of life, to apostolic order in the Church, and to interpret it by these phenomena. There has passed no quarter of a century of the Christian Church, but some one has, placing the finger on this passage, with the other hand pointed to some greater or lesser embodiment of error, and said, "This is the last great apostasy." I will not dispute, either, that some signs of the same have at all times cropped up in greater or lesser degree ; but that the apostasy which was present to the Apostle's prophetic spirit has not to this hour arrived, or at least has not yet attained its height, is shown by the fact that the day of the Lord has not yet appeared. For, let us conceive of the day of the Lord however we will, it is in any case a mighty epoch of judgment ; either the last judgment, or at

least a mighty intervention, an anticipatory judgment, resounding through the history of the world. In neither case, however, can we say, that the day of Christ, as the Apostles longed for it, has already come in the past, or is now present. Accordingly, the last power of apostasy has not yet appeared; and we are, therefore, led carefully to investigate what the Apostle understands by the falling away, and sharply and searchingly to fix our eye upon *our own time*, and with our time, upon *ourselves*. This we must do somewhat at length.

My brethren, such assemblies as we see meet here every Sunday for prayer and confession, for praise, and the hearing of the Gospel, are certainly no signs of a falling away from Christ. The fact—the indisputable fact—that wherever amongst us the Gospel is proclaimed with purity and power, crowds are found to flock, is also no sign of the approaching apostasy. But you know that all our assemblies together form only a small fragment of the Protestant population of our Prussian, or of our wider German Fatherland; and that a great proportion of this population never attend the ordinances of the Church and the preaching of the Gospel. A growing coldness, a laxity in regard to God and to Divine things, is an undeniable characteristic of our time. There is no one of our members who does not know that in all the houses of God in this city, by no means the sixth part, yea, scarcely, on ordinary occasions, the twelfth part, of the

Protestant inhabitants, not debarred by circumstances, meet together to hear God's Word in God's house. That may well make us anxious, and give rise to the question, whether ours is not a time of the falling away. It is true, the objection may be raised—Perhaps the definite outward form of the Church, as it has existed for the last three hundred years, has been outlived; and that living Christianity has retreated within the smaller circles, the family, and that *there* is felt the more powerfully the breathing of the Holy Spirit. But you will admit that this question is entirely superfluous, because we all well know—and many of us not only of Berlin, but from cities and lands far distant—that in the families the sound of the Word of God has become entirely strange, that the prayer of the household has died out, the interchange of spiritual experiences and Divine help, which have been given to the individual through the Word and Spirit of God, is an exception in the family. Believing families, building themselves up in spiritual things, are not the rule, but the exception. And, then, as far as such exist, whom do we find most in the House of God, and at the table of the Lord, but the members of these very families!

Is not this a striking sign of a great falling away—of such a falling away as did not characterize former times? Is it not an especial characteristic of our times?

I have spoken especially of things which are appa-

rent—of church attendance and family worship. A hundred years ago the signs of falling away were by no means so commonly to be met with amongst us; but now we must consider them as generally prevalent, and the opposite the exception. Is it, I ask, only that the old custom—which, as we all know, so easily degenerates into the mere form, the husk, an unspiritual and powerless proceeding in beaten paths—is fallen into decay? And has, on the other hand, the constraining desire to glorify Christ broken through in other ways, so that we see the ground of the present world and present age furrowed by the channels of the stream of life which faith in Jesus Christ, and the love He has inspired, has dug for itself? We rejoice to admit that in our time much proclaims a revival of the love of Christ among us. We hear of foreign missions among the heathen, among the Jews; of inner missions; of labour among the outcasts; of voluntary activity in spiritual ministrations; of care for the poor and sick; of seeking and finding the morally lost and wretched. We receive intelligence of the precious fruits of the love of Christ which have been gathered in our days; of quiet deeds of sacrifice and self-denial, which in God's eyes are of great price. Let nothing of all that be underrated or lightly esteemed, which is done among us or around us before our eyes, or of which we receive intelligence from afar. We recognise with joy that the power of the love of Christ,

which constrains us to extend the hand to each other in Him, is again awakened ; and that it is this which in the present week has brought together Evangelical Christians of all nations in this city.* These are all signs of reviving life in the Church of Christ. But how do all these things stand in relation to the feeling of the great majority ?

If you speak of the practice of benevolence, you must confess that, with the exception of those who have been half compelled thereto by the sense of honour and respect for the judgment of men, there is in every city, in every district, only a small number of those upon whom all labour and sacrifice for the Kingdom of God falls ; while the great majority, a multitude of men who are not wanting in outward means, look down with a smile upon these foolish, weak, pietistic efforts, and know better how to preserve themselves and their money against them. It is an acknowledged fact, that Christian self-sacrificing benevolence is yet something exceedingly rare. We must consequently set against the more pleasing signs of the times the fact, that an alarming indifference in relation to the Word and Ordinances prevails far and wide ; that in the upper classes of society, in the so-called cultured circles, where a familiarity is shown with the literature of various lands, the Bible has become an unread book, and if here and there it is read, yet a book that is not understood ; that there

* Meeting of the Evangelical Alliance at Berlin, 1857.

has scarcely been a time since the Reformation, in which educated persons have shown such a lamentable ignorance in things of the Spirit, on questions concerning the way of salvation. We must also regard the fact as incontestable, that the living fruits of a Christian mind and spirit in our time are wanting in a melancholy degree. Our conclusion from all this must be—Yes, our time *is* a time of the apostasy, even though we glance at its manifestations as cursorily as we have done.

And yet, my friends, we have only until now regarded the bright side of our age. It has very dark shadows, which we have not yet looked at. It is true the crater of the volcano is again quiet, which nine years ago,* with loud roar, poured forth its masses of burning lava. At that time, for many a one, such a scripture as this became more intelligible, “Except there come the falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.” Then many a one thought of the approaching coming of the Lord, who had before for many years evaded this thought, and now again has put it off. But do you believe that what then proceeded from the hearts is now no longer in them, because the mouth is closed? Or do you not perceive—whoever wishes to investigate these things—that a dark, bitter, malevolent, often Satanic, hatred against all order, not only of the State, but especially of the Church, and against all which belongs to the kingdom of God, broods in many souls

* The revolutionary movements of 1848 are referred to.

who are not far away—beyond lofty mountains—but dwell with us in the same streets and houses? Does it not recur to you, how in recent times the last remnant of faith among the people has been assailed and destroyed by thousands of poisonous little books and periodicals published in our city? Do you not know that the doctrine of the merely material nature of man, by which he is degraded to a purely earthly being, affected by all the movements of Nature and developments of created power, but according to which an eternal destiny is only the dream of the imagination; that this doctrine now pervades our populace, and especially the lowest strata thereof? Has not the apostasy in this case proceeded beyond a falling away from Christ, to a falling away from God and every thought of eternity? Every consideration of men has reference to time, to earthly enjoyment and gain.* This most terrible error—this lie, destroying man spiritually and intellectually—has in no age of Christianity spread so rapidly as in our days.

Yet once more I ask, Do we not live in a time of the apostasy? I do not assert that the last time—at least, the culmination of the apostasy—is present; but the apostasy itself is amongst us in our age, is there as a mighty, threatening power.

And now, let us turn to our own heart. Hast thou part in this apostasy? In its extreme form, certainly

* Compare the teaching of the Secularists of the present day in England and America.

not. You certainly do not disseminate these doctrines of lies; nor, if they come to you, do you receive them. But, my brethren, this is not accomplished all at once, but gradually. The glance at our heart is, therefore, necessary; and the question, Hast thou not been involved in the beginning of the apostasy in becoming lukewarm, indolent, and powerless in thy Christianity? Dost thou also pray in reality, and not merely with the form, and as a matter of custom, but out of the depth of thy heart? Dost thou lift up the cry to thy Saviour out of a felt and acknowledged distress of soul? Dost thou lay hold of Jesus as the only Mediator between God and man—the only one who can give thee joy? And dost thou observe anything of His fruits in thee; or is there no result, no power and joy in the Holy Ghost? Or, look at the practical side. What dost thou accomplish—how much dost thou give of thy time, thy strength, thy wealth to the Saviour, who has surrendered all for thee? Art thou not weary, and thinkest with the surrender of a few Sundays to make thy account for eternity? Oh, seek, seek in thyself, and in those for whom thou art responsible, whether thou art not by thine indolence and spiritual paralysis becoming prepared for the apostasy! For the fallen ones have not been thrown by a single jerk out of the spirit and practice of Christianity into hostility against the Lord; but have gradually slidden down upon a gently inclining surface into the careless ease

of everyday life, into a gradual deadening of the soul for the voice of the Holy Ghost, into an increasing satisfaction of the flesh—yea, it may be, into a spiritual excess, not of the word of God (which cannot be received in excess), but, perhaps, of good and beautiful thoughts and books of men.

Alas! my brethren, there are in the present day dangers which must continually bring before the soul the exhortation of the Lord to His disciples, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Let us, therefore, brethren and sisters, employ this contemplation of the first apostolic prophecy to the end we may truly be in earnest, and seek out even the smallest beginnings, the scarcely perceptible fibres of worldly-mindedness and unbelief, of lightly esteeming Christ and His gifts of grace in our daily life. Let us, if we find these evil roots in our hearts and homes, not rest until they are plucked up, and we gather ourselves anew around our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and let us also earnestly employ all the means of edification—such as our assembling here in the house of the Lord—that we may be delivered from the apostasy; and that if, in the black waves of darkness, it should rise far higher than before, we may then belong to the little flock which will not fall away, but will rather die than forsake the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Antichrists.

“Little children, it is the last time : and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists ; whereby we know that it is the last time. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.”—I JOHN ii. 18, 22.

MY BELOVED IN JESUS CHRIST!—In our last discourse we began to meditate on the prophecies of the Apostles of Christ, and turned our attention to the apostasy which, according to the prophecy of the Apostle Paul, shall appear ; and to the commencements and traces of this apostasy, as they present themselves in our day. The text on which we based our last discourse would at the same time further lead us to the contemplation of a dark and sombre form, which the prophetic glance of the Apostle discovers in the future—the form of the Man of Sin. We continue to-day the prosecution of this subject, inasmuch as the prophecy of the Apostle John, just read by us, naturally introduces us to, and prepares us for, the contemplation of the terrible form before us. He points forward to the Antichrist, and gives his friends the clue to recognising him, when he shall

arise, by his allusions to the many Antichrists which already exist. For us the same way is marked out ; and we cannot speak of the *Antichrist*, or comprehend the signs of his appearing, without first setting before us the ANTICHRISTS of the present day, who are already made manifest, by the text of the Apostle and by the light of experience, for all who have an open eye. It is for us, then, on the present occasion, clearly to fix our eye upon the Antichrists, and to shed upon their countenance the light of the apostolic prophecy, that we may have a clear sense of our own position. Our problem is, first, distinctly to define WHENCE THEY COME ; and then to discover WHITHER THEY TEND.

Everlasting God, gracious Saviour ! Antichrists have existed in Thy Church, and have proceeded from it. Antichrists there are still, who are not without some kind of root in the communion which bears Thy name. Alas ! what an accusation lies in this fact, and what a cry of warning to our hearts to ascertain whether we stand fully, decidedly, and resolutely on Thy side ; or, whether there is yet something within us opposed to Thee ! Show this unto us, and help us by Thy Holy Spirit, that we may be freed from all which moves within us in opposition to Thyself ; that we may stand wholly for Thee, and with Thee, and near Thee, and in subjection to Thee, until our latest breath. Amen.

The words of the Apostle, beloved in the Lord,

flow forth so softly and gently, and yet have such a mighty and terrible import. When he calls to the believers, over whom the Lord had made him a chief shepherd, "Little children, it is the last time," he speaks a word *for them*, not terrible, but the sweetest he could utter. They were waiting with earnest desire for the moment when the Lord should come, and receive them to Himself; when He should complete His kingdom on earth, and blend in one heaven and earth. They had long been desiring that He should appear, and put an end to this period of the world—to their distress, and the waiting of their faith. Yet when the Apostle set before their eyes, in clear outline, the signs of the last time, there was for them also in this description something which awakened alarm and dread. The words from his gentle lips have a twofold force: "As ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, and now there are many antichrists; so hereby we know that it is the last time." His flock ought to be able to infer, from the presence of those who could only be overcome and taken out of the way by the judgment which heralds the coming of the Lord, that this judgment could not be long deferred: the Lord must needs be at hand, for the fearful perversion of His truth and of the life which flows from Him—predicted by the Lord himself, when He speaks of false Christs and false prophets—is already present. The Apostle, indeed, could point, as we cannot, to definite forms and appearances, to

persons within or beside the Church. He could stretch forth the finger, and say, "Behold, these are the Antichrists." This we are not able to do; because there is not given us, through the fulness of the Holy Ghost, such a deep insight, and such a clear knowledge of the secret conditions of the heart, as was given, in his character of Apostle, to the disciple whom Jesus loved. But we may, nevertheless, convince ourselves by looking upon the indications which present themselves in our time, and that within the bosom of the Protestant Churches, that there are Antichrists among us in no small numbers; yea, that they present themselves more numerous than in the time of the Apostle, and in a yet more threatening form. But let us, instead of asking, *Who are they?* or, *Where are they?* instead of looking with critical eye upon this or that individual, rather fix our attention upon the apostolic signs of Antichrist. The *Apostle makes us acquainted*, first of all, *with the going forth* of these Antichrists. He tells us whence they come: does so in the words, "They went out from among us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us: but that they may be made manifest, that all are not of us."*

"Went out from among us." By this is clearly expressed that the Antichrists were not simply Jews or heathen, but outwardly Christians, such as had

* See Alford on this place.

once belonged to the Apostolic Churches. They had remained for a time unknown and unrecognised in their opposition and decided hostility towards the Lord; had perhaps worked many years in the Christian Church with distinguished zeal and success; were, beyond doubt, men who even in their better beginning had gathered around them a crowd of persons over whom they exerted a commanding influence. Consequently, not the ordinary and insignificant members of the Church, but highly gifted persons—persons, however, who on taking upon themselves the name of Christ in baptism, had not therewith surrendered their whole heart to the Lord. They had attached themselves, perhaps inspired with enthusiasm by the new and wondrous conceptions and prospects, the great and world-revolutionizing thoughts of the Gospel; had with eloquence and fervour proclaimed and enforced these foundation-truths, so that many would come to regard them as distinguished instruments in the hand of the Lord; yea, they may have even had the capacity for becoming so in reality, had they freed themselves from the radical insincerity of their character.

The Apostle, nevertheless, clearly asserts, "They were not of us,"—that is to say, Christ lived not in them, and still lives not in them; he also says, "They went out from among us"—were therefore within the Church. Had they confessed their sins and faults, that which was Antichristian within them—the glory

of the natural man, their self-love and pride—in the light of the truth received by them through the word of the Cross, they would, indeed, have become distinguished servants in the kingdom. But both went on side by side, nature and grace. We behold a striking instance of this, in the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, in the case of Simon the Sorcerer, upon whom the word of the Cross, and of the resurrection of the Lord, and the deeds of the Apostles in the power of the Holy Ghost, operated, indeed, attractively, yea, even with captivating power. But with what a degraded fleshly mind, with what vanity, having respect only to his position in the eyes of others, did this go hand in hand!

So it was in the Apostolic Church, my beloved; and now I ask, Is it not possible even among us that one may bear the name of Christ—may pass in the eyes of all for a good Churchman, a serious Christian, an earnest inquirer after the things of God, an honest seeker after truth—and yet be, in innermost heart, no possession of the Lord? How much of the Christianity of such an one is truth, and how much is self-deception, only God can measure. But we must admit that one may have a reputation for all this, and yet cherish a secret self-love, a prevailing worldly tone of thought and feeling, and may succeed for years in hiding from others this weak side of his character. Is it not possible that a man himself scarcely recognises that in the midst of his Chris-

tianity—of his spiritual zeal and piety—he is not, properly speaking, seeking the Lord and His glory, not the salvation of his own soul and of the souls of others, but this and the other object which belongs to the passing world? Yea, is it not the frequently-expressed opinion of worldly men, in reference to those who are in earnest, or seem to be in earnest, about spiritual things, that they are seeking wealth, honour, power, influence, something that is not of God, but of the world? How comes it that this judgment is so often heard, yea, has become almost the prevailing one, if the possibility were not present of such a worldly enjoyment in Christian form and guise, and under a mask of piety? Had not such examples presented themselves, and did they not still present themselves? We all know how often the deep and public fall of some one, whom we have the right to regard as a believer, strikes us with dismay, and calls forth the mocking laughter of the enemies of Christ. No considerable circle of Christians long exists without such a fall taking place; so that, in our day also, one may, unconsciously or half consciously—at any rate, undiscovered by others—be under the sway of two opposite powers: something of the Lord, the promptings of His word, the impressions of His grace, the enlightening of His heavenly light; and side by side with this, self-seeking, self-righteousness, self-admiration, self-applause. In this lies the point of departure into

Antichristian error. Half-heartedness, insincerity in the Christian profession, is its source. We now understand the words, "They went out from among us, and yet they were not of us." And if this point of departure lies within the sphere of our spiritual life, it is also necessary we should preach on this matter.

If one should arise, my beloved, frankly and openly to deny the Father and the Son, and to express his hostility towards God and Christ, his teaching would not prove so very seductive for us; for, once arrived at this extreme, Antichristian error becomes usually in its outward form so repulsive, so opposed to the finer morality and nobler life of society, that the better disposed minds feel themselves repelled by it. Not so, however, does the Antichristian spirit show itself in the beginning: it is only in the end it shows itself thus. This beginning is so much the more dangerous, since it may present itself at any day or hour, and, indeed, not rarely does actually present itself. There is, therefore, occasion that we speak of it, not merely in relation to the last hour, but in relation to the time immediately before us, whatever hour it may be in the kingdom of God.

And now, let each one seek for himself testimony, in the presence of the All-seeing God, upon this question, Art thou sincere and upright in thy Christian profession? This question may be more exactly analysed into the following, What dost thou seek? Nothing—absolutely nothing—in all thy Christian

hearing, receiving, speaking, doing, and running, but to be everlastingly saved! Is all undertaken by thee—and this is the second question, properly only another aspect of the former—to the end thou mayest stand in abiding communion with thy Saviour Jesus Christ, a communion gradually penetrating and transforming thy whole life? If this be so, thy Christianity is pure and simple. If not, thou art, if not yet an Antichrist, at least in great danger of becoming so. The greater the gifts, talents, or other qualifications for influencing others, with which you are endowed, the greater the danger in which you stand; for all that is conferred upon you for the enriching of your spiritual life, for the filling of your inner man with the presence of the Lord, may become so many stones of stumbling, so many accumulated dangers, so many powers holding you captive, forging bond after bond around your soul, if there only remains within you some leaning towards the earthly and transitory. If you have followed this leaning, followed it in spite of the admonitions of your conscience, and the appeals of the cross of Christ to your heart—I do not mean relapses into the flesh, from which you arise a penitent sinner, and seek and find renewed forgiveness; but if, on the other hand, you have held fast to this worldly leaning, *in spite of* Christ and His gracious word, have followed it even *by means of* your Christian name, and the power and help which the Christian communion and your public

profession of Christ afforded, then you are indeed on the way to become filled with the spirit of Antichrist. Yet once more be it said, this secret reservation does not at first seem so very dangerous; may even be confounded with the weakness which so often leads us to fall back again into old sins, out of which, however, a penitent heart is ever raised into fresh strength in the Lord. But you must not remain in this confusion of thought; you must come to a distinct understanding as to whether you are walking in sincerity and simplicity of heart. If you find, in thus seeking to come to a clear knowledge, a power within you of which you are conscious, which wars against Christ, and does not permit you to cherish the honest desire to become a child of God—if you discover that beneath all the rest there is something fleshly, transitory, earthly, which you are seeking by means of Christ—then I pray you confess this melancholy discovery; confess it before the Saviour, come to Him, seek purification through Him, and cast from you all that does not bear upon your salvation by Him. Then you will no longer be among the number of those upon whom the Apostle pronounces the terrible words, “They were not of us.” For these words say to us, now that we understand their meaning: They have not been born of Divine seed, born again; but wear merely the outward form of the life of God.

Yet a step further. An Antichrist can no one

become who has not in any degree tasted the powers of the world to come, and knows nothing at all of the good word of God. The Antichrists, these most bitter foes of Christ, the deniers of the Father and the Son, whose apostasy has grown up out of spiritual insincerity, are not, as we have before said, the most insignificant members of the Christian community. It is well known that those who have once been under the influence of a higher mind and spirit, and in whom, nevertheless, the selfishness and meanness of the natural man has regained the ascendancy, and who have gone over to the opposite camp, usually become the most decided, the most dangerous, the most implacable enemies of the good. Apostates, renegades, are always the most bitter opponents of those whom they have deserted. So it is also in this case. If any one has been under the powerful influence of the grace of God in Christ, and has—not merely in falling back through neglect or through the busy whirl of daily life—consciously suppressed the life of grace which was in him, in its weak beginnings, or even its more powerful manifestations, for the sake of the fleshly aims he will not abandon, and has afterwards hypocritically remained for a while in outward union with the Church of Christ, as usually takes place in passing from the Church to the world, this man is on the rapidly descending path of Antichrist. First, self-deception through want of sincerity; then hypocrisy, and then open and declared hostility.

“They went out from among us,” says the Apostle ; they remained not with us, are no longer counted of us, because they have at last shown themselves to be that which they have long been in heart, or rather because the lie has first completed itself within, and then has forced them out of communion with the truth.

Thus our meditation of itself leads us to consider THE GOAL OF THE ANTICHRISTS. Whither do they tend? with what do they finish? what is the unmistakeably manifest sign of the Antichrists—a sign no longer to be concealed? The Apostle expresses it in few words: “He is Antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son.” My beloved, of this denial we unhappily know too much from our own experience. We might, indeed, easily do a great injustice if we should brand, as the spirit of Antichrist, the denial of those who, brought up in a cold and lifeless age, have never yet become thoroughly acquainted with Christ, the everlasting Son of God ; who, therefore, doubt it, and have hitherto remained in an undetermined, reverential, but not adoring attitude towards the Saviour. Ah, no ! It is, indeed, to be deplored that our age knows deniers of the Son of God, such as existed not in the Apostolic Churches, who, out of ignorance and blindness, in which other blind ones have been their leaders, still deny that Jesus is the Son of the living God. With these we have now nothing to do. The Apostle’s word is of those deniers who know the Son—have even experienced

something of the Divine power which is in Christ Jesus. We will gladly suppose that they, even in our days, are somewhat rare. But we, nevertheless, cannot be ignorant of the fact, that at the present day there is a denial of Jesus Christ which springs from hatred ; and there is scarcely any one among us who has not heard of such a denial. There are persons, not merely rude and ignorant, repeating the words of others, but, well educated, to whom no thought is more averse than that this crucified Jesus of Nazareth should be the Son of the living God—our eternal King—who shall come again to judge the quick and the dead ; who, therefore, pursue this thought with loud words of mockery as a dream of fanaticism, a superstition, a monkish invention. This is not the comparatively innocent doubt which arises from spiritual weakness and blindness. Rather is hatred and antagonism towards the Lord ever in the background. I do not believe that any one here present has proceeded thus far ; for those who have advanced so far as this, flee in our time the places where the Lord Jesus is named and proclaimed. But it is, nevertheless, well that we direct our attention to it. The Apostle in his time did not without cause fix the eye of believers upon this phenomenon in the words, “Little children, it is the last hour : that you perceive from the many Antichrists.” He has designedly presented before their eyes the definite characteristics of these Antichrists.

So, therefore, the deniers of the Son of God—those who will not have Him to rule over them, who assail with scorn and hatred this crucified Saviour of sinners, and those who openly, distinctly, and truly confess themselves His—these are the Antichrists. It says, remarkably enough, “who deny the Father and the Son ;” the former, one might think, is not so frequent. It is true there are many now living who take up the thoughtless words, What you call your God is nothing real : it is your imagination. All these denials I count among those blind ones, to whom the Gospel in its Divine power has not yet come ; they take up the words of others, and know not in their ignorance what they say. There are thousands of such in our large towns. But those who deny the Father *because* they deny the Son, it is against whom the Apostle testifies. He does not imply that there are people who know nothing of the existence of the living God, or who have of Him only an indistinct and confused idea—these were present in crowds in the heathen population around him—but he speaks of those who first denied the Son, because the Saviour who came from Heaven, who descended to the Cross and to the dust of death, is an abomination to them ; and who also deny the Father, because only by this second denial are they able, with the measure of knowledge they have already received, to maintain the first. For the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth—the God who counts all the hairs of our head, who, by

the ministry of His angels, and by His holy presence, moves and upholds all things, great and small, in the history of the world—the God who, therefore, calls us to account for every thought and every act of our life—the God who has created heaven and hell, and from whom we must receive either salvation or condemnation, can be endured by no one who has shaken off belief in the Son, and who has suppressed the gracious influences he has experienced through the Gospel, in order to fulfil the wishes and desires of the flesh—his proud, ambitious, or selfish plans.

This terrible denial of God is, unhappily, not rare in our time. Wherefore do we so often hear words of hatred against the name of God in our days? Assuredly, not because people have instituted such profound theoretical researches, and have discovered new means of knowledge, whereby they have been led beyond the existence of a personal God to a pantheistic essence—a universe of infinite power. Alas! no; the true ground of this hatred against God is, that sin, the Satanic wickedness of the heart, leads them to refuse to bend before this God, and to cast themselves in humility at His feet. We are all by nature equally proud, carnally-minded, ungodly. But, by God's grace, are some preserved; while the others, who reject this restraint, are left to themselves. It is

* Take, for instance, the case of a speaker who was not long since hissed off a public platform, in Paris, for the offence of having incidentally exclaimed, "Dieu me pardonne!"

the natural end of the natural man, and, therefore, the word of the Apostle Paul, of the natural mind as enmity against God, is not a whit too severe.

On this account, my beloved, this question also intimately concerns us—I mean the denial of the living God, the Father, because they will not believe in the Son; and the denial of the Son, because they will not acknowledge the Saviour, who forgives sins, the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God, the wrath of God against sinners—because they will not behold their own countenance in the mirror of God's law. For they who deny Him are for the most part those in whom the Christian Church in the past has not fulfilled its duty. Are they not even types of our own natural condition, since we should have been the same if God had not graciously prevented us? He did this by means of believing parents, by the prayer of the mother at the cradle, by the Christian influence of the teacher, by the word of God early learned; did it ever of free grace, without our being able to contribute anything to it. Beloved brethren, if the end of the Antichrists—the goal to which they are tending, that which they at last attain to, the denial of the Father and Son—is not alien to our time, and we must confess that we are not free from guilt in regard to it, the question is worthy the trouble of a more careful study.

But what shall we do? Is it enough that we have once looked at the dark traits in the history of our

time, and that, with a sigh, we ask whether the last hour is not come? Never can this suffice. We do not, indeed, propose a mission for the recovery of Antichrists. Whether we should succeed in gaining over those who have proceeded thus far is known only to God. But we will direct our efforts to preventing the further extension of the Antichristian spirit. At present, there is still time for this; and I need not explain in detail to you the way in which we should go to work. The opportunities present themselves in great number, and our only trouble is that we cannot be engaged in all places at once. But it is clear that there is a serious necessity that everyone—not merely the ministers of the word, the civil and municipal authorities—should put his hand to the work, if Christendom is to be saved. Within the past weeks, many dear friends from all countries have been present with us, and have spoken out the experience they have brought with them from their home, that there is now need of living faith and prayer, and the setting of all our powers to the work of the Lord, if Christendom is not to succumb to the danger to which it is exposed, and step by step to become Antichristian.

Beloved brothers and sisters! I beseech you in the name of the Lord, return not home without having lifted the heart on high, and earnestly besought the Lord that He would show you what of this evil root is in you; that He would eradicate it by His Holy

Spirit, and preserve you sincere, pure, and decided in His communion; and that He will show you the way in which you may stem the rising stream of the Antichristian spirit in our day. Forget not the apostolic word of exhortation. Let it ring in your ears continually: "Little children, it is the last time." Amen.

The Mystery of Iniquity.

“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.”—2 THESS. ii. 6, 7.

WE have met to-day,* beloved in the Lord, with the special purpose of proclaiming our praise and humble thanksgiving for the riches of Divine long-suffering and goodness which has borne with us until this moment, and has not regarded our sins and our iniquities, but has overwhelmed us with undeserved benefits and blessings. We celebrate together the harvest thanksgiving, and look back on many a sigh, which, in the beginning of this year, and in the course of this summer, arose from hearts troubled about the bread which perisheth ; and upon many unbelieving and desponding thoughts, and upon many a prediction of scarcity, famine, and misery, in which (when the heavens were closed in the summer heat)

* Delivered on Sunday, 4th October, 1857. 17th Sunday after Trinity.

our anxiety about the winter's supply found expression.

And now behold, our unbelief is put to shame ; and whatever we may have to say of the effects of the drought and summer heat, we cannot but confess the Lord has done above all we could ask or think—has dealt with us in mercy instead of judgment ; and all our unbelieving cares and anxieties have not prevented Him from dealing with us, as though with filial and lowly spirit we had waited for His blessing. Our praise and our thanksgiving must, therefore, be mingled with shame and humiliation ; and we cast ourselves in spirit before the Lord, and beseech Him henceforth also to deal with us in grace not according to our sins, and to reward us not according to our transgressions, but to remember us according to His great mercy.

But, my brethren, often as this festival of thanksgiving has returned, and often as the whole brilliant succession of our yearly festivals has left its mark upon our life, not without blessing, not without manifestation of the powers of the world to come, the question is yet raised in our reflecting thereon, To what have we attained in consequence of these manifestations ; what point has been reached by our whole life—by the age in which we live ? Whither have we arrived in the progress of the kingdom of God ? For, as in the visible world, the heavenly bodies revolve in their courses one year after another, and retain most

exactly the periods and orders which the Lord, in His eternal, creative wisdom has appointed to them, yet, notwithstanding, whole solar systems are advancing, and, though slowly and scarcely perceptibly, are taking up other places in the universe than they occupied in former ages, so also it is with us. One year resembles another in its main outline ; but after the lapse of centuries another period has dawned ; and insensibly every age is advancing towards the place which it must take according to the plan of the kingdom of God. We inquire, therefore, with reason, on the return of each of our annual festivals, At what point do we stand now in relation to the whole kingdom of God ?

We know that this kingdom has a point of beginning—a beginning upon earth—and that it has a goal ; and between the beginning and the goal lie the important turning-points designated in prophecy. We have already been engaged during a series of Sundays with the prophecies of the Apostles, which point towards one of the greatest turning-points in the kingdom of God. We have heard that there are precursors of a great and decisive time, the time which brings the last triumph of the Gospel upon earth. We have discovered that these precursors are for the most part of a gloomy nature ; that many of them show themselves in our day, although in such a way as not to be recognised by all. To-day the Apostolic word of our text speaks to us of a mystery

of iniquity, which was working even in the Apostolic age. In order, therefore, to know in what position we stand in relation to the kingdom of God, let us make this MYSTERY OF INIQUITY the object of our contemplation; and in this, following the guidance of our text, let us see HOW WE MAY RECOGNISE IT; and, then, because the text requires it, let us ask, WHAT IS THE POWER OPPOSED TO IT IN OUR TIME? Lastly, we must return to ourselves, and seek an answer to ourselves for the question, IN WHAT DOES OUR STRENGTH AGAINST THIS MYSTERY OF INIQUITY CONSIST?

Lord God, we thank Thee in deep humility for Thy benefits; for the riches, for the unspeakable fulness of Thy goodness, and for the blessings which Thou hast conferred upon us of the same. We thank Thee with deep shame, as sinners who are not worthy of the compassion and faithfulness which Thou manifestest to us. But we thank Thee, also, with earnest inquiry as to our own condition. We pray Thee give us the light of Thy Holy Spirit; make clear to us, through the Word of Thy Apostles, our position in relation to Thy kingdom in these our days; and grant that all this may enter deeply into our heart, that we may choose the only refuge which is open to us—Thyself, Gracious God, in Thy Son Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

To the Thessalonians the Apostle writes: "Ye know what withholdeth that he—the man of sin, of whom

we shall afterwards speak—might be revealed in his time ;” and shortly before he reminds them in the words, “ Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you, I told you these things ?” He has, consequently, already drawn their attention to the fact, that the Gospel which He preached to them would not enter upon an unbroken course of victory, passing with rapid stride from nation to nation to the end of the world; and that not without conflict and trial for those who had already believed would the day of triumph dawn, the day of the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ in His glory. He has already given them an insight into the severe and painful conflicts—perilous even as regards everlasting salvation—which threatened individuals and the community of believers, on this path. He has also assuredly given them the means of distinguishing what are really the powers of darkness, and recognising them out of the whole complex and manifold life which was before their eyes. And it is to be understood at the outset that he could not designate the heathen world, with its life and action, nor the Jewish world and its life, as the mystery of iniquity ; for in this there was nothing mysterious, nothing creeping in darkness, nothing which had only then begun to move and work. This was only something hastening to its end and death—an expiring remnant of past ages. This life was anything but secret and hidden. Heathenism wrought openly on all the great theatres of the nations, in the

mighty cities of the Roman empire, decked with art and splendour in its temples; and the more openly, the more its inward power—as far as it ever possessed any—was broken; and heathenism itself, in respect of the scattered beams of truth and life which were left in it, was expiring. We are driven, therefore, to the conclusion, the Apostle must here be speaking of the movement of a hostile power within the bosom of Christianity itself.

We have already seen that the Antichrists had not their home without, in heathenism or Judaism, but within the confines of the churches themselves. So here the mystery of iniquity is a false mingling of Christian divinely-revealed truth with the lie, not merely of heathenism, but of the natural heart of man. I am not about to speak here, although this in a certain respect belongs to our present subject, of the whole systems of error and sensual teaching which have been formed by such admixture—combinations which existed in their beginning in the time of the Apostle; but I wish to point out that which extends through all ages, namely, the inclination of men to take something of the sacred fire of Divine truth and mingle it with their fleshly lusts and desires, and so to build up and form for themselves a practical Christianity—a religion which does not enjoin upon them to deliver up the natural man to that death to which the Spirit of God condemns him—a Christianity in which one can remain what he is by nature, if he only makes

some external improvement, and assumes a form not at variance with the common life of the society.

My brethren, the mystery of iniquity will on this account never be recognised by us, unless we first of all seek it in ourselves. He who is so well satisfied with himself—as is unhappily only too frequently the case even within the Evangelical Church—so well satisfied that, without assuming to be a perfect Christian, he thinks there is really nothing wanting except perfection, may find the mystery of iniquity in himself.

He may recognise it in the language of his heart, which is, that on the whole he ought not to be unfavourably judged. He is not a despiser of religion, not a prayerless man ; he is a supporter, especially at the present time, of Christian objects and the means by which they are attained, and gives his contribution to this end in money or personal activity ; he ought, therefore, fairly to be numbered among true Christians, the living members of the Church of God ; and so much the more, as he partakes of the Communion, the receiving of the body and blood of Christ, with feeling and emotion of soul.

My beloved, this may be all well, and we must not overlook that which is genuine in it ; and yet, with all this, your heart may, and probably will, belong to the world, and the wealth and possessions, the honour and glory and enjoyment of this earth, will probably fill up more than the half of your inner life. You

may be full of envy and wrath, full of hatred towards those more prosperous; and if one could enter into the confidence of your life, he would find there nothing of the humble, gentle tone of the Gospel, of the breath of the Holy Spirit, or at least exceedingly little. The whole inner life of your heart is given to the world; and the only question for you is, how you may live comfortably, respectably, and honourably, or at least live. In this mode of thinking, by no means rare, which, however, is not often openly expressed, there lies concealed something of the roots of the mystery of iniquity. It has not yet grown up; for iniquity is a *conscious* striving against the Lord Jesus. No one is at the very first a conscious enemy of the word of the Cross—a conscious opponent of the Gospel—who, if he dare speak his true intention, would gladly uproot all that springs from it. The enmity always begins in the admixture before described, in insincerity of mind. In ourselves, therefore, must we learn to recognise the first roots; and then, when we have learnt accurately to know ourselves, we shall have the key which enables us to understand much that would be otherwise unintelligible. How often it is spoken of as incomprehensible that such bitter hatred should reveal itself, in this and the other place, against Divine things! But, alas! there is nothing more easily comprehensible than this. So long as the natural life can go on undisturbed, side by side with Christianity, no occasion for declared enmity arises. Only when

the Lord intervenes in your life, whether by suffering and afflictions, visitations and chastisements, or by powerful admonitions of His Holy Spirit, and you oppose Him, and succeed in repelling His gracious influences—when the condemnatory words of Holy Scripture reach your heart, and you cast them from you—you gradually acquire the habit of resisting the truth, and at last come to cherish a decided hatred. The mystery of iniquity is on this account *a mystery*, because it does not at first amount to simple iniquity, an unmixed antagonism to all that is Christian, but at first remains mingled with that which is truly Christian. All danger for us lies in this very fact.

I ask now, my brethren, Do we recognise in our day something of the mystery of iniquity? Are there those, or have there been those, still exerting an influence on the present generation, who, by word, writings or example, declare that element in Christianity which is contrary to the flesh, which annihilates self, to be weak and foolish, an invention of men, and a mode of thought unworthy of the character of God? Have there been such, or are there still such, as reply with an everlasting No, when the Apostolic word teaches, If God save thee not through grace, for Jesus Christ's sake, thou art for ever lost: even thy virtues are regarded, in the light of eternity, only as failings and weaknesses, because they are full of vanity and self-admiration, full of vain confidence in your own power and glorifying in self! And where you find such

voices, take notice if they do not also say, We must live a Christian life—cultivate a Christian spirit ; but Christianity consists not in the crucifying of the flesh, with its affections and lusts, but in love. And what is love but mutual forbearance—a covering of each other's defects and failings? Is this tone unfamiliar to our age? Love is the common plea ; and under this expression is understood, in hundreds of cases, only that sentimental tenderness and mutual consideration which one shows to the other, with the understanding it will be returned ; in which the whole self-love and selfishness of the natural heart is left unreprieved, and persons are allowed to proclaim themselves true disciples of Jesus, on account of this very love to all mankind, which they assert they possess. Certainly, my brethren, the name of faith has been greatly sinned against in the Christian Church. Men have claimed as a living faith in themselves, and have acknowledged as such in others what is only a repetition of words and formulas, and have not demanded conversion and regeneration through faith—the possession of Jesus Christ and His merit, which is the contents of faith. But, without doubt, yet greater sins have been committed in the name of love, and are yet committed in the present day.

Many regard it as the language of true penetration, when they hear it said that what one believes, the conception he forms of God and of his position toward God, is a subordinate question ; the main question is,

whether he possesses love. Very good, if there were only love worthy the name in the heart of the natural man. But he who has not embraced Jesus Christ as the Lamb slain for his sins, knows no true love; and that which so deceptively resembles it is, after all, only a substituted caricature thereof. Love springs from faith. And now I ask once more, Is there not in our age something of the mystery of iniquity? Is not the natural spirit of accommodation, of mutual recognition and acknowledgment, a hundred times consciously interchanged with the love which is in Christ Jesus. The mystery of iniquity lies concealed where, first unwittingly, and afterwards wittingly, corruption of the great fundamental principles and blessings of the Gospel takes place, whether of faith or of love.

And now, farther. The mystery of iniquity was already present in the time of the Apostle: it was moving and working. But it was as yet a MYSTERY. Not every one recognised it at the first glance as that which it was; the Thessalonians must employ for its discovery the key placed in their hand by the Apostle. Now the Apostle says, plainly, It is still a mystery: it cannot yet break forth in a personal form, as yet the man of sin cannot appear; there is something that "*withholdeth*," consequently, a *counterpoise*. What were the circumstances under which it was repressed? And afterwards he says, "He who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way."

Who is this that must first quit the field? WHAT, we further ask, HAS BEEN THE COUNTERPOISE FROM THE APOSTLE'S TIME UNTIL THIS MOMENT, on account of which the mystery of iniquity is still a *mystery*; and iniquity, enmity against Christ, cannot become manifest and dominant in Christendom? Much has been spoken and written concerning these enigmatic words of the Apostle. It has even been thought that secular authority, the good moral order in which human life has been preserved by it, has led the Apostle to think of the Emperor of Rome, under whose sceptre justice was administered throughout the land. Others again, when they looked upon the hostile bearing of these heathen rulers towards Christianity, have found this impossible, and have said it is Christian authority, the Christian state, which restrains it. But, my brethren, where was the Christian state at the time of the Apostle? We know well also that there have been times in which Christian authority has lent the weight of its influence to Antichristian iniquity; we have also seen with our eyes how it has stood powerless; and yet, although the mystery of iniquity has in a greater degree manifested itself, it has not fully done so, and the man of sin has not yet appeared. The Christian Church, with its institutions and ordinances, has also been thought of. This could hardly have been the case in the time of the Apostolic commencement; for the Church was as yet present only in single con-

gregations, and it was much less outward order which held these congregations together, than the inner living power of faith and love in Jesus Christ. What then, finally, is the power that hinders? It must at least be something flowing from the nature and life of the Gospel which exerts such restraining power in regard to the mystery of iniquity; and, again, it must be one who is provided with a power greater than the Satanic powers, and who cannot yet be removed out of the midst, between the two camps, the Christian and the Antichristian.

Our first thought when we are seeking such a Greater One, is of the Lord himself; for who else would oppose a restraining power to the kingdom of darkness in its complete presentation in a personal form, so far as this is possible on earth? What single person but our Lord, the eternal Victor, who has trodden down Satan under His own and His people's feet? It is true it is not simply the unseen operation of Christ, the silent power of life, which still sometimes restrains, when the mystery of iniquity has already become powerful, so that the wicked ones cannot do as they will, because they have again at particular times what they call their moments of weakness—because impressions of eternal truth are still sometimes experienced in their hearts. It is not this inner power of the Lord alone; it is the operation of the Lord Jesus Christ in all the fore-mentioned spheres—the Church, so long as it remains in any

measure a Christian, living Church ; the State, so long as it allows Christian principles in any measure to prevail in it ; social order and culture, so long as Christianity forms the basis of this culture ;—it is, above all, THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL ; for this preaching in all the world, among all nations for a witness unto them, it is which the Lord himself designates as “that which withholdeth ;” for He says, when this is done, “then cometh the end.” The preaching of the Gospel, which, spite of all human weakness and imperfection in the ministers of the Word, is yet the preaching of Jesus Christ himself ; because His Word—the Word of His Holy Spirit, in the mouth of His Apostles—is proclaimed. This is the restraining power. There have been times—and we have, not long ago, experienced such times—when it seemed as though the restraining power would be removed, as though the pure Gospel of Christ would cease to be heard. Then it seemed as though the mystery of iniquity would soon cease to be a mystery. When out of this time of unbelief, in which the congregations, the homes and hearts, were deceived in regard to their faith, and to those sustaining powers by which alone they could be preserved on earth and blessed in heaven, and all was cold and desolate, and Christendom continued to be Christendom only because the bells still called to church—because the organ-strains were yet heard, and prayers were spoken, and the sacraments were still observed—but

the places of worship were empty ; when out of this condition the revolutions broke forth, and beat against the thrones of Christian princes, and the Christian state had now but little right to the name, because it rather professed the doctrine of Higher Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*), and regarded itself as subservient to the material life and its aims;—then the hidden believers felt that the man of sin might speedily be revealed.

But the Lord has once more afforded a time of grace. We live in such a time ; for the Word is again proclaimed with increasing power and with the testimony of the Holy Spirit ; and we may hope that the congregations, houses, and hearts which have grown cold, which are sunk in sleep and death, will become alive again—many, at least, of them—we pray, if possible, all. He who yet restrains, remains consequently still on the field, and the Church of Christ, with its institutions and ordinances, is again better understood, and the old treasures, once buried under ruins, are again dug up, and cleansed from rust and defilement. We believe and hope the State also will more than before receive and give forth the living principles of Christianity. Therefore, because the restraining is again on the increase, we hope the mystery of iniquity will remain yet longer a mystery. But do not overlook the fact, my beloved ; all depends upon us how we, as individuals, act in regard to it.

We come now, therefore, of necessity, to the ques-

tion most important for us, IN WHAT DOES OUR POWER AGAINST THIS MYSTERY OF INIQUITY CONSIST? For it would be a sinful wasting of our brief festive hour if we should speak of these things only in order to have a clearer insight into the plan of the kingdom of God. Precious and refreshing as this is for the inner man, it would yet be a waste of time, when we have such pressing practical questions before us, if our whole meditation did not, properly speaking, culminate in these. Once more, then: In what does our power against this mystery of iniquity consist? In my answer, I communicate nothing new to you, but that which is well known, although never too frequently reiterated. It consists in this, that we ourselves, each individual for himself, and each in his family, receive in all earnestness the truths of Christianity; that we cease to appropriate, by way of selection, one truth of revelation, to reject another, and to form a compromise with a third; so that we at one time seem to regard with serious concern the great principles of Christianity, at another, not.

And now I return to the commencement. We have been gathered together here to-day for praise and thanksgiving. If, however, one year after another we render praise and thanksgiving—if we are filled with wonder at the long-suffering and kindness of our God—of what avail will this be, unless the long-suffering and kindness of our God lead us to repentance—unless we review with earnest self-examina-

tion our whole position before God, and ask, Have you hitherto, properly speaking, lived for your Saviour, for God in Christ? Can you say, The great aim of my life, through all that which my earthly calling has brought with it, has been to show myself a possession of Him who died for me upon the Cross; and all must acknowledge of me, imperfect as my Christian life has been, that I seek those things which are above. If this be not so, it is for you, my brethren, unreservedly, to confess this to the Lord, to fall before Him in your chamber, and implore Him: Enter not into judgment with me; look upon me in compassion, and forgive the sins of my whole past life, even those which the world calls virtues, and fill me henceforth with life from Thyself. Grant me to experience Thine everlasting strength in the conflict against flesh and blood, against the world and Satan; and help me not only to overcome all admixture of flesh and spirit, of life and death, in myself, and to advance in the purity of Thy life, but also to oppose this admixture wherever it shows itself around me.

My brethren, then are we ourselves a part of that which withholdeth; then do we ourselves oppose the mystery of iniquity.

Yet more, Can I truly say that our congregation, scattered as it is throughout the entire town, operates as a leaven in the town? Are we in reality united as a true people of the Lord? Do we bear our children upon a prayerful and believing heart? O beloved, in

this respect the aspect is sad enough ; though better than in former years, sad enough ! What, then, shall we do on this day of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord—a day, at the same time, of the first communion of a multitude of children, for the most part of our own congregation—effectually to oppose the mystery of iniquity ? Shall we not, above all things, pray with earnestness and importunity that these young souls may not be drawn and enticed with this mystery, and finally involved in the same, but that they may put on power from on high, in order effectually to oppose it ? And if thus, from their youth up, there should arise within our congregation a warrior host of Jesus Christ, would not, in the end, the hearts of the parents be turned to the children, and even the strong hearts of the aged be broken ? Let us stand, then, as those whose sins are forgiven, who, in Jesus Christ, have found peace—peace to behold the countenance of death with joyful spirit, and to rejoice in the prospect of eternity as their home. Then, beloved, the Lord will restrain through us the mystery of iniquity. We shall have power to resist it ; and even if, in God's mysterious counsel, the appointed time for the revelation of the man of sin should come, should fall in our lifetime, we should be found such as shall follow in the footprints of the suffering of Christ, and shall not esteem the sufferings of this present time worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Lord, look in compassion upon us! Let old and young, especially these children, put on strength—the only strength which avails for us—by apprehending Thee in faith, that we may stand and not fall, if the darkest hours of temptation should come upon the earth within our lifetime ; that we may stand also, and not fall, so long as we have to do with the mystery of iniquity which creeps among us. Look in compassion upon us, and grant us, in the midst of our praise and thanksgiving, and as a fruit thereof, true repentance ; that we may henceforth be able to praise Thee with purified hearts for all Thy benefits in time and eternity. Amen.

The Man of Sin.

“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, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?—2 THESS. ii. 3—5.

BELOVED IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD,—We have for some time past, under the guidance of the word of the apostolic prophecy, directed our glance to the future of the Church of Christ on earth, yet awaiting us; and we have already in this future seen many things pass before our eye, which did not at once gladden our heart, but rather deeply oppress and sadden it, but which must at the same time call upon us to repair thither, where power and courage and armour is to be obtained, for the severe conflicts which await the little flock of believers, before the great and glorious day of the Lord can dawn.

During the last days,* beloved, we also have looked forth into the immediate future with the questionings of anxious care—asking what was the Lord's intention in regard to us, to His people, to our land, and our Church; and we have been cast down by the thoughts which pass through our souls when we look upon the future of the Church of Christ. Hitherto, we have been able to look with confidence upon our beloved Lord and King, as one of those whom the everlasting Head of the Church has set as strong pillars to uphold it; but when such a pillar begins to give way, or we at least fear lest it should give way, whither shall we then look? Whither could we look in these days but to the Everlasting Rock himself, the living God in His Only Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, the Rock that never faileth? Thus, my friends, our feelings, and the thoughts which are in our hearts, mingle with our meditation on the subject before us.

I have often already given you to look from afar upon a dark and terrible form which rises threateningly in the background of all that which we have hitherto learnt, from the words of the Apostles, to recognise in the future. I cannot spare you the effort of to-day more closely approaching with me this terrible form, in taking up the same Scripture which we have already made the text of our meditation, that

* The illness of the late excellent King Frederick William IV. is here referred to.

we might learn to understand the apostasy ; but now to examine it on the other side. To-day we have to contemplate in spirit THE MAN OF SIN ; and in doing so, we cannot dispense, first, with the question, WHO WILL THIS BE ? and then with the second question, WHAT WILL HE DO ? and, finally, we shall be impelled to answer a third question, HOW SHALL WE FIND PROTECTION AGAINST HIM ? Lord Jesus ! Thou hast, through the Holy Spirit, given Thine Apostles to look forth into the future of Thy kingdom upon earth ; and hast revealed to them the form, which this day, while occupying our thoughts, inspires us with terror. This, also, is written in Thy word for our admonition. We pray Thee, therefore, that we may receive this teaching, and that it may become a power in us, to the end that we may not only know and understand something more of Thy kingdom and its progress, and may comprehend the gloomy hours and portentous forms and appearances in the same, but also, and above all, may become established in our calling and in our election, through Thy grace. Amen.

My beloved, when we read that the day of the Lord shall not come except the apostasy come first, we very easily comprehend this ; and we have understood in our former meditations that this apostasy is not something entirely foreign to our age, to the circle in which we move, to our hearts. But when it is further said, "And that man of sin be revealed,

the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself," it would almost seem to us as though the Apostle had here spoken that which was beyond possibility.

"Man of sin!" What can that mean, unless it be the well-known melancholy fact that we are all by nature wretched sinners, under curse and condemnation; and that, even to those among us who have received, through faith, forgiveness of sins, sin yet cleaves and makes them negligent; and that we must exclaim, even with the last breath, "God be merciful unto me a sinner!" *This*, however, is certainly not what the Apostle would say when he speaks of the manifestation of the "man of sin." He can mean nothing else than that a human being will yet come, unlike any who have preceded him, who will stand in close connection with sin, will be one with it—its outwardly-expressed form, its visible appearance—as no other sinful man has ever been. The Apostle had already beheld terrible forms of sin, in spirit and in life. He had been present when the Christian martyr Stephen sank with shattered form beneath the hands of the children of Zion, and had looked close at hand into the well-known faces of the raging Pharisees, into these fearful expressions of sin. He knew of the betrayer of Jesus, into whom Satan had entered, and who was gone to his own place; and yet he speaks of a man of sin, who would be so in the future, in a degree in which none of these had ever become so.

WHO, THEN, WILL THIS BE? The answer lies at hand in the Apostolic prophecy. When the Apostle says, it is the "*man of sin and son of perdition,*" he tells us that sin, or literally, *lawlessness*—consequently, rebellion against God, willing and doing in opposition to God's known and recognised will—will form the principal feature and main characteristic of the person of the man of sin. The Apostle in effect says, A man will arise who will not, like other men, be held captive, and impelled forward in sin, as a wretched slave subdued and led away by it; nor will he merely break forth from time to time out of this more passive state into open rebellion and enmity against God; but he will be one in whom sin has attained such a degree of development and power, that it forms, properly speaking, the stamp and especial mould of his spiritual character. Is that possible? asks the human heart with dread. Is it possible that a man who lives in the time of grace upon earth, in the midst of the saving influences of Divine compassion, can attain to this extreme of wickedness?

Alas! my dear hearers, if we are acquainted with the depths of evil in our own heart, and know that what is yet good in us, or what is not yet entirely enlisted in the service of sin and Satan, has been preserved neither through our natural goodness nor through our zealous working, our carefulness, and efforts, but that all this is the free, delivering, and compassionating grace of God in our life, such an

one may at least think, How would it be with me if God should withdraw from me this preserving grace ; if, after long unworthiness, and manifold and ever-renewed rejection of His gracious drawing, and His loving preservation or warning, He should finally give me up to Satan and the powers of darkness, to exert their influence upon me? *Then* there arises within one the terrible thought, I might myself, even, become a man of sin !

And now consider, further, that man cannot reach the extreme of wickedness so long as he knows only by hearsay the whole fulness of God's grace and compassion. As Judas the betrayer was among the number of the chosen disciples of the Lord—as his sin assumed so fearful a character on the very account that he had lived constantly in the companionship of the All-gracious One, the Saviour of sinners—so must we also expect it to be with the man of sin. We cannot think of him as a man who, merely in following his natural inclinations and desires, passes quietly from bad to worse, and eventually reaches the extreme of wickedness. This extreme can be reached only after a severe conflict with the powers of grace. A man of sin can be only one who has with the eye of the spirit clearly seen the Lord in his life's path, not once, but often, and ever afresh, as He came to save him, to warn him, and even, at the last, to snatch him from the abyss ; but who on each occasion, in his pride, or in his already developed

enmity for that which is of God, repelled the gracious hand, and on his own rebellious spirit made progress from evil to evil; who had, perhaps, never tasted the Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, but who had truly experienced their presence, and had trampled under foot the blood of Jesus Christ, and crucified the Son of God afresh. It must, consequently, be one within that sphere in which the influences of God's grace are most powerfully felt; not one from the midst of heathenism, not one out of that state of obscurity which borders on heathenism, but one out of the community of the pure Word of God—out of a Christian communion in which the pure light of the Gospel shines. For only there are felt the powers of grace in such a way that a human heart, be it ever so hard and proud, must either be melted or continue in an undecided and irresolute course, until death; or finally—thanks be to God, an extremely rare case—must with consciousness, with resolute force of will, oppose everything which from Divine love seeks grace, mercy, deliverance to the poor sinner. On this account I say, that when the man of sin shall be revealed—at what hour is known only to the Lord—he will not come forth from a world of darkness, but will arise where the Gospel is preached, and many walk in the blessing and peace of it.

He is called the “son of perdition.” What does this imply? Wherever in the Old or the New Testament this figure is used, and a man is called, for

instance, a “son of the sword,” or a “child of wisdom,” there is understood by it, that he is one who derives his main characteristic from the sword, from war, from heroic courage and bravery—one to whom wisdom has given its peculiar impress. A child of God is one who is allied to God, because he is born of God—of the incorruptible seed of the Divine Word. The son of perdition is, consequently, a man upon whom eternal perdition, the condition of Satan and his angels—bitter enmity against God—has impressed the peculiar stamp of his being. The son of perdition is not, however, instantly recognised as such by every one. In our text the features of the man of sin are presented as they show themselves in the mirror of God’s word, as they can be seen only by the spiritually-enlightened eye of a true Christian. When the world beholds nothing but splendour, power of human intellect and will, the opened eye of the true believer, experienced in the things of the kingdom of God—not merely the one endowed with much wisdom and natural understanding, but even the simple one—perceives the fire of everlasting perdition gleaming behind. In the eyes of the child of God, the man of sin is a sinister, dark and gloomy form, whilst perhaps millions exult in him as an earthly God; for according to all that is afterwards written, and which we shall soon proceed to examine, we anticipate that he will not be one working secretly and in concealment, but one openly coming forth—one

who exerts commanding influence in the world, has the earthly powers at his disposal, and knows how to apply all those means of fascination, which, unhappily, even in Christendom, are able to seduce millions of hearts from the simplicity which is in Christ, and to draw them into the way of perdition. An *adversary* he will appear to believers, whilst the majority of mankind will perhaps find him exceedingly agreeable; because his religion, his kingdom, his mode of action, is able to permit to the flesh all that it so greatly seeks; yea, perhaps, because the religion of the flesh is enthroned, and that which, according to the will of God, we should mortify and trample in the dust, is raised to the throne of dominion. Alas! on this account many, many will fall down before him, will commit to him their hearts and their life, and by him will be drawn down to the abyss. To those, however, also, who have an eye enlightened by the Holy Spirit, he will be an opponent, an enemy, who seeks not God and the things of God, but himself and himself alone. In him the natural selfishness of the human heart, present in us all, will attain to its full expression, to its perfect realization. This he will be so far as we are able to express in the feeble language of men, the deep and mysterious hints of the spirit of prophecy; and, according to that which he is, will he do.

To our question, WHAT WILL HE DO? the Apostle gives us the answer, "He will exalt himself above all

that is called God, or that is worshipped.”* Must we not, my beloved, shrink back in alarm at this description, if we at the same time cast a glance at our own age? Are there not many in it, among so-called cultured persons and others, who find no more the need of a God? Their art and skill, their thorough knowledge, their possessions, the ways opening up to them for increasing these possessions, their power, and the forces combining for its augmentation, are able to satisfy the wants of their life; and what may happen after—if there is, indeed, a hereafter—is a question ever unseasonable for them. Are there not those in our days who regard it as absurd that we should meet together to pray, to praise God, and to hear the word of the Cross—who do not hesitate to say to us, Christianity has outlived itself; it is a religion no longer adequate to the wants of the present day, and especially of *that* future to which we are unquestionably hastening? Have we not, consequently, to confess that the spirit which exalts itself above all that is called God or worship is already present?

And yet, I would not answer this question entirely in the affirmative. For only follow into the quiet pathways of their life those who so speak; enter into their chamber when their plans have been frustrated, their possessions are lost, when they lie sick and miserable upon their bed, and the supposed inex-

* *Σέβασμα*, whatever is an object of awe or reverence.

haustible fountain of their spirits is dried up, the wing of the once so high-soaring courage has become powerless, and when the dark shadow of death and of threatening judgment, which man is no longer able to banish, fills their souls with gloomy terror ;—then it is very different with them. If they do not even then stretch forth their hands towards the living God, and seek peace in the only One through whom peace is to be found, in the Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, they at least cling, as we know, to all kinds of superstition. They do not, therefore, exalt themselves above all that is called God or is worshipped ; but only, since they will not open their hearts to faith, become the slaves of superstition. And that is the fate of very many in our time, who are carried to and fro between unbelief and superstition, between levity and that which is not the true fear of God, but slavish dread of God. But, at any rate, there may and certainly will be gradually developed out of this present melancholy condition a new phase, in which many within the Protestant Church will at length emancipate themselves from superstition, and will truly exalt themselves above all that is called God and worship, because they will no longer hear of doing service ; they are strong, high-flown people, who have not learnt to bow, and at most only do homage to the idol Mammon, in order to obtain something from him. To fall down before a Higher Power, which promises them nothing for the

flesh, they have either not learnt, or have long ago unlearnt. From among them, first of all, will the man of sin, when he is revealed, gather his immediate followers, his most confidential servants; but he will not, as we have before mentioned, himself spring from their number, but out of the communion of those who have still the life of faith. But, we repeat, from among these lost ones, these unhappy ones—of whose blood, perhaps, none of us are entirely innocent, because we have by no means done all that we could to bring them within the influence of evangelical light and life—will he gather his first adherents.

But now, further. *How* will he exalt himself above all that is called God or is worshipped? Not by a pure denial, as many now suppose, of that which is Divine in general, but “he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” Behold, my friends, the height of enmity against God. But does any self-seeking and self-love aim at anything short of making the self-seeking man the centre, the head of the world? All must serve him, all fall in with his inclinations and interests, all become only means in his hands; and the more widely he extends the circle of these means, the more men and things he makes his instruments, uses in the service of his pleasures, the greater he thinks himself, and the more is he admired and envied by thousands.

It has been from the beginning the innermost

essence of sin, of self-seeking, that man will be as God. As long as he wishes only this, he is not clearly conscious of his own will. When he has attained this clearness—as this takes place in the man of sin—he will no longer wish to be *as* God and *with* God in equal power and glory, but he will be *God himself*. Beside him nothing any longer can appear great. If this is already the case with selfishness and sin, as it is now in the world; if this crushes and annihilates all around it, so far as it has the power, what will it be when once God's invisible hand, at the time He has reserved for himself, shall withdraw the barriers of the kingdom of darkness, and allow its floods to burst forth at the appearing of the man of sin? And how will the lesser and weaker selfishness of the majority attach itself to the greater one of this Ruler of Sin, and subordinate itself for the purpose of gaining the advantages he obtains?

In this, beloved, we have the fearful image of a human form which has become one with the extreme manifestation of sin. We should certainly not dare to say that such an one will some day arise—a man will presume to take his seat in the temple of God, and to give himself out as God—if it were not written in the Book of God's prophecy, and if we could evade its plain declaration, or expound it otherwise than of an actual man. But the Apostle speaks so clearly and distinctly: the “man of sin”—a human person, who shall arise in the history of men upon earth—

“the son of perdition, the opposer, will exalt himself above God, and that which is worshipped, and will profess that he is God,” that we cannot, without doing violence to his words, think of anything else. You will, perhaps, say, That will be no historical person. If a man advances to such insanity of wickedness, that he, a feeble creature, frail and mortal like others, who lives his determinate number of years like ourselves, is subject to sickness and distress like one of us, proclaims that he is God, he will at all times be regarded as an unfortunate being, be pitied as one deprived of sound reason, and as such will be harmless. Yes, my friends, so, thanks be to God, would it be at present in our community. Not thus, however, will the man of sin begin; but, as we read in other prophecies, which we shall hereafter examine, he will arise with powers and lying wonders: he will appear as a helper and deliverer of humanity; will perform those things for which the millions on earth have long sighed, in their race and struggle after unbroken earthly enjoyment, and unchecked toil for the increase of life’s pleasure and life’s splendour. Of him it will be said, Now at last has appeared that which the centuries have been longing for; now we have found the key to all the products of human research for the alleviating and perfecting of the earthly life. And only when he has satisfied their fleshly desires, their hungering and thirsting after that which is transitory, will it gradually appear against what the force

of his kingdom and his dominion is ultimately directed—against God ; that at last beside him and above him the thought of a God is not to be tolerated. But one must either renounce all thought of God and of Divine things of eternity, of prostration in the dust before the Omniscient and Holy One, or must stand forth the declared foe of this opponent. Here will the half-heartedness and indecision cease which now so widely prevails. It will be necessary to come to decision : either to be against God, an enemy of God, a subject of Antichrist, or a child of God.

Thus are we led to the question most important for us. It is true there is now no appearance of this, the last terrible development before the great day of the Lord, taking place in our lifetime ; but we know not—no man is able to say—how many developments a decade of years may bring forth in the history of the world. Changes which once required the lapse of centuries for their introduction, now follow each other in rapid succession ; and if just now it seemed as though the storm would sweep, in its course, over the earth, it is now suddenly stilled, and a time of quiet progress returns. But because we know not the time, we are called to a state of preparation. The Apostle did not without cause exhort his Thessalonians in our text : “Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you I told you these things ?”

My brethren, the Apostle had been but a very short time in Thessalonica, and in this short time he found

it needful to present these things to the new-born communion of those who were just come to the faith. He must, therefore, have regarded it as of the highest importance that they should be prepared. How much less shall we be justified in declining the consideration of these things, and leaving unanswered the question, HOW MAY WE FIND PROTECTION AGAINST THE MAN OF SIN? To this I answer in few words: It will not be possible to obtain protection against him, for those who have not till then found protection, when the man of sin appears. For I have already remarked, the extreme of darkness, so far as this is possible in humanity, will not suddenly arise in it, but all will follow in a regular order of natural development, step by step; and he who has not before this open eyes, and regards not the signs of the time, nor looks into his own heart and continually seeks to know himself more fully in humility before the Lord, will infallibly be led to drink of the intoxicating draught of the flesh, and led away by the common delusion—will not then have his eyes opened to recognise the man of sin, the Antichrist; but, once drawn within the reach of the vortex, will no longer have the power to escape therefrom.

One is protected against it only by recognising in its true light all that is Antichristian. And how will you recognise that which is Antichristian in others—in the spirit of the age, in whole societies and schools of thought—if you do not distinguish in

yourself flesh from spirit, nature from grace ; if you do not discover what you are by nature, and what you would have become already, had not God, in unspeakable compassion, preserved you hitherto? And what would become of you if He should, from this moment, leave you to yourself? But if you daily renew this research, and become acquainted with your own heart and conscience, and contemplate yourself in the mirror of God's word, then will you become a poor sinner before God, and find no rest until you have found peace at the Cross in the forgiveness of your sins, and will daily experience the need of a renewed sealing of this forgiveness. Then you will be in earnest with your Christianity in heart and life, will be a child of God, and therefore will receive through the Holy Spirit opened eyes of the understanding. Then will you not merely recognise the fruit of darkness when it has come to maturity, but it will be discerned by you in its first budding, and you will distinguish the Christian from the Antichristian element in the present day, and will range yourself on the side of Christ in word and deed.

Thus, beloved, and only thus, are we secure. Then let the power of seduction rise and swell as mightily as it will, and let the number of its adherents and the force of public opinion seem to be irresistible, you will stand firm, for you are in Christ Jesus the Lord. Everything depends—as I have already declared to you from this place—upon the personal

relation, the true communion of a soul with the Lord Jesus Christ. In this is the only safety. And then, when we are thus protected, shall we indeed regard the voice of prophecy, but not anxiously inquire whether he comes to-day or to-morrow—in what region, in what land, in what community, will the Antichrist arise. We shall above all things ever seek to distinguish in our sphere of life, in our day, in our common life, that which is against Christ, that which destroys the peace of God in Christ, which detracts from the honour of Jesus Christ, and which affords nourishment and support to the flesh—even under spiritual pretexts—from that which is for Christ and of Christ. But we must ever recall to mind this distinction, as the Apostle reminds his Church: “Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you, I told you these things?”

Beloved in the Lord, we, the preachers of the Gospel, have the sacred duty, following the teaching of the Apostle, to remind you also, in order that when perhaps after our death, or after yours, the appointed hour shall come when the man of sin shall be revealed, not upon us or upon you may come the blood of those who fall away unto perdition, but we may be able to testify in the presence of God, We have told them these things while we were yet with them; and you also may be able to say, We also have told these things to our families while we were yet with them.

Oh, tell it to them! and let me say, with all

emphasis, To-day, now, must we put on the armour of protection, if we are to be preserved against the coming of the man of sin, and against the lying wonders with which he shall seduce a great part of humanity, of Christendom.

May the compassion of God be upon us, that we may not in slumber and indifference pass over the clear word of prophecy, or, in the opinion that these are only the particular views and favourite thoughts of the preacher, neglect to put on the armour of God! May He help us, and make us strong in the power of His might! Amen.

The Judgment of the Wicked One.



“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 : 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.”—
2 THESS. ii. 8—10.

BELOVED IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD,—We return to the connection of the text, which we have already on several occasions made the subject of our meditation ; and at the same time, as you have heard, I cannot spare you the pain of again looking upon the sombre form which everywhere occupies the background of the Apostolic prophecy, when it speaks of those things which shall precede the glorious coming of Christ. The Apostle designates this being the “Man of Sin,” and in the words of our text the “Wicked One.” He will appear, will

have a revelation, a future, a coming forth from the darkness of the times in a clear, unmistakeable form ; but he has not only such an appearing, he has also his end, his judgment. Our present text treats of the JUDGMENT OF THE WICKED ONE, THE MAN OF SIN. This is to-day the object of our prayerful and believing meditation. Three questions force themselves upon us, and find their answer in the words of our text. The first is, WHEN WILL THE MAN OF SIN BE JUDGED? The second is, HOW WILL HIS JUDGMENT BE ACCOMPLISHED? And the third, the most important for us, WHO WILL SHARE THIS JUDGMENT WITH HIM?

Everlasting God and Lord, by every word of Thy prophecy, and the prophecy of thine Apostles, we are compelled to sink before Thee in the dust, because we ever see our flesh and blood, our natural life, implicated, when the clear light of Thy Holy Spirit falls upon the dark future, upon the wider unfolding of Thy kingdom, and especially upon the last and extreme form of that sin and corruption which is already in the world. But every such word impels us at the same time to a filial, believing, prayerful looking to Thyself ; for Thou art our help, our deliverance, our salvation. Thus do we bend before Thee this day, and look forth from our humiliation to Thee in Thy glory, and pray Thee have mercy upon us. Have mercy upon us, and leave us not to perish with the world, but deliver

us, and forsake not, but rather complete the good work begun in us. Lord, help us, and bless our meditation in this hour consecrated to Thyself. Amen.

Is it not, my beloved, an idle question of curiosity which would gladly raise the veil which lies upon the more distant future of the kingdom of God upon earth, if we allow ourselves to ask the question, **WHEN WILL THE MAN OF SIN BE JUDGED?** It may be said, We must be content with knowing nothing about this matter, and with confessing that the Lord had His wise reasons for concealing it, to lead us in all our ways to seek warning, awakening and strengthening, that whenever the man of sin appears, and his judgment overtakes him, we may not be surprised by the event. But here it is clearly and distinctly indicated in the Apostle's words; and a definite answer is given us to the question when the man of sin will be judged. Where the word of God affords us such indications or revelations, there we *must* ask; there we are called upon to regard the matter as serious and important enough for us to devote to it other interest than that of curiosity. There is nothing in the whole of Holy Writ, and more especially in the words of the Apostles, which does not intimately concern our whole life before God and for God—our everlasting weal or woe—and to this our question and its answer forms no exception.

We shall discover the time in the more careful analysis of the answer itself. For there it is written by the Apostle's hand, "*Then* shall that wicked one be revealed;" and immediately after he is described as the one whose coming is according to the working of Satan, with all kinds of lying powers, and signs, and wonders. Here we have a description of the condition in which judgment will overtake the man of sin, and consequently, also, of the time, in his working and being, at which this judgment will overtake him—certainly not the time in the sense of our being able even approximately to determine the year of our Christian era in which this great event will happen. This, also, is entirely superfluous, since, even though it were written in the word of God in distinct numbers, in what year the man of sin would appear and exercise his influence within Christendom, and to what year his perilous and destructive work would extend, this description would not prevent a single soul from falling into his snare. So much has already been written in the Holy Scripture, and so clearly, that if this might avail to warn men against the ways of everlasting perdition, things would long ago have worn another aspect in Christendom. But what we are told is, that the final judgment upon the man of sin and his work cannot take place until he has been *revealed*. And you now know well, my beloved, from the word of prophecy as a whole, that when the

coming of the Lord is spoken of, either His personal manifestation and appearing is meant, or that victory, the dawn of the day and of life, which cannot be brought about except by the Lord himself. When, therefore, it speaks of the coming of the man of sin, the wicked one, it is clear that not merely that spirit is meant which is already present, and has its work in the children of disobedience—the spirit of enmity against the word of God, and His pure truth—of distrust in regard to the things of God, of becoming steeped in earthly, vain, transitory, and material interests, of opposition towards that which is spoken from heaven by the Holy Ghost. In this case, judgment against the man of sin would pervade the whole history of the Christian Church. In a certain sense and degree this has, indeed, been the case, and we might point out in history a long succession of judgment days of the Holy Spirit—now upon great communities of men, now upon single individuals. But in all this there was only a prelude of that which one day will happen.

We have already seen in a former meditation that when the Apostle speaks of the man of sin, the son of perdition, he means a definite human person, who shall yet appear in the future, the same in whom all which is written of Antichristian principle, of enmity against Christ within the Christian circle, will find its summary, its incorporation, its mightiest representation and realization. Such an one will be,

who is adored as a god of this world on account of his powers—the force of mind and will with which he carries out that for which the mystery of iniquity, creeping in darkness everywhere, prepares the way. And now it is said, Only when he has come forth out of the darkness of time, when he is no longer merely a spirit of wickedness and of enmity against Christ, but a man who opposes himself to the Lord of all lords, the King of all kings, and denies His word, and makes it a lie, and with an authority which is to outweigh that of Christ, comes forth against Him and His, then will his judgment appear.

At the same time, it is further said in what way the coming of this wicked one will be manifested. On the one hand, we have a hint of the dark background from which he shall come forth, in the words, “after the working of Satan ;” and on the other hand, the proclaiming of his revelation is described in the words, “with all power, and signs, and lying wonders.” Might we not say, my beloved, that this is spoken in exceedingly general language? For in a certain sense, we may assert of all that is evil and Anti-christian, that it is a working of Satan, inasmuch as Satan was a murderer and a liar from the beginning ; and this first seducer stands to this hour in a certain connection with all that is done of sin and ungodliness in the obscurity and darkness of this world. But here the Apostle is speaking of a coming, of manifestations according to the working

of Satan, and of a power of evil which can be explained only by being traced back to the immediate operation of that world which belongs to the power of darkness—to sin. It has been said, the Antichrist or man of sin is, properly speaking, not a man in the strict sense of the word, but an incarnation of the devil; Satan mimicking the great work of grace and redemption—the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus—will himself also appear in a human form. God preserve us from this horrible and perverted thought! Satan is a created spirit, however deeply fallen and corrupt. Satan cannot be anything else than what he is—a created, finite being; he cannot pass beyond the limits imposed on him. Only the infinite God, only the Almighty himself, the Creator of all things, can become man and be truly man, whilst He, at the same time, remains that which he is—the everlasting God. Only He works this wonder of wonders. The incarnation of God cannot be imitated by any being who is not God; and, therefore, however gladly Satan would have the creative power of becoming man, and of acting as man, he has it not, and will never have it. Therefore, the wicked one will be an actual mere man. An actual man can never be Satan; but only one more than others penetrated with Satanic power, and swayed by the power of seduction. How far this may be permitted, no word can indicate beforehand. No one of us is in a position to conceive of

all the possibilities of evil, and of surrender to Satanic power, and to sum them up in a personal form. This can be only in some measure learnt from the experience of those who shall dwell upon earth during this terrible period.

This much, however, is clear from his words, that the Apostle recognises as already present a dominion and power of this evil and gloomy spirit of Satan, active in the measure in which man within the Christian Church turns from Christ, or turns not to Him. However far the age, in its wisdom, may have advanced beyond faith in the actual existence of this personal power of darkness ; however many forms of expression it may have coined to cover this unwelcome and gloomy doctrine of the Word of God, the Apostle tears away every such veil with the words, This coming is after the working of Satan.

Here, dear hearers, it becomes clear that we have not to do with a question of curiosity and of interesting investigation in regard to the future, but with a question very closely and deeply affecting our life. If Satan can rule and fill man with his powers, we also are then exposed to these influences, and, consequently, an earnest watchfulness and prayer is demanded of us, that we fall not into the snares of this tempter and seducer, and gradually become his involuntary instruments. At first, indeed, the man plays with sin, and with the thought of being at the will of the Prince of Darkness. But he is not.

long able to continue this play; instead of the player he becomes gradually the plaything, and finally is given up, without his choice, to the powers of corruption and perdition. This comes forth to us very clearly in the "signs, and powers, and wonders." They are called, indeed, powers, and signs, and wonders of a lie. This also they must be; for whatever else the man of sin will do, to awaken astonishment, whatever he may produce out of the fulness of his evil nature before the eyes of men, a creative spirit he will never be, for Satan is able only to destroy the creature of God; he is, as a creature, not in a position himself to create. The evil is able only to pervert that which God has made pure and good; itself to produce anything abiding, vigorous, fruitful, lies beyond its power. So the man of sin also will by no means have "power," in the sense in which the Apostles elsewhere use this word, when they speak of Christ's work of grace, of God's wonders in human history, and in the inner life. These are creations instinct with life, through the intervention of the eternal, invisible world in this poor world, which is, nevertheless, an image of the eternal, and, on this account, able to receive its impressions. Here, however, the Apostle is speaking of the "powers of a lie," which cast their spell over life, whilst in themselves they bear only death and destruction.

Ah, beloved, may we not perceive in many a single

human heart, and even in ourselves, if we look deep into our hearts, that there are such powers of a lie? Is it not often, as by fascination, that one and the same sin, whose painful issue we have already often experienced, is able afresh to ensnare us in its net and to present to us an attractive, bewitching form? Is not sin—even where it exerts the greatest ascendancy—just such a supernatural power of fascination; and do we not hear it said, hundreds and thousands of times, as a sort of excuse for one's own sin, that one cannot resist this mighty stream—that evil, like a power of nature, bursts irresistibly upon us? These are lying powers, and these powers rise to signs, and these "signs" become "wonders." Signs: what is the meaning of this word as it is used by Christ? It always implies that a new life, a new world, is arising within the old, and is renewing and glorifying it. Christ our Lord arises with signs among the people of Israel, all which express only the one thought which was afterward summed up by the Apostolic proclamation in the words, "The Life is manifested." Even so will the spirit of falsehood endow his most powerful instrument among men—the man of sin—with the capacity to blind the minds of men already under the dominion of the flesh, that they should recognise in that which is only the outcome of everlasting death, a tree of life, at whose fruit they greedily snatch.

I have already indicated what danger there would be, even in our days—when we have not reached this

extreme point in the history of the kingdom—if a man should arise who could promise full satisfaction and gratification for all the ten thousand wishes and desires of the natural heart ; if one should come forth among us with power of intellect and of will, and should be able at once to heal all the gaping wounds of our natural life, the interruptions of our quiet ; to fill up all the blanks and dreary voids of the pleasure-loving heart, so that he could say, Eat, drink, and be merry!—if any one by his smooth discourse and sparkling thoughts could dispel the anguish and fear of death, the dread of eternity, the quailing before the judgment, and could furnish us with a religion in which we could allow our life's vessel to drift pleasantly upon a smooth, sun-lit lake, dreading no evil issue—how great a danger, even for our age, and for our present Evangelical Church, would such an one bring ! But if, in addition, he should arise with even lying signs, and should produce the impression that that which he does is right, even though he should cherish the extreme of enmity against Christ, the lowly and despised Saviour of sinners ; if he should produce the appearance of his work being the completion of Christianity—as though hitherto the gloomy and severe side of Christianity only had been presented—in an over-spiritual conception of it, and too low an estimate of the present earthly condition of the human life ; the attractive, pleasing side, on the other hand, had been kept in the background—if,

consequently, in the name of truth, and in the name of God, as visibly present, a full satisfaction for the morbid desires of our natural life is afforded us; if, upon every wound which the Word of God, the testimony of the law, the accusations of the conscience, and the operations of the Holy Ghost, had made, a healing plaister is laid, how great, my beloved, must be the fascinating power of darkness in this case! And “wonders” will then be—truly lying wonders; for thousands and thousands will say: We have long in vain sought, toiled, struggled, and made research, but nowhere have we succeeded; here with a stroke, as by a touch of a Divine hand, our life is satisfied, and for us there is no toil and labour more.

Do I need, after that which has been said, any further to prove that the question as to the time of the judgment which is to be passed upon the man of sin very closely concerns us?

I may now pass to the manner: the one question leads naturally to the other. HOW, THEN, AND BY WHOM WILL THE JUDGMENT UPON THE MAN OF SIN BE ACCOMPLISHED? It is written in very simple words: “Whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the first appearing of His coming.” Then, indeed, will be rendered apparent that all the seductive powers, signs, and wonders, were only lying powers, signs, and wonders, when the true man of wonders shall be revealed

in the clouds of heaven with great power and glory ;* when He who doeth wonders both in heaven and on earth, shall work the last great sign—which, however, will be only a prelude of the transformation of heaven and earth—in destroying the wicked one with the breath of His mouth. Then will it be seen that this glory and dominion, derived entirely from the flesh and its out-growth, and this power of intellect, based entirely upon a lie, can avail nothing against the word which proceeds out of the mouth of the Son of God. Christ's *word*, that is, the spirit of His mouth : the Holy Ghost is embodied, so to speak, in the word of Christ.

His word, then : and what a word ! He will again say, as He once said in Gethsemane, I am He. But He will no more speak as the Lamb who was led to the slaughter, but as the King of eternity ; as He who sits at the right hand of the Majesty of his Father. He it is in whom alone a human soul can be saved ; He, the Crucified, with pierced hands and side, who shall one day so come as Judge, that all the nations of the earth may behold Him, from the rising to the setting of the sun. *Thus will the judgment upon the man of sin be an anticipation of the last general judgment ; no longer, however, such an one as now extends through the world-period of humanity ; for out*

* Upon the events connected with this appearing of the sign of the Son of man in the clouds, see Matt. xxiv. 29--31. Further light is shed by the vision of the Apostle John.—Rev. xix. 11 - 21.

of this judgment there will be no other issue than perdition for those upon whom it falls. Then will become manifest that the wicked one is the son of perdition ; that his destruction is written on his brow, legible for every divinely enlightened eye, but not understood by his blinded ones. “The Lord shall destroy him ;” that is, not merely physically slay him, although, no doubt, with the full revelation of the inner corruption of wickedness and lies, of abandonment to Satan and his kingdom, the earthly life can no longer continue. Sin and death consumes the bodily life : it has an end. But He will destroy him—slay him—not merely bodily, but consign him to everlasting death. That is judgment, that whoever has hardened himself, and has rendered himself gradually inaccessible and unimpressionable for the influences of grace which have been brought to bear on him, have touched him, aroused him, often again have exhorted him ; he who could make such gigantic progress in sin, and could finally become the conscious antagonist of Christ ; he who could exalt himself above all that is called God or is an object of worship, and pretend that he is a God, should be shut up to his own darkness and wickedness, and consigned to that torment which is in himself, which he has created for himself. This is the beginning of hell. He shall destroy him with the spirit of His mouth, and “shall bring him to nought (*καταργεῖν*).” Then will every appearance of might, power, and dominion, of influ-

ence and importance, be effaced, and iniquity, sin, Satan and his kingdom, as well as the man of sin, appear in their wretchedness; and all that here on earth has been so great and high, and has been adorned with such fair names—so much that has been called noble and fair—will be seen in the shame of its nakedness, and no one any more will have the least desire for it. Here the power of seduction ends. Oh, if we would only look upon the odious form of sin—we can do so—we should no more be led captive by it, and drawn away to perdition! By the “spirit of His mouth,” by the “revelation of His coming,” will the man of sin be judged. When Christ arises in His glory, the gloomy forms of sin flee away, and hide themselves in their own darkness from the presence of Him who sitteth upon the throne.

You will again confess, my dear friends, that it is no question of curiosity if we inquire after *the manner in which* the man of sin will be judged. It is certainly not a remote question, whether Jesus of Nazareth, who has hundreds of times invited and allured me, during my life on earth, to become His, shall one day come as He before whose mere appearing and bare word every covering will fall, every mask disappear, every appearance be done away, and also my state of heart be manifest before all the world. Nay verily, it is a life-question daily pressed upon you, How do you stand in relation to this Jesus of Nazareth? How if He should appear to-day in the bright-

ness of His coming? Will you be among those who rejoice to meet Him, because the longing of their life is now satisfied? Will you stretch forth the arms to Him as to the One whom you expect with joy, that He may graciously receive you, in spite of all your unworthiness, for the merit of His sacrifice, into His everlasting kingdom? Or will you be among those who must say, Ye mountains, fall upon us! and ye hills, cover us? As is your position in regard to the last judgment, so is it also to the anticipatory judgment upon the "wicked one." The question intimately affects us. Even if we should not live to see this mighty event of the kingdom of Christ—the victory of the Lord over the man of sin—yet even now our own everlasting portion is decided in the same manner. If the man of sin should arise, were now in the world, all those who belong in heart to Christ would range themselves on His side, and this would be seen, not merely in words, but in spirit and life. All others bear in themselves, more or less clearly, the sign of belonging to the man of sin, and falling under the same judgment with him.

For, finally, it is written that this judgment shall not overtake him alone, but others also with him. This, namely, is taught where it is said, He shall arise with all lying powers and signs and wonders, and with all seduction unto unrighteousness, among "them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

Here, my beloved, is the last, but most pressing question—of which I said it was the most important for us—WHO WILL SHARE IN THE JUDGMENT OF THE MAN OF SIN? You will say, Wicked, degraded, godless men, of whom there are many in our own as well as in every other age. You will bid us descend into the depths of corruption, into the dark hiding places of sin, in which it conceals itself from the eyes of man. Is it so? Must we there seek those who fall into the condemnation of Antichrist, or who are types of those who will one day have a terrible part in this judgment? For the present we might easily think so, for we are not yet living in the time of the final decision, but in a very important transition period; of which no one is able to say how near it is to the end. At such a time, much in the life of man is only half developed. There are many who are still able, after their manner, to serve at the same time God and Mammon; who hold alternately with Christ and Belial, and believe they can be at once devout and can give loose reins to the flesh and its lusts. These, however, are times in which—besides the seductive influences of the lawless one, though not yet in his human form—the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit are still in operation; that point of decision not yet being reached, after which there will be no one who does not, either living or dying, belong manifestly to Christ, or take his stand as a decided opponent and enemy of Christ. This decision is not

yet characteristic of our days, and therefore we easily imagine that the connection with the man of sin is to be sought in that which our present Christian society regards the extreme of wickedness—in the most repulsive manifestations of vice and transgression ; and that here are to be found those who will fall under the judgment of Antichrist. Not thus, however, does the Apostle speak : he speaks of the Antichrist as the wicked, or rather, lawless one, and his deception as a seduction to “lawlessness”—to the tendency to free one’s self from God’s law and the holy order of His word, either by quietly putting it on one side, or by bold rebellion against it. Lawlessness, however, characterises all those who will not be held within the limits of God’s order ; who therefore explain away, out of the Bible, all that which is disagreeable to them ; or, if they cannot do this, cast aside the whole Bible and its obligation upon us.

Are such not to be found amongst us, or to be found only where the defilement of sin betrays its inner repulsiveness ? I must even afresh remind you that sin in no one begins in its highest degree, but that its course is a gradual or more rapid descent, until it becomes a result, a product of much opposition and resistance against the admonitions of God—a manifold grieving of the Holy Spirit. The wicked one seduces men to lawlessness, to self-glorying and self-idolatry, as Satan seduced the first human beings. Thither, also, tends in the present day all seduction

of the kingdom of darkness. It is, however, yet further indicated that they obeyed not the truth to salvation.

Beloved, the truth unto salvation is well known unto us. It produces upon us its inner impressions, alarming or gracious, ever precious; it remains not strange to us; it touches our heart, and we cannot escape its contact with our innermost life. Thanks be to God, this is His work of grace: He has not yet given us up. But to be *obedient* to the truth is something far more than all this. Are we, then, obedient to the truth in such a way that, let the world say what it will, we walk in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus? This must be seen; for nothing is more difficult to conceal in a community of men than obedience to the truth. If we, who are present in this Church, walked resolutely in obedience to the truth, bowed in daily contrition, surrendered ourselves as the weary and heavy laden to the open arms of our Saviour, to be refreshed of Him, to appropriate all the fruit of His redemption, to have peace with God through the blood of the Cross, to bear within us a certain hope of everlasting life, and to tread the works of the flesh under our feet, how great must be the effect produced upon the society in the midst of which the God of our life has placed us! What life must proceed from us! This has not been the case. But even on this day we cannot deny that, besides much that is good, devout, fair, Christian; besides an increase and growth in

spiritual and Divine things, the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life—has exercised a fearful dominion over our life; and obedience to the truth, if present at all, is present only in its weak beginnings. If, however, all those who have not received the truth in the love of it will be seduced into unrighteousness by the man of sin in the time of his appearing, this must alarm us in regard to our whole position; for the man of sin is in so far present in our days, as there are in a lower degree already many “men of sin;” yea, in a certain degree the natural man must be so named.

Therefore, I implore you and myself, let us be awakened to a salutary dread by these prophecies; for if we are not walking in obedience to the truth—if Christian evangelical truth in all its fulness, without any exception, has not become to us power, life, deed, and witness—we are at least involved partly in the unrighteousness of which the Apostle here speaks, and the judgment of the man of sin will assuredly overtake us in eternity, since we belong to him. Only if we have been saved by Jesus Christ, the only Saviour—have peace with God through His righteousness appropriated to faith; in His strength, which the Holy Spirit daily communicates to us, humbly and joyfully walk; tread down Satan under our feet; look forward in glad hope to the prize of our high calling—shall we escape the judgment, for we are in Christ; and when He shall one day come with ten thousand

of His saints, we also shall triumphantly accord in His sentence ; for we ourselves shall no more enter into judgment, but have passed from death unto life.

The choice between these two issues will not be difficult for any one. But this choice is not to be attained merely by a passive acquiescence in the call to the Lord, or by a brief "I will," not proceeding out of the depth of the whole life ; to attain to this choice is the work of a life. On earth you must make it : now, every day, every hour, unto the last breath.

Oh, make this choice ! and so make it, that in eternity you may have to praise the God of all grace that by His Holy Spirit he has led your heart to choose aright. Amen.

The Glorious Coming of Jesus Christ.

“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.”—I THESS. iv. 16.

BELOVED IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD,—The Advent-tide,* upon which we, through the grace of God, enter again at the beginning of another Christian year, has a remarkable twofold character. It carries us back, on the one hand, into the Old Testament centuries of hope and longing for the coming of the promised Saviour, and places us thus in the outer court of the Gospel down to the time of John the Baptist as the last forerunner of Christ; on the other hand, it raises us to the mountains of vision, clad with the light of eternity, and bids us look forth to the glorious coming of our Lord Jesus

* Preached on the 29th Nov., 1857, 1st Sunday in Advent.

Christ. It recalls to our minds the word of our Lord, in which he says, "They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory;" and gives us to hear afresh those words of the men in white raiment: "He shall so come as ye have seen Him go up into heaven."

There is crowded, then, such a fulness and multiplicity of Divine thoughts and of God's acts in relation to His kingdom into this time of Advent and its meditation, that it becomes difficult to select a single point, and impossible, in treating of all at one time, to allot to each particular its due prominence. On the present occasion, however, it is not difficult for me to make the choice, since my series of meditations upon the Apostolic prophecies lead me in due course to that point where, after observing all the mighty precursors and signs which herald the coming of Christ, we have to fix our eye upon the glorious coming of the Lord himself.

On this account I have chosen as my text for the present day the words of the Apostle I have just read to you.

We purpose to-day to meditate on THE GLORIOUS COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST; and in doing so we cannot but regard it on its two sides—first, IN ITS JUDICIAL SIGNIFICANCE, and then in its COMPLETION OF THE KINGDOM.

And Thou thyself, everlasting Lord and God, Saviour Jesus Christ, who hast ascended and hast

sat down at the right hand of majesty in power, who wilt come again to judge the quick and the dead, who, through thy Apostles in the Holy Ghost, hast gradually and step by step revealed to us the future mystery of Thy return, help us through this same Spirit that we may understand this mystery, so far as is needful for our peace and salvation. Bless us also, and let us aright celebrate Thy coming, that we may look forward thereto with contrite hearts as poor sinners, but also with joyous hearts as Thy redeemed ones.

My beloved in Christ Jesus! from the general impression of the text we have read, you will at first think of nothing else but the last judgment, the last great day of revelation of Jesus Christ on earth, before the whole human race, and in presence of all the holy angels. And yet there is something in our text that will not properly allow us to limit our thoughts to this last, most glorious, visible descent of our Lord Jesus Christ. You have, of course, observed that I laid a certain emphasis upon the last word of our text. That word is *first*—"and the dead in Christ shall rise first." If now we think of the last judgment, it is clear that, according to the testimony of all Holy Scripture, when the Lord comes to judge the quick and the dead, and when the earth gives forth its dead, and the sea gives forth its dead, and Hades gives forth its dead, and both small and great appear before the face of Him who sitteth upon

the throne, there will not be a resurrection merely of the righteous, but also a resurrection of the ungodly to shame and everlasting contempt; and that if we were to suppose the righteous would first leave their graves, and then immediately after them the ungodly also—supposing this were all—astonishingly little would be said by the Apostle's words. For what is in such a case first and last? They are moments of Divine revelations, in which time to a high degree disappears—the consciousness thereof falls into the background; and especially is this the case for those who have fallen asleep in Christ, and have become henceforth blessed, who, consequently, already rest in peace, and have no ungratified wish or desire, because they are at home with the Lord. If they rise “first,” what importance has this for them, since time has an insignificant value, and one not to be brought into account? We must, therefore, adopt another course, and listen to a later prophecy* of the same Apostle, as it is contained in the fifteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, when the Spirit, who guides into all truth, had already led him somewhat further than before. There he is speaking of the resurrection of the dead—not at the last day, but in the whole history of the world—as following in a certain order and appointed succession. “Every man,” it is there written, “in

* Date of writing First Thessalonians, the earliest Apostolic letter, about end of A.D. 52. First Corinthians, Passover, A.D. 57. Wieseler.

his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming. Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power." Thus you behold, my beloved, that the last judgment is the end, when all earthly rule and authority and power ceases; in the Son's coming from heaven, the earthly kingdom of God, the kingdom of His only Son, has its end, and passes over into the kingdom of the Father, into the heavenly kingdom.* Therefore, by *the end* is unquestionably meant the last judgment. But, besides this, it is said, The dead who are fallen asleep in Christ shall rise at His coming. If, then, we allow the light of this later Apostolic prophecy to fall back upon the earlier, it becomes clear to us that he is speaking of another coming of the Lord, at this period of the "resurrection of the just." When, therefore, it is said in our text, "The Lord shall descend from heaven with a signal cry, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God," it is here the last concluding return, the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ as judge of the quick and the dead, which is meant; and yet to this description something is appended which belongs not to the last coming of the Lord.

* Between the coming of Christ for the completion of His kingdom, and the time of the final judgment, must, consequently, intervene that period of millennial glory described by the Apostle John, Rev. xx.

Two great steps in the revelation of the Lord's kingdom are comprised in one. This is an important peculiarity of Divine prophecy through a human medium. There are other such condensed representations in Holy Scripture, and we have in each case to separate that which the word of God in its wider prophetic course compels us to separate. On this account I have, from the beginning, distinguished the judicial appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ from His coming to complete His kingdom. Do not say, But then the coming of Christ to complete His kingdom must be considered first, and His judicial coming afterwards, for in this order do they follow each other. For it is not my design to speak to you on the last judgment,* but to show you that even that coming of our Lord Jesus Christ—to be distinguished from the last judgment—in which the dead in Christ alone arise, is a judicial one. We have already seen that the Lord at His coming will destroy that wicked one by the spirit of His mouth; that consequently he will, by the Holy Spirit, overwhelm with His judgments all which has, during the world-period, raised itself against Him, and at last has found its culmination and most terrible form in the man of sin. A judgment we have consequently to expect before the last judgment, and that unlike the judgments which pervade all the centuries of

* The sermon by the author, on the Last Judgment, was inserted in this series at the request of the translator.

history; not a continuation merely of the judicial sway of God in all the deeds and days of men, but an especially prominent, mighty, and unmistakeable judgment.

It is true our Lord and Saviour appeared first as the King of peace. Before our eyes it stands written in the Gospel of this day how He, full of peace and compassion, enters into the city which shall crucify Him. He is present before the soul of us all as the Just One and the Saviour, who comes to Zion to bring her consolation in her misery; and so also is He revealed ever afresh through the history of the Church as the only One in whom help, consolation, and peace is to be found; and millions of anxious souls have already rested on his heart, and found that peace which the world could not give. Ever does He remain the same. But to those who will not seek salvation of Him—will not call upon His name, and sink before Him in the dust; who, when He is presented to them, now, as at Calvary, shake their heads at Him and scornfully turn away; who, when He is proclaimed, and they, in the distress of their hearts, feel their need of Him, are too proud to receive grace, salvation, life, and glory from a crucified Saviour, He cannot unto the end of the days come only as the Saviour; but at last, in the course of God's kingdom here on earth, there must come a sharp line of demarcation between those who cling to Him and those who have given themselves up to Satan and his kingdom. This dis-

tinct separation is itself, however, an act of judgment, since, as on the last day, there is a dividing to the right and to the left. There lies in this a hidden power of judgment of the perverted heart and mind, and of the deeds and words of the individual, which have become for him binding powers: these separate the two classes, and place them opposite each other. This happens, indeed, already to a greater or less extent. In later meditations we shall perceive that single judgments are predicted by the spirit of prophecy—judgments which prepare the way for His coming, and which introduce at last a mighty, decisive, miraculous visitation, which can no longer pass unrecognised, but which still is distinct from the last judgment.

You will ask, Will He then twice visibly appear? At His first coming in the flesh, when the Son of God became man, He was visible, but not glorified; in innocence and righteousness, but not in glory. The second coming with which we are acquainted, and of which we express our hope in our confession of faith, will be that glorious and visible coming as a lightning flash from heaven, which will be seen from the rising to the setting of the sun. Is, then, a third visible appearing of the Lord predicted—an appearing as yet concealed in the future?

I answer, We might let this question rest, without deciding whether this coming is visible or invisible; for this is one of the distinctions which, for the

spiritual man, have very little importance. We call visible that which we perceive with the bodily eye: invisible that which we only inwardly feel or recognise to be present. Ordinarily, we ascribe to visible things a more definite and undeniably essential character than to the invisible. We assert that the visible—because men's eyes and minds are in their principles everywhere the same—will appear to all in nearly the same manner; that the invisible, belonging to the inner world, mingles at once with the especial inclinations, modes of conception, and peculiar thoughts of the individual, which greatly differ, and that therefore each one regards the invisible somewhat differently. However true this is in many respects, yet another judgment may be opposed to it. We shall not doubt that the consciousness of good and evil is essentially the same in all men, and that that is regarded as good which is in accordance with the higher powers, whose existence—whether acknowledged or not—is ever felt by man; and that as evil, which is not in accordance with them. What is good and evil, this question of the conscience, may in its application to single cases in life, be differently answered; but is, as a whole, answered in the same manner by the whole humanity of all ages and peoples, since all say that the good is pleasing to the Divine Being, and the evil is displeasing to Him. This is an agreement, which we cannot but recognise, in the conceptions of men, having relation to the inner and

spiritual world. Yet more, however, does this agreement appear in the simple primary feeling which everyone has who has not entirely stifled it,—I am a sinner : I am in myself nothing which can please a Holy God ; neither can I save myself, make myself sinless. Whatever unspeakable labour many may impose upon themselves, all in reality know that a truly sufficient help for their inner need—for that which tortures them in the most trying hours of their life, in the most painful conditions of their soul—is to be found only outside themselves, only above them in a Divine world. Here, consequently, again, the same first principles in the spiritual and invisible world. Now I pass straight to my object. Will you be able to doubt that a prevailing movement in the domain of the Spirit may, and often does, at the same time exert essentially the same impression upon one man or two, and upon millions? Will you regard it as inconceivable that an entirely new manifestation of Jesus Christ, the eternal King and Lord of this world—a manifestation proceeding from such an inner movement of the Spirit as has never yet taken place in like manner—may produce, as by a lightning flash, one and the same effect upon the whole of humanity? Will you deny it, when you know how the spirit of the age, within the space of a few years, exercises a magic power ; that men can scarcely help believing in it, and seeing things in its light ; and that, on the other hand, often in a time of excitement and suspense, a

word, a deed, of a gifted man, qualified for this purpose by God, appears for the salvation of millions, and passes as with lightning flash through whole nations? If this is true as a matter of experience, we cannot wonder if one day a revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be made, as mighty in its results, and as powerfully affecting His enemies and His friends, as though He had visibly presented Himself before their eyes. When this miracle of revelation one day happens, will it be less great than though the Lord should visibly appear; than though He should be manifest to all the world in the clouds of heaven, and should shine forth in His glory? I know not whether the question of visible or invisible is for us of very great importance; for all that comes upon our souls with true spiritual and overwhelming power, is, I might almost say, more than visible, and certainly easily becomes visible.* We will not, consequently, occupy longer time with this question. Only thus much shall I permit myself to remark by way of anticipating our future meditation, that, according to my conviction, Holy Scripture predicts a second coming of Jesus Christ before His coming to the last judgment, but not an outwardly visible one; that the Holy Scripture does not promise that the Lord will come again in humility as at the first time, or appear before-

* The question as to the visible nature of our Saviour's coming must depend greatly on the interpretation of such scriptures as Matt. xxiii. 39.

hand in the glory with which He shall visibly descend from heaven to earth for the last time to judgment,—not thus, but He will come in judgment, and that is for us enough. One judgment after another will pass upon all souls who do not stand fast in the grace of God in Christ Jesus. All those who, now undecided, are carried hither and thither, and do not well know whether they wholly belong to Christ or the world—who seek as yet to conceal from themselves the impossibility of remaining unto eternity in this wavering condition—will fall on the side of the world, unless the heavy judgments which precede and prepare the way for the Lord's coming, the heralds of those which go before His face, so prostrate their earthly life that they call forth out of the depths unto God, and thus, while there is time, are saved amongst the number of those who look forth with desire unto Christ's coming.

And now let us consider THE COMING OF THE LORD FOR THE COMPLETION OF HIS KINGDOM. For what else but a great epoch in God's kingdom is indicated by the words, "the dead in Christ shall rise first?" The Scripture says: "Every man in his own order;" and three divisions are then made: Christ the first-fruits; afterwards the dead in Christ; and then the last day—the last general resurrection. We have, some years ago, expressed ourselves more fully on the first resurrection, of which it is said, in the Revelation of John: "Blessed and holy is he that

hath part in the first resurrection ; on such the second death hath no power ;”—and then ventured on the supposition, favoured by much in Holy Scripture, that this first resurrection of those who have departed in Christ has been taking place through the whole Christian period, and will only find its close—for those who have before departed—when the Lord comes to complete His kingdom on earth.* This resurrection, however, remains invisible ; and the coming to complete the kingdom, for which believers wait with longing, designates a great epoch.

And what will this epoch be ? This is clear, that it will not again be one of those preparatory events, as, for instance, the conversion of the German nations ; will not be such a period in the history of the kingdom of Christ on earth as the Reformation was, and as perhaps our own day is, but the last, *the victorious period of the Christian Church*. Every human heart feels the need of hoping that one day the powers of the Gospel will hold sway, in a very different degree than has ever yet been the case, in the wide family of nations ; and it is also again a natural reflection that all manifestations and powers in this world, gradually advancing and receding, ascend until they have

* May it not rather have its *beginning*, properly speaking, at this time ? The resurrection of saints at Jerusalem, between our Lord's resurrection and ascension, can hardly indicate what is passing during the ages intervening between His ascension and His return.

reached their highest point, beyond which, owing to the imperfection of human life, they are unable to pass. That the highest stage of the dominion of Christ over the whole life of man, in all his doing and suffering, has been already attained, or passed, were a melancholy and saddening reflection. We can, indeed, point back to the Apostolic Churches, with the well-grounded assertion that nothing like it has ever since been. In the Reformation a beginning of the same kind was made, but it did not rise to the same height: sin immediately began to corrupt, and divisions to stifle, the work. But is it not to return? Will it never come again? Is the Apostolic Church merely an earthly type of the eternal communion in heaven with Christ; or is it also a type of the Church, the triumph of the kingdom of Jesus Christ upon earth, which must one day be won through conflict? I can return no answer to this question, but that the Holy Scriptures compel us in many, many of its texts to think of such a coming of the Lord—an invisible but glorious coming for the completion of His kingdom on earth; and this completion of the kingdom is assuredly an object of longing to all those who feel in themselves so much misery and weakness, insincerity and indolence, and cry for a richer outpouring of the Holy Spirit—a mightier working of power from on high. And when we look from ourselves upon the great whole, and see how few nations of the earth—

how small a part of the human race—as yet call upon the name of Christ ; when we consider that Christendom itself is so greatly held back, by human traditions and all kinds of obscurity, from standing in the light of the pure truth of the Gospel ; when we further reflect that within the sound of the Gospel itself so many remain entire strangers to the life of God, and to that which leads to it ; when we yet further think of the manifold conflicts of opinion within the Church of Christ itself, and of the hatred and bitterness displayed therein, we must truly exclaim, Oh, that help were come out of Zion !—that the Lord were come, a Just One and a Saviour ; that He would now make His entry as the King of Peace, that our misery might be relieved, and the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ might become on all sides powerful and victorious ! This we desire, and therefore it is permitted us to strengthen ourselves with the sunny prospect that the Lord will yet come to complete His kingdom, and that this completion will be even here below a union of heaven and earth, an intervention of the invisible kingdom of glory in our world of conflict, and an ascending of our prayers and sighs, made in the name of Jesus, unto the throne of God ; that then a mind more open for the eternal and heavenly will be ours, and a richer revelation of the powers of light and life which reign above. This is implied in the resurrection from the dead, which as a sign indi-

cates the dawn of the completion period of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

So then, my beloved, not merely of the voice of the archangel awakening the nations, not merely of the trumpet-notes which pierce the grave, have we to think when we look upon the glorious coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; but we can also, thanks be to God, think of the completion of all that which has been prophesied by the Old Testament and the New, of a dwelling of the God of peace with and in the sons of men, not merely in a small company, but in the multitude of the nations. Not that at any time all will be in Christ, and all will have become new creatures; but the time will yet come—yea, it will come, my beloved!—that the Lord will be one and His name one upon earth, and that in the name of Jesus Christ, in a manner very different from what has hitherto prevailed, will bow the knees of all who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father! This is our joyful, blessed Advent-hope. Oh, that it may be quickly fulfilled! Amen.

* Goodwin, so early as the first half of the seventeenth century, believed that the condition of the bodies of risen believers on earth at this period, has its analogy in the condition of our Lord's body during the forty days of His resurrection-life. This receives confirmation from the account given in Matt. xxvii. 52, 53.

The Restoration of Israel.

“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.”—ROMANS xi. 25-27.

BELOVED IN JESUS CHRIST,—The words of our text belong to the Apostolic prophecies concerning the kingdom of God. They form one feature in the whole of the sacred picture, which, through the Holy Ghost, was reflected in fair colours before the opened eyes of the Apostles, but of which we know only such single traits as the Apostles felt themselves under the necessity of adverting to.

Nowhere, except in the last book of Holy Writ, is there given us a connected prophecy in regard to the whole Divine economy on earth; but out of the mouth of the Lord himself, as out of the mouth of

His Apostles, we have occasional glimpses afforded us into the wider distance of the kingdom of Christ on earth. Last time, we had the joy of contemplating the sunlit scenes of the kingdom—irradiated, as they are, by the splendour of our glorious and everlasting King and Saviour—which yet lie before us in the future; whether near or distant we know not. We spoke of the coming of the Lord in majesty, and learned to recognise some of the main features which make up the glorious picture of His coming. To-day the finger of the Apostle points us to the future of Israel, leads our thoughts to an isolated, but, at the same time, privileged member of the commonwealth of nations, but without saying that that which he predicts stands in any immediate connection with the conflicts or triumphs of the kingdom, and does so in addressing the Gentile Christians, because he had demolished all glorying in the law which the Jews might be disposed to bring with them to the preaching of the Gospel, and had proclaimed the righteousness which comes through the blood of Jesus Christ, and is imputed to faith alone. Then it became time to say to the Gentile Christians, “Brethren, be not high-minded. Do not think the inheritance of promise has passed over entirely and exclusively to you. It is true it is lost to Israel, but only for a time; another time is coming, in which the original heir will be reinstated in his ancient rights.”

We are not yet able, in virtue of any vantage-ground we have gained in the course of our previous inquiries, to decide whether this restoration of the original heir, this *grafting again*, as the Apostle afterwards expresses it (in the figure, Rom. xi., of the branch plucked out of the olive tree, into the ancient and Divinely-planted stem,) will take place *before* the coming of the Lord, or *after* it, and *by means of* it. Different thoughts and views have always prevailed in the Christian Church in regard to this question; and we will leave this conflict of human opinion undecided, for we have to do only with the great central truth, which forms an important trait in delineating as a whole the completion of the kingdom of God upon earth—namely, *the restoration of Israel*. And here, again, two distinct landmarks are given us, each of which forbids our passing further—each of which bids us stand still and reflect. The first is indicated by the words, “THE FULNESS OF THE GENTILES MUST FIRST COME IN;” and the second by the words, “THAT ALL ISRAEL MAY BE SAVED.”

Let us more closely consider the restoration of Israel from these two important points of view.

The Apostle says, “Blindness *in part* is happened to Israel.” He does not speak of that blindness which is immediately the fault of the blind one, the work of his will in closing the eye to the light; but of a blindness which has “happened” to him, which was

imposed upon him—imposed by God ; consequently, since moral blindness is always an evil which is connected with sin, a judicial correction—blindness, occasioned by previous guilt. The Apostle, in the Epistle to the Romans, enters largely upon the work of clearing up a difficulty which, in presence of the Old Testament prophecies, had seemed inexplicable, viz., that Israel as a whole, although the chosen people of God, had not been *reached by the Gospel* ; that the Gospel, which had been first preached among them, had passed over to the Gentiles. This was, in fact, at the time of the Apostles, a thought so difficult to comprehend, that it cost the Apostles themselves and their immediate associates many prayers and sighs and tears, before they clearly understood that not Israel in its earthly and natural descent from Abraham, but that the spiritual Israel is Abraham's posterity, and inherits the promises. It was an entirely new truth in the Christian Church—reminding, indeed, of some isolated words of the Lord himself, not understood at the time, out of which it grew as a development—that it had never been the teaching of the ancient prophets, that every one who is called a Jew, whatever his position in regard to the law and promise, possesses the first claim on the Saviour of the world ; and that salvation, life, and peace through the Redeemer are his portion ; but that the prophets distinguished between Israel and Israel—between the Israel of the flesh and the Israel of the Spirit—

between the Israel of the multitude who were externally interested in the blessings of God's house, and the remnant, the hidden ones of Israel, the meek of the earth, those who were longing for salvation and life, who, distressed because of their own sins and the sins of their nation, waited for the consolation of Israel.

This unfamiliar truth the Apostle had proclaimed ; and now he says, " But yet the fulness of the Gentiles will at last, one day, at an hour reserved for the omniscience and wisdom of God, be come in." If we wish to understand his meaning, we have first to explain something that is a little obscure in this language. What is meant by saying that, according to the will of God, the judicially-imposed blindness of Israel will cease *only when the FULNESS OF THE GENTILES is come in?* Here, again, our first task is to determine what is the meaning of the words, "fulness of the Gentiles." We might understand by it the whole of the individuals composing all the Gentile nations. The term "fulness" does not prevent our supposing the whole of the Gentiles may first have entered into the kingdom of God, have become believers in Jesus Christ, before Israel—the whole nation, not simply the elected number—can come to its promised inheritance. But here, again, a question arises, Will all who dwell on earth, who are not of Israelitish descent, ever have become true disciples of Jesus Christ, living Christians? We cannot accept a

diminution of the force of the words, "be come in," which would make the meaning almost equivalent to saying, A door shall be opened to them. It must, therefore, for us, have the significance of our incorporation into the host of those who assemble round the Lord of Glory; an insertion as members in the living body, whose head is Christ. Were not this the case, the figure of the tree and its branches were an ill-chosen one, and what is opened up to Israel by the Apostle as its final prospect could not, after all, imply much more than that the Gospel should be preached to Israel. Let us for a moment suppose the Apostle to say, "Only then will Israel come to the inheritance of promise, to faith in Christ, to salvation and blessedness, when all men who live upon earth, except the descendants of Israel, have received in the crucified Saviour the powers of the new life, the forgiveness of their sins, and the certain hope of everlasting life." "Alas!" we must sigh, "Israel will, then, never attain to it."

For other words of Holy Writ are unfavourable to the supposition of the conversion at some time of all upon earth. It is nowhere written that a time will come when no one will any more be opposed to God and to His anointed; rather it is said, in all that we have yet become acquainted with of prophecy, that humanity—yea, even Christianity—will divide itself into two camps—the mass of those who are indifferent through ignorance will disappear, and everyone will

stand either for Christ or against Him, and his temporal and everlasting portion will be decided accordingly. The enemies of Christ will be shattered by judgments, and will go into their own place. Even in the last judgment there will be found, among those living on the earth, the "cursed." Consequently, the word of God does not promise us a time when there shall be none, except Israel, who are unconverted; on the contrary, we read of Antichrist, the man of sin, and his followers, the hosts who will continue in their adhesion to him, until the moment when the Lord, by His miraculous and glorious intervention and coming, shall put an end to him, and gather His own from all the ends of the world, to triumph with Him in His kingdom on earth. But even though all who were His foes had been snatched away by the judgments which precede His coming, we nevertheless learn that during the glorious kingdom of Christ on earth, in the time of its completion here below, there will yet be distinctions in humanity, and that from the mass of the nations will come those dark, godless powers, designated by the typical Gentile names, "Gog and Magog," who, seduced by Satan, will arise at last—after the completion of the kingdom on earth—against God and against His Anointed, and will bring about the final judgment—the last day. The Scripture accordingly does not teach that the "coming in of the fulness of the Gentiles" signifies the inner, living conversion of all men except Israel. The

nations will only enter within the enlightening influence of the Gospel ; notwithstanding which, individuals composing these nations may always harden themselves against the power of the Cross of Christ, and so become Antichrists. We have before seen that the Antichrists grow up out of the midst of the Christian community.

We are, therefore, inevitably led to seek another signification for the word "fulness." It signifies not necessarily the total number composing the nations ; but rather a "filling up"—so Matt. ix. 16—that which fills up the place made empty through the unbelief of Israel. God, from the beginning, designed His people to be countless as the sand on the sea-shore, and as the stars of heaven in number. He further promised that this people should spring, not only from the loins of Abraham, but that He would prepare Himself a people who, until then, were not His people. He will give the Servant of Jehovah for "a light unto the Gentiles ;" not merely to raise up the tribe of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel, but to be His salvation unto the end of the earth. By this He declares the Gentiles shall enter into the place of unfaithful, disobedient Israel, blinded through its own lust and folly, and thenceforth more and more deeply blinded in God's judicial visitation. And now it is asked whether we may suppose the number of the Gentiles who will be gathered to the people of God—to the spiritual

New Testament Israel—is to be determined by the number of those who became unbelieving in Israel, from the time when the word of the Cross was preached amongst them ; or whether it is reckoned from the time when the promise of the fathers, and the prediction in the mouth of the prophets, was made known to them.

Nothing of all this, my beloved. We have no right and no occasion to apply such minute, mechanical, and external modes of calculation in measuring the fulness of God's gracious promises. When the Lord speaks to us by His Holy Spirit in the mouth of the Apostle, of the "filling up of the Gentiles," which must first come in before Israel is saved, it remains for us short-sighted men entirely undetermined how great will be the number of those who belong to this "fulness ;" and we have not the most distant hint towards explaining the mystery. But a very important thought in relation to our own life lies in this statement of the Apostle. The question is suggested—Do I belong practically to this number? We can recognise only those as "filling up" the spiritual Israel, who take the place which the historical Israel has vacated, who have truly entered into the "heritage of promise." Is the promise for you a matter of indifference? Have you never felt your life would lose its highest significance if you could be satisfied with that which satisfies the world; or if you could attain this and the other object of desire, but only of

an earthly and transitory kind, which would gladden you only for the short days of your earthly pilgrimage, and render more agreeable to you the flight of time? The inheritance of promise which Israel has lost until the fulness of the Gentiles is come in, and into which we, through the grace of God, may enter in, is the reception of the peace of God, through the blood of the Cross. He who knows not this peace in his life, to whom is wanting a secret, quiet, blessed communion with God in Christ, to whom is not granted an enduring calm amidst all storms and trials of the earthly pilgrimage, who does not yet possess the inheritance and does not seek it, has no part in this "fulness."

Our question is thus, instead of being directed to the future, turned back upon ourselves. Feeling conscious of its force, we are the less disposed to devote much time to the consideration, *When* will the fulness of the Gentiles be come in? How many centuries may pass away before that time? How many millions of Gentiles will compose the "fulness?" We are concerned rather with the question, whether *we ourselves* shall be found among this blessed number. The before-mentioned questions are, no doubt, such as might well engage our earnest attention; but yet more important for us is the other, Hast thou entered, as one of the chosen number, into the inheritance which the Everlasting God has appointed for His nation of priests and kings? Only to this end do we

contemplate the prophecies, and occupy ourselves with things future, that in the midst of the present, in the midst of our daily life, the foundation may be laid for our everlasting salvation, our unspeakable joy and blessedness.

Now it is written, that what is properly renewed for Israel is this: "There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." And again: "This is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins." Thus, redemption, taking away of sin, turning away of ungodliness, is the promised inheritance. Thus the question becomes for us one of self-examination—Art thou reconciled to God? Sighs, complaints, and tones of sadness we hear on all sides; these any one may hear, who will know the secrets of hearts; and, for the most part, we only need to set free the tongue to hear one lamentation after another on the misery, the want, and the difficulties of this earthly life. But how seldom is the undertone, in all this complaint, a weariness of that sin from which all earthly trials spring! And yet, only where this undertone is heard is there any knowledge of the inheritance to which the Apostle refers.

Then, again, when the Scripture speaks of the taking away of sin, it treats of a daily-renewed act of God's grace. God desires ever afresh to impart to you the righteousness of Christ; and your whole Christianity, from beginning to end, must, if it is

sound, consist in nothing but this, that you come daily as a helpless sinner to your Saviour in penitence and hearty desire, and receive, through the Holy Ghost, the healing word, Thy sins be forgiven thee.

Yet one thought more: the "turning away of ungodliness." When we examine ourselves, as to how far ungodliness has been turned away from us, or is yet cherished by us—how far at least we stand idle and without conflict in presence of it, how far we are involuntarily carried away by it—we must all confess, "I am not worthy to be reckoned among that fulness of the Gentiles which enters into Israel's place; I have not yet truly entered into this inheritance, or have often again lost sight of it." This, my brethren, is an essential and indispensable part of our daily self-examination.

Thus has the question of the completion of the kingdom, in the history of the world, become for us a personal question for heart and life, which must receive from us its decided and ever new answer.

But let us proceed in the examination of our text. We behold the second boundary-stone which the Lord has appointed us, when we look upon the future RESTORATION OF ISRAEL. "And so all Israel shall be saved." This sounds as though an exception were made, in the case of Israel, to that which we have before recognised as the preaching of the Gospel. But we found that Holy Scripture

knows nothing of a true Christianity, a genuine life of faith conterminate in extent with the nation itself, that it does not promise that whole peoples, as peoples, in their national unity, shall become living members in the body of Christ. We saw rather that in all ages, and among all nations who are enlightened by the grace and truth of the Gospel, there will be those who will not be won, but become Antichrists, enemies of Christ.* Will it be otherwise in the case of Israel? Certainly not. That all Israel will be saved, is by no means equivalent to saying that not a single one will remain who has not become a child of God and an heir of glory. Of the salvation of Israel as "a whole," the Scripture speaks only in the sense that no longer, as in the time of the Apostle, and as in our own day, here and there an Israelite (as an exceptional case) comes forth from his darkness to the true light of life, while the others have still the covering of Moses before their face; but that, clear as the day, the truth will stand revealed before their eyes, that there is no other Messiah and Saviour to be looked for than the Jesus of Nazareth who has appeared, whom our fathers pierced, whom we have cursed. He is the Saviour of the world, whom the prophets and the fathers looked for. We know, indeed, that in our own day Israel

* In the time of our Lord's glorious appearing, however, and during the time of Satan's being bound, the influence of the enemies of Christ will be small indeed.

does not to the same extent as formerly continue in the faith and expectation of the fathers. How many thousands of Israelites have entirely lost the ardent desire for the lost Paradise, for the destroyed temple and its glory, for all the gifts and blessings of the Old Testament ; and there is no longer a yearning in their hearts which leads them with uplifted hands and heartfelt sighing to pray that Messiah may come. There are many of them who have entered into the worldly possessions of the Gentile nations, who have their whole being in trade and commerce, in interchange, gain, and enjoyment. Not a few, also, are there who have expressly abandoned the faith of their fathers, as no longer tenable, and, nevertheless, see not the fulfilment which has already appeared.

So, beloved, will there also certainly, even at last, be such in Israel as the unbelieving, unconverted Gentiles. How could it be otherwise ? Consider what a God-fearing Israelite, who is still waiting with strong desire for the coming of Messiah, must think of us who assert Messiah is already come. Where does he find among us that joy and exultation, not to be restrained by any want and distress, a joy that He is come, that sins are forgiven, the transgression is covered, and that life, salvation, and peace is obtained ? Here and there we find one in a company of professed Christians who manifest such joy ; but the majority do not even afford to Israel a pattern to

which it could be strongly drawn. You see, then, brethren and sisters, that this question, however greatly it may concern the history of the world, ever returns and seeks an answer of our own hearts. How shall Israel be restored through a crucified Saviour, if we are its seducers—if the blessing and gain which the faith we profess, the fundamental truth we acknowledge, sheds upon our public, our social, and our hidden life, appears so small? Israel cannot be saved unless there arises among professing Christians a very different life of faith; unless it is drawn, by the fulness of Divine life which is in us, to regard the blessings which we possess. Christians, however, act as though they had no other blessings than Israel. Many among us, whose voice has weight in the community, speak of Christian things as doubtful, as uncertain, merely because they have never made it the serious problem of their heart and life how they may become convinced of these things; because they have never yet given their own heart to Christ, have become believers in Him, and have afterwards in the spirit of faith learnt to understand Him.

Oh, my beloved, how greatly is guilt heaped on guilt, when we look back upon this Advent Sunday,* upon all the Advent seasons which have been observed in the Church since the lifetime of the Apostles—when we reflect that Israel, in its dispersion among the nations, and among us also, stands as a continual

* Delivered on the third Sunday in Advent, 1857.

Advent preacher, proclaiming that the fathers, who desired to see it, have not seen that which was revealed to the simple disciples! How is guilt heaped on guilt when we reflect that Christians do not make manifest to the Jews who may happen to live amongst them the power, the joy, and the blessedness of the Christian life and character, but rather show to them the way to perdition, or are themselves taught it by the descendants of Israel! For how much of Jewish corruption has penetrated into the whole social life of the present day is evident to everyone who will observe a little closely. We know (and each one knows something of it from the experience of his own life) that a good number among us have either once been inclined, or are still inclined, to regard Christianity as an outer court, as a preparation for something more perfect; as though in Scripture and in the faith of the Church we could at pleasure reject one point and receive another, could subject the whole to doubt, to critical investigation; as though human opinions could stand side by side with the doctrines of revelation, could be compared with them, in order that, now from this, now from the other, more satisfaction and enjoyment might be derived; whilst, in truth, in Christianity the question is only of one great fact, namely, whether you have received the forgiveness for all your sins, and bear in your heart the seal of the Holy Spirit, by which the fear of death, of judgment, and of hell, is taken away.

If, then, the lesson from the second landmark which met us has been applied to our own hearts, we can boldly assert that the completion of the kingdom will not turn out to the joy, blessing, and salvation of those who do not make use of the whole inheritance which was promised to Israel, and which Israel in its former blindness lightly esteemed and rejected ; who do not so portion it out, and turn it to good purpose, that the lustre of its treasures may be apparent even to the eyes of those who have hitherto cast them aside as worthless stones. But then, how great will be the joy, what a gracious rejoicing will be on earth, when once Christians are powerfully awakened to this living faith ; and when with them, and from them, Israel catches the sacred flame, and the fire of a love receiving and embracing the Crucified glows in the hearts of those who till then had only words of curse for Him ; and when at length the priestly kingdom, the royalty and priesthood of Israel, shall stand forth in the same dignity and freshness of spiritual life which was originally promised to it, but which Israel, on account of its unbelief, could never yet in full measure receive ! Then shall we perceive in what the precedence of Israel consists. With them we shall praise and adore the Lord, and our mouth will join in the songs of praise which shall arise from Israel.

Let us, then, to-day, retiring with prayer and penitence within ourselves, seek the accomplishment of this end. May God in His grace not delay the fulfil-

ment of the promise ; may He bring in quickly the fulness of the Gentiles, and make us meet, even in the present day—but yet more fully and joyfully in the time of the completion, if we are permitted to see it—to contribute by our labours to the salvation of Israel! And in this sense we conclude with the wish of the benediction : Peace be upon Israel. Amen.

The Nearness of the Lord.



“The Lord is at hand.”—PHILIPPIANS iv. 5.

CONGREGATION BELOVED IN JESUS CHRIST,—After a pause* which the Lord, the God of life, has enjoined upon me, to testify to me, as an individual, His nearness in every manifestation of His holy severity and of His kindness, I this day proceed in the series of meditations on the Apostolic word of prophecy which have engaged us for some months past. We had spoken at different times of the Coming, of the glorious Appearing of the Lord, and of the precursors of this great event, from the words of Apostolic prophecy, and have ever repressed the question, as often as it arose in our hearts, “But *when* will the Lord come?” We find in the words of the Apostle no answer to this question; and because we find none,

* A severe illness laid aside the author some months from his ministerial work.

we were obliged to lay it aside as a question for us unwarranted. Our present text, also, furnishes no answer that could satisfy the inquiring mind of man, which would so gladly penetrate into the future ; but an answer it gives nevertheless, for this text is the expression of an expectation, in which the Apostolic Church constantly lived, and without which its whole being and life would be inexplicable. The writings of the Apostle are full of testimonies that they silently cherished in their hearts the hope of living to see a glorious completed coming of their Lord and Master, whom they had seen ascend into heaven, and at whose ascension they had heard from heavenly lips the words, "He shall come again." They not only believed the Lord would come, but were convinced He would come quickly. And much in their discourses and writings rests upon this conviction, or turns around it.

If we now ask about the NEARNESS OF THE LORD, after eighteen centuries have passed away—during which there has not been a single century in which the glorious coming of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven with great power and majesty, has not been hoped for and looked for, by those then living, within their time—I know well, we are only too much inclined, after this long and as it might seem vain expectation, to apply the words which I have read to you, from the mouth of the Apostle, only to that presence of the Lord which certainly is experienced

by His people, and on their behalf, according to His Word: "Lo *I* am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." But no Apostolic Christian, when he heard the epistle to the Philippians read, understood these brief words, "The Lord is at hand," otherwise than of the nearness of His glorious coming. When, therefore, we, in order to attain a right understanding of these words of the Apostle, make the NEARNESS OF THE LORD the subject of our present meditation, we cannot but first transport ourselves to the STAND-POINT OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH in the time of the Apostles, and afterwards, from OUR PRESENT STAND-POINT, look forward into the future to the near coming of the Lord!

Lord Jesus! How blessed a consolation has it been for Thy Church unto the present day, and remains also for all future time, that Thou comest; that Thou art not alone invisibly present with Thy whole Divine power, and all Thine influences of grace, but that Thou wilt yet come and appear in Thy glory! May this also remain our consolation. But as it was always also a trumpet-voice which awoke those sleeping in security, when it was said, "The Lord comes quickly!" so may it also be a trumpet-voice in our days in our Church. And at this time help us so to understand and meditate on Thy coming, that we may have the full blessing therefrom—that it may make Thee known to us as the Saviour and King, who receives His own unto Himself, and who at last will crown

this silent and hidden work, as well as His manifest work in them with His glorious appearing. Amen.

We find, my beloved, the words of our text like a golden fruit upon a luxuriant, foliage-covered tree. They do not present themselves as the principal theme upon which the Apostle has to speak to the Philippians; they occur only in the fourth chapter—consequently towards the end of the epistle—when the Apostle, after he had before displayed the riches of Divine teaching, and the knowledge of the truth unto godliness, comes to the application in daily life, to the exhortation to a pure Christian walk in the sight of God; and even then the section does not begin with the words of our text, but reads thus: “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” And then the epistle proceeds further in precious words of Apostolic exhortation. If, therefore, we isolate this text, and draw it forth from the fulness of foliage in which we find the fruit concealed, we cannot, properly speaking, pluck it from its surrounding; the remainder, which is closely connected with it, comes away with it.

As I have already said before, we should not understand and be able to explain the Apostolic Church in its nature and life, without the expectation of the Apostles and of the members of the Churches, that the Lord would quickly, would perhaps in their lifetime, descend from heaven in glory; I must, therefore, regard the words immediately surrounding our text as the planets, which revolve around it as their central sun. The certain hope of the speedy coming of the Lord in the heart of the Apostle is that very thing which enables him, with such boldness and decision, to call to a Church like that at Philippi, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." It is this hope which enables him so fearlessly to exclaim, "Be careful for nothing!" and which also forces to his lips the exhortation, "Let your kindness be known unto all men;" and those other words, "In all things by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

We see, therefore, faith in the speedy coming of the Lord shows itself active here on two sides: first, on the *consoling* and gladdening side; then also on the side of *admonition*. This applies to the *Apostolic age*, and this we shall afterwards see applies also to *our own age*.

Whence, otherwise, would the Apostles, and all those who were gathered around them in the wild, strange, heathen world, and in the hostile Jewish

world, have been able to derive the joy of victory, the confidence that they were walking as those who saw but days or hours intervening between their present state of suffering and the trial which must necessarily follow if they had not felt, The Lord comes ! Either we shall first go to Him, as those who have fallen asleep in Christ, and then shall arise at His coming ; or else He will appear and we shall be changed, and caught up to meet Him in the air. And again, whence would the Apostolic Christians have derived this unwearying power of labour in the service of the Lord, and the ever new and fresh desire thereto, had it not been for the wish that the Lord, if He should come speedily, should not find His servants sleeping, but waiting and working ; not indolent, but active ; not the hands in the bosom, but the hands to the plough ?

Let us look more closely into this feature of Apostolic life. We know that, quickly as the sacred fire of the Gospel sped from land to land, and over the islands and seas into far distant countries, the first Churches were, and remained during the lifetime of the Apostles themselves, unnoticed, despised, and persecuted flocks. For what does it amount to, if, as has been approximately calculated, at the death of the Apostle John, who outlived all the others, there were on earth about half a million believing members of Jesus Christ, spread abroad in all lands, from Babylon to Spain, and from Egypt to the confines

of Germany. The Churches were, as we clearly see from the Apostolic letters, only single stars in the night, scattered lights which shone in the darkness ; and round about them were their enemies, so numerous that, according to human calculation, their long continuance was out of the question. There they stood ; but they stood not with a hope of that which has since happened—with a thought that gradually the whole Roman empire, then ever wider circles of peoples and nations, would be drawn into the enlightenment of the saving word of the Cross ; and that finally a time would come, which even now has not yet arrived, when this gracious light should beam over all lands of the earth, and would shed back its light from all lands of the earth. They rather thought the Lord would come quickly ; and only after He had appeared in glory, would the masses of the nations behold who alone can deliver and save ; then would He establish his kingdom, not with a few, but would establish a kingdom which should embrace ten thousand times ten thousand subjects.

Clear and unmistakeable lay the prophecies of the Old Testament touching the glory of the kingdom of God upon earth, touching His return, and the last judgment, when heaven and earth shall pass away, and a new heaven and a new earth appear before the eyes of the Apostolic Christians, and that in such a way that they must conceive of this glorious completion in close connection with the incarnation

of the Son of God, and with His victory in His resurrection and ascension. Only gradually through the leading of the Holy Spirit into all truth was revealed to one Apostle one fact, to another another, concerning the future course of the kingdom of grace on earth. One truth, however, shed its light into every soul: He will come, will come quickly, to deliver His captive people, and to set free those who have not yet become His enemies from the bonds of death, and will gather around His little flock hosts of those who believe in Him and receive Him with joy. In this hope the Apostolic Christians, those models for all time, could truly repeat with joyful response the words, Rejoice in the Lord! And this joy might well be so strong, that it failed not in toil and weariness, or in persecution and imprisonment; yea, that it flowed forth in songs of gladness, and afforded to the world a testimony that Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Saviour, can fill a human heart, even in a state of hope, with a joy which no power of the world is able to diminish. In like manner could they witness the destruction of their property, the destitution which threatened them on all sides, the solitude to which they were not seldom reduced, either with a spirit of joy, or at least of calm submission.

Be careful for nothing! Yea, free from care does a true Christian become when he knows that yet a little and the hour of joy will be here for which he

has been waiting all his life, and then all that he has suffered is forgotten as a dream of the morning, and all that he possessed, or that he may have surrendered, is as nothing compared with the riches of that which is prepared for him. So stood the Apostolic Christians; but for this very reason, they laid not the hand in the bosom. Nothing is so common with the unregenerate human heart as to misapply and abuse to worldly ends even spiritual blessings. Man willingly indulges in indolence, and finds an excuse for doing nothing in the fact that all depends on God's compassion, that no one is justified by his works, but through grace alone, that all, from beginning to end, is pure grace, and that the Lord, at the appointed hour, will assuredly come to the help of his people. Then will the foolish heart sleep, and quietly wait, and rejoice that the Lord comes without further care. So does the flesh act, and thereby destroys all; it takes away joy, because there is no more rejoicing in the Lord. Yea, even the freedom of care and confidence of heart which has been falsely assumed, disappears so soon as work in the Lord ceases. Therefore, the exhortation is given, "Let your kindness be known unto all men."

There lie the nations around the little Churches of the Apostles, like a great Lazarus; and the children of God, whose inner eye has been opened to themselves and to the world, who know what it is to die in one's sins, because they have been delivered from

the terrible death in sin, do not hesitate a single moment to say, Here is our field of labour; here we must redeem every moment; here we must put forth every exertion, to testify of the power of redemption which is in Christ Jesus, to enlighten the darkened hearts, and to draw them to Him. And when, as must inevitably be the case, that by their own power nothing would be effected, what could they do but sink down in humility and sense of unworthiness, and pray for forgiveness of their sins, which hindered their activity, and even there closed the source, where, according to the promise of the Lord, streams of living water should flow forth; and to pray for a new enduing with power from on high, for a filling with all the fulness of God, for an enriching with all heavenly riches. In prayer, therefore, in constant prayer, the Apostolic Christians laboured; and therefore were the Apostles also so strongly upheld by their Churches, and therefore the Gospel extended from them unto the distant lands of the earth.

Thus, my beloved, did the Apostolic Churches avail themselves of the nearness, the speedy coming of their Lord and Saviour as a triumphant king; thus did they regard His coming.

But HOW HAVE WE LOOKED FOR IT? Some of us are not far from asking, "Of what use is it, if I should fancy the Lord will soon come? I should only rank myself with the great number of those

who, for the past two or three hundred years, or even longer, have cherished this expectation without its receiving its fulfilment." This worldly wisdom or prudence is exceedingly natural, and we are therefore disinclined beforehand to take the words, "The Lord is at hand" in their full Apostolic meaning. We easily say within ourselves, What does it concern us, after all, how soon the Lord comes? That He will come, we all believe; that He will come in glory, there is no doubt. Of the things which will accompany His coming, the prophecies of the Apostles have instructed us; but whether I shall live to see it, or whether my immediate descendants will live to see it, remains uncertain—on this point the word of Apostolic prophecy gives no answer. I must rest content with thinking of the continual presence of the Lord, and never forget that He sees and knows the secrets of my heart. In His presence all things are open and manifest; He knows my wants and weaknesses; He will not leave me nor forsake me. I will not say that a Christian should put from him this consolation, derived from the continual presence of the Lord; but let no one assert that he who knows this presence of the Lord, and does not ask concerning the near or distant future coming of the Lord, may, nevertheless, be one of those friends of the Saviour, who, with all their heart, desire to see Him, to behold

Him present, without further conflict in abiding victory.

Where there is a fulness of life from Christ and in Christ, there dwells also a longing to be with Him. Whether this longing expresses itself in the same form as with the Apostle Paul, "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ;" or whether it expresses itself in the form, "Lord, how long?" or, as at the close of the Apostolic prophecies it is said in the Book of Revelation, of the bride of Christ on earth, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come!" is not in itself important. Whether we wish rather to be with Him in the land of peace, or we desire to see Him come again victoriously, is of little importance, because the longing in either case has reference only to the moment of perfect union with Him.

But, my brethren, whence comes the great want of joy in the Lord in the Christianity of the present day? Why can we for the most part not send forth a response like the Apostolic Churches to the exhortation, "Rejoice in the Lord alway?" Because the words, "The Lord is at hand," are no longer for us such a gladdening sound, no longer such music of Heaven. We cannot, indeed, thanks be to God, deny that here and there some lowly spirit is waiting with desire for the coming of the Lord, and finds within itself this echo. But we must also confess, the peculiar characteristic of our present Christianity, even among those who build themselves up in their most

holy faith, is not that all hearts thrill and all eyes beam with joy at the words, "The Lord is at hand."

So, however, it was in the Apostolic time; and therefore, my beloved, it is needful that we again seriously place before ourselves the nearness of the Lord. This truth is proclaimed to us for our consolation, that we may rejoice in the Lord; because we know the weariness of our Christian pilgrimage, the conflict, trials, and distress will at length come to an end. The hour of redemption is coming, either because we shall go to Him or because He will come to us; and, in this prospect, the cares from which we all more or less suffer will disappear. We will not deny that a spirit of care pervades society—for how timid and trembling we become in presence of the great events of the world or of life; how concerned for our life, our health, the well-being of those dear to us—from the daily cares about food and raiment up to our care about the future of the kingdom of God. What an infinite host of cares, of gloomy anxiety, of thoughts of sadness, extends before our eyes!

"Be careful for nothing: the Lord is at hand!" If we seriously believe that the Lord is near, and we have to do with the fact that He is near, and that our perfect union with Him is at hand, then cares will lose their weight, and we shall no longer go about fainting beneath their burden. Joy and confidence will make us able to accomplish deeds by which our

kindliness will be made known unto all men. We hear the question in our day, What can the small number of those benevolent persons who are able to help, effect among such a multitude of poor? If you thus reckon, you may well give up the matter as lost. There is no doubt, if God left it in our hands to save the poor, nothing would be effected by us. Only the kindliness which springs from joy in the Lord is able here to do anything. If we have not with us the oil and the wine of the good Samaritan for him who has fallen among thieves, he will die. But to those who know that the Lord is at hand, and who therefore are not concerned for the preservation or the increase of their earthly possessions, yea, who feel that it is almost better to reject much ballast and much luggage when they are going forth to meet the Lord, is there a hope, quiet indeed, but daily renewed, and mighty to call forth deeds of kindness. What *we* do, what we give, what we accomplish, what can be measured by human standard, is a secondary question; the main question is our inner communion with the Lord, constant prayer, thanksgiving with joy, humiliation of spirit, confession of sin, and a child-like, confident asking and receiving.

Beloved, if in our days the words, "The Lord is at hand," came to our hearts as a drop out of the cup of everlasting salvation, as a seal of God's gracious promise—if we thus received this word, how great would be the change! What a joy thus to await the glorious

coming of our Lord with uplifted head, courageous, with our hands to the plough, and, where needful, also with our hand to the sword!

Grant us, Lord, powerfully to feel that Thou art near. Let us feel it to-day, that we may put from us all that clouds our mind, and darkens our view of Thee and Thy glorious coming. Help us, and call to us by Thy Holy Spirit, "Behold, I come quickly!" Amen.

The Cross of Christ the Guide amidst the Error of the Last Time.



“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 ; speaking lies in hypocrisy ; having their conscience seared with a hot iron ; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.”—1 TIMOTHY iv. 1-3.

MY BELOVED IN CHRIST JESUS,—We assemble at the present season of the Christian year,* to gather around the Cross of our dear Saviour. We look from the depths of our misery and our need up to Him who is uplifted on the tree of the curse, hereafter to be uplifted above the heaven of heavens. But we return ever afresh from the Cross to our daily life, to our present time, to the future of our Church and of humanity as a whole, and to our own future ;

* Preached during the season of Lent, 1858.

and in the light of the Cross, the prophetic words of Holy Writ, and especially the prophecies of the Apostles of our Lord, become truly intelligible and important. We have before us on the present day, as the text of our meditation, a word of prophecy, which at the first glance seems to have nothing to do with the Cross of Jesus Christ, until we read that which immediately precedes these words of the Apostle. The Apostle there exclaims, "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory!" There we behold the word of the Cross—of the incarnation, the sufferings and death, and the resurrection and ascension of our Lord—as the solid foundation of rock upon which the Apostle stands; while in the spirit of prophecy he directs the glance of Timothy, and, through him, our glance also, to the perils of the last times. As he, so are we also, called to learn the connection of the Cross of Christ and our meditation on His passion, with the prophecy concerning the last times; and in order that to-day, with God's gracious help, we may come to understand this, we meditate on THE CROSS OF CHRIST AS THE BEST GUIDE AMIDST THE ERROR OF THE LAST TIME. Our text, fully understood, shows, first, HOW THE CROSS OF CHRIST POINTS TO THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF ERROR; *then*, HOW THE CROSS OF CHRIST CONDEMNS THE

AUTHORS OF ERROR, THE FALSE TEACHERS ; *and finally, for our consolation,* HOW THE CROSS OF CHRIST AFFORDS TO THE CHILDREN OF GOD A FIRM STAND AGAINST ERROR.

Grant, Lord, that Thy Name and Cross alone may be the source of all our joy ; that Thy death may be to us Divine wisdom, heavenly light, giving us to see clearly and distinctly, amidst all error which already surrounds us, and which may hereafter break in upon us. Help us in this, and bless to this end our meditation. Amen.

With us, brethren, it is necessary expressly to state what, with the Apostles and their immediate disciples, was at once understood, that the Cross of Jesus Christ and the word of the Cross stand in close connection with all Apostolic teaching, be it a relating of the mighty works of God, or a deeper development of doctrine from these facts, or a pointing forth into the future destinies of the kingdom of God upon earth ; for they, the Apostles and their disciples, were wont to lie daily—and not once only, but almost constantly—at the foot of the Cross. And the same Apostle from whose later epistles our text of to-day is taken, says, in one of his earlier epistles, that he determined not to know anything save Jesus Christ the crucified ; and that the word of the Cross was that which alone he proclaimed, both to Jews and Greeks, although it was to the one a stumbling-block, and to the other foolishness. We, unhappily,

do not lie thus constantly at the foot of the Cross of Jesus, and yet our passion-tide, every year, renews the earnest and powerful call to descend from our exalted position in true humiliation, to fall upon our face, and to seek and apprehend, as our only righteousness, Him who died for us. On this account it must be expressly said, that the Cross of Christ is the best guide, even in the midst of the errors which, according to the prediction of the Apostle Paul, yea, of the whole Word of God, shall arise in the last time.

“He shall,” it is written, “send them strong delusions,” such as come with a power irresistible for the natural life, and are to be vanquished only by that life which is born at the foot of the Cross. The Apostle speaks, at the same time, of the nature and character of these errors, and understands by them not any false views and doctrines, only future and as yet unintelligible, springing out of a long preparation and development of the Christian Church, but errors which, in his time, already existed within the circle of the Apostolic Church—errors which, in a slightly altered garb, in all ages rise afresh, and which have accompanied Christianity, the pure doctrine of the Saviour, from the beginning until this hour, and will accompany it to the last judgment. We are called, therefore, by the warning of our text, not to an expression of wonder at the new and terrible forms of error which shall one day arise,

and which we, or our immediate descendants, may live to witness, but we are called upon to guard against errors which are ever close enough at hand to draw us into their eddy, and to deprive us of the prize which is set before us. It is not our purpose, however, at present, more closely to define them.

First, to follow the Apostolic words, we must inquire into the final source of these errors. The Apostle says, "The Spirit speaketh expressly that, in the latter days, some shall depart from the faith—the *apostasy* which he elsewhere predicts—giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils." The Spirit of prophecy which wrought in the Apostolic Church, and now here, now there, selected an instrument, an organ—the Spirit possessed by all the Apostles—spoke distinct, intelligible words, all having immediate reference to the present, and more remotely, also, to an important and decisive future. A direct contradiction is thus given by the Apostle to our ordinary conceptions, to the prevalent views of the age, in his asserting that the final source of the errors of the last time, as of all times, is, in reality, to be found in the influence of seductive spirits and of Satan. The last age will produce no substantially new errors; but the one old error will raise its head anew, and will do so at last with fearful and irresistible power, just as ever the same enemy of God and of mankind, Satan, seeks to destroy the works of God. The final source is he whom our Lord and

Master himself designates as the "liar from the beginning," as the deceiver, and, therefore, the author of sin in men, and, as a necessary consequence, since sin and error are inseparable, as the author of all error. He is, without regard to the denial of hearers or readers, called by his name. Not as though every individual had, during his life, had such experiences as to confirm for him this statement of the simple word of the Cross touching the final source of all errors in Christendom. Yet, in the course of the unfolding of the kingdom of Christ, many a one has borne distinct and powerful testimony that the prince of this world, the lord of the dark kingdom of falsehood, and the lying spirits sent forth by him, exert a power far and wide, and that the hearts of men, far more than they think or imagine, receive influences from a kingdom which continually withdraws itself from our grosser means of perception. But it is not of especial assaults and temptations, on the part of the Prince of Darkness, to which at particular and very important and critical times in the history of the Church, the bearers of Divine messages and the instruments of Divine deeds have been exposed, that the Apostle speaks, but of the final source even of those errors which have a purely human and natural form, and of which we say, with a certain amount of justice, they are the expressions and outcome of the natural human heart.

Now, what is the main prevailing error which has

shown itself ever afresh throughout the whole history of the Church? It is the self-confidence and despair of the natural heart expressed in thoughts, and reduced to doctrines and systems. The natural man who is led by passion into error, who, out of the evil treasure of a will directed only to fleshly ends, derives all kinds of excuses and palliations, yea, even justifications and encomiums of that which he wishes to do, is the immediate human author of error. But behind him lies the ever-active enemy of our salvation, who, by his fascinating influence, continually insinuates a lie into the human heart. In our days it is not difficult to recognise this, when we consider that many now are no longer satisfied with deriving error from the human authority of those who have lived before them—from great names to which they attach the favourite opinions and principles of themselves and their age—but that the “spirits” are consulted in every kind of deceptive and foolish manner which can excite the curiosity; that they think of bringing forth the departed, or the powers of darkness, out of the kingdom of evil, into an intercourse, yea, into a conversation, with men. And what, when all the utterances from these dark sources, charged as they are with self-deception and falsehood, are summed up in short sentences, is the substance of this revelation? Nothing else than the justification of men by their own wretched works, which, for the most part, are not even deeds, living works, but only disjointed, external

work, depending on a thousand accidents. Consequently, it is the old foundation-error, the old primeval lie, for the proclaiming of which no such elaborate machinery was necessary. Or the opposite error is brought out, namely, of the indifferent character of human actions, since an inevitable necessity, firm as a well-knit chain of brass, winds around the life of man, and renders all our efforts, toils, and struggles in the end fruitless. The self-confident heart will be the author of his own destiny, and win his salvation by his own acts; the desponding heart gives up all hope, because his natural power is unable to do anything against sin. Weariness of useless efforts causes all acting and working, all earnestness and application of the powers given us by God, to appear indifferent, and everything to sink in the dark whirlpool of an inevitable destiny. Thus one falsehood ever passes over to another, and out of this circle of corruption no one emerges of his own power.

My brethren, these errors were present even in the first age, were present in the time of the Apostles; and it is these which the Apostle, or, rather, the Spirit of prophecy through him, designates as the work of seductive spirits, the invisible powers of the kingdom of darkness.

If we have referred to one of the favourite practices of our time, to a kind of curious pastime which is instituted on the boundary-line of the human

spirit-life with non-human spiritual natures, it has not been to say, "This, and this alone is the sin, the error of the last time," but to indicate how exceedingly unwilling the human heart is and has ever been to rest satisfied with that precious truth which the Word of God has to open up to man if he only desires it. The word of the Cross, of reconciliation through the death of the incarnate God—the word of justification through faith in Him, and of peace *through* Him and *of* Him, and of the power for sanctification in putting on this Lord and Saviour—suffices for every human heart that thirsts for salvation, fills it for all time, even for the last hour of death, endures throughout the judgment, and will be through all eternity that on which the glorious songs of the redeemed are raised. But the fountain of all error and darkness, such as will break forth mightily in the last time, and will fascinate the minds of men; such as already lays hold of many thousands, beyond hope of release from its seductive influence, and renders for them tedious, dry, and insignificant, suitable only for those who are children in intellectual life, the ordinary truths of the Christian faith, and institutions of the Christian Church;—the fountain of this error we must learn to recognise, lest we deceive ourselves. For the Apostle James speaks of a wisdom from beneath, which is of the earth, of the flesh, yea, of the devil; and, in thus speaking, expresses the same truth as the Apostle Paul in our

text, namely, that the ultimate source of error is the Prince of Darkness. As soon as we recognise this, it is no longer a matter of indifference whether or not we stand in the acknowledgment of pure truth, in the simplicity of Christ; whether we are governed by the word of the Cross alone, and whether this word of the Cross is the living source of all our knowledge and desire in regard to Divine things. Therefore, be it once more said, that the Cross of Jesus Christ, for him who understands it, reveals our natural wisdom of the flesh, the error into which the natural man is brought by his own passions, as Satanic in its origin.

If this be so, my dear hearers, then must the teachers of errors receive A SENTENCE from the Cross of Christ. It is written in our text, that these doctrines of demons are diffused and circulated by those who are "speaking lies in hypocrisy, having a brand upon their conscience." Behold, how in a moment the mask is torn from them; their appearance of greater sanctity, of deeper thought, and of a purer life, is annihilated by a word. Branded, and branded where no human art is able to remove the brand—in the conscience—are, according to the Spirit of prophecy, all those who consciously and industriously circulate error, its instruments and heralds, who seek their glory and pride in it as in a new wisdom, and regard themselves as much wiser than the simple children of God, who cling to their Bible and catechism, and to the experiences of the fathers

in the faith. These tempters, on the other hand, say, that which the Reformation has brought, or which the first centuries of the Church have afforded, is only a beginning ; its true development for the future lies in us ; we crown the work of the Holy Ghost by our teaching.

The false teachers of the Apostles' time laid claim to the possession of special and mysterious treasures of wisdom, accessible only to advanced Christians, in opposition to those who held fast to the simple words of the Cross, who knew only of the one righteousness in Christ Jesus. They assumed an air of superior wisdom, to be communicated only to the maturer minds ; and he who attached himself to them supposed he thereby attained a higher rank, that of the theosophic and initiated. The Apostle, however, with rude hand, tears away the mask from the countenance of the deceivers, in that he defines their true character, "Men speaking lies in hypocrisy." Not, consequently, persons who are deceived, who, while engaged in seeking for truth, have had the misfortune, through taking a wrong track, to be led into superstition, instead of apprehending the true faith. No ; these ministers of error pursue their special aims, and proclaim their Satanic doctrines only in order to gratify the flesh. Not the honour of God, not the salvation of souls, however much they may speak of the one and the other, is their motive, but their own profit, whether in honour and glory,

or power and influence, or even wealth and possessions. Such are these dissemblers. They speak of Divine things, yea, they are the "excessively holy ones," as the Apostle terms them in another place (2 Cor. xi. 5 ; compare v. 13), who profess to be much more strict and earnest in their devotions than the Apostles themselves, or at least than Paul, but within are corrupt and poisonous, full only of putrefaction and death. Yet more distinctly does the Apostle say, "They have a brand upon the conscience." Again, an indication as to whence error springs. The majority of errors arise from a diseased conscience, injured by sin, and not healed by the blood of Jesus Christ. If one who is pained in conscience, instead of going to cast himself at the feet of Him who has made a sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world, seeks rather to discover a way in which he may be able to continue in sin, without being chastened by his conscience, he enters upon the pathways of error. I have before indicated that there are excuses, palliations, even laudations of the evil deed, which are reduced to a doctrine, yea, to a system. This is the greatest triumph of error. It has now become conscious falsehood, and has manifested its Satanic nature. As a thought of the day, flashing through the souls of men, it is, in any case, dangerous ; but it becomes absolutely formidable when, attracting to itself, and blending with itself, as much as possible of truth, it comes forth

as a complete system, upon which a whole community has laboured with a view to its becoming a common possession, a fortress inaccessible to any weapons. To this the brands upon the conscience lead.

Why do many smile approvingly, or loudly express their satisfaction, when the old doctrine of everlasting perdition, of Satan, of the universal and entire corruption of the natural man, of righteousness through the blood and sacrifice of the Son of God alone, is assailed with much ability, with admirable force, and with considerable success, and is set aside as an antiquated mode of conception, belonging to figures long ago exploded and rendered ridiculous? Why is this? Because they have a branded conscience, which feels the need of healing, and yet would avoid the pain of this healing, on which account they prefer going over to the side of those who say their disease does not exist—is an invention of those who would wish to heal it.

And now, brethren and sisters, ask yourselves, Do I not generally feel my heart lighter, as though a load were taken off me, when I see these doctrines—which belong to the word of the Cross, yea, necessarily grow forth therefrom—assailed with skill and apparent success? Does it not seem to me as though the atmosphere of the new proclamation of a more cheerful Christianity, without sin, the curse, death, and hell, were a finer ether, more easily to be breathed? This is ever a proof, my beloved, that it is not well

with the conscience ; in other words, that we have committed sin and our conscience chastises us, and we will not yet apply to the true source of help, and find through the true Physician healing for our wounds.

But you know, further, what gradually comes to pass with the conscience-brand. At first the wound is painful ; at first one seeks help here and there, to lessen its pain ; but gradually the place becomes hard and unsusceptible of feeling. Those who have the brand upon the conscience are not, therefore, always like those I have described, who feel unhappy, and rather glide into error than avail themselves of painful truth for thorough healing. There may be those, also, who have become already hardened, and who, the more unsusceptible they become of feeling, the more practise hypocrisy and falsehood in moral sayings and maxims for an excellent walk in the world, yea, in legal injunctions which they impose upon others, so that they may appear to be zealous and earnestly concerned about the kingdom of God. There ever, again, is the mighty Apostolic hand, which comes in and tears away the mask from the face, with the words, "Thou hast a brand upon the conscience, therefore dost thou join in proclaiming the error which arises from presumption or from despair."

Finally, the Cross of Christ is not only a *judge*: for the children of God it affords A POWER TO STAND AGAINST ERROR. It affords them a firm basis ; and

this is what is implied in the third verse of our text, after the Apostle has adduced—by way of example of the excessive devotion of these people—the enjoining of celibacy and absence from food which God has created, and the condemning of much which the Apostle regards as right, and well-ordered, and in accordance with the will of God. The Apostolic doctrine does not say, “Abstain from marriage;” but it *docs* say to the affianced, “Join hands on the day of your betrothal, on the day of your union, and every day afterwards, at the Cross of Jesus Christ.” The Apostolic proclamation will have the whole life, as well the family life as the individual life, sanctified through the Cross of Christ—through the forgiveness of sins for Jesus Christ’s sake—through the peace of God, which thence flows for families, and passes from the parents to the children, from masters to servants, from employers to employed, yea, from house to house and from heart to heart. The Apostolic doctrine does not say, “This food you may eat, and that you must avoid;” but it says, “Consecrate and sanctify your eating and drinking and every enjoyment by the Word of God and by prayer, and only that which will not admit of this consecration—that which contradicts the Word of God, whether it be enjoyment or labour—all that will not admit of prayer, and shuns the spirit of prayer, avoid: this is forbidden you by the Holy Spirit himself.” The hypocritical speakers of lies arise, therefore, with a sanctity in

presence of which the Apostles appear lax and indifferent men of the world. They say, with a devout appearance, God has forbidden to eat certain kinds of food, and direct us back to the Old Testament to obtain for their falsehood the appearance of truth; and then they speak as though the sin of unchastity had not its seat and home in the heart of every one; as though the unmarried were not, equally with the married, to be rejected before God; and therefore forbid to marry. Against this whole appearance of sanctity, this mask of hypocrisy, woven out of human precepts, the child of God has need to take a firm stand. If these false teachers came forth at once as the avowed deniers of God and of Christ; if they rejected all that is sacred for us, our position would be clear. But error clothes itself in the garb of truth and sanctity. Against this it is written, "The children of God, believers, and those who know the truth, receive with thanksgiving that which God has created." And whence arises the thanksgiving of a Christian? He looks back indeed upon creation, and receives with thankfulness that which the wisdom of God has from the beginning allotted to him; but since his poverty and guilt is daily before his eyes, he looks still more upon redemption, upon the Cross of Jesus Christ, and through this redemption upon creation, through the Son into the heart of the Father. His thanksgiving arises principally from this, that he can say, "I thank Thee that Thou hast

not cast me away on account of my wretchedness, and hast not suffered me to continue in my sins. I thank Thee that Thou wast for me smitten on the Cross, and for me didst die. I thank Thee that I was not counted unworthy of Thee, but that even in my misery Thou didst turn to me Thy faithful Saviour-heart." In this thanksgiving is veiled all other thanksgiving, including that for the blessings of the earthly being; through the Cross is sanctified all the thanksgiving, as well as all the enjoyment of a child of God. And because he has need of this thanksgiving, and is therein so joyous and blessed, he stands armed against the excessively holy speakers of lies—supra-human in their devotion—who arise in every age, and especially in the last age, to tempt those who will live godly in Christ Jesus. From this simple relation of hearty filial receiving out of the fulness of grace obtained upon the Cross, grows the daily new recognition of the truth; and he who ever humbly and in a filial spirit thus receives, who goes not forth in a spirit of pride and self-sufficiency, but ever draws afresh through prayer from the gracious treasures of God, as revealed in the Scripture, will grow evermore in that truth which, on the one hand, chastens and humbles, but on the other raises and exalts him, and at last brings him into the land of glory.

Thus, one who grows in the knowledge of the truth is daily making progress in the same, has a

firm and sure standing-place in life—even though the power of error should become in his lifetime that which Scripture tells us it will become in the last time—because the Cross is the support on which he rests, in not departing from this Word, but consecrating and sanctifying all things through the Atonement of Christ.

And now, beloved in the Lord, may the Holy Spirit afford us such a firm stand, through the word of the Cross, and through the experience of the sufficient righteousness given us in the crucified Saviour—a stand in the severest temptations of our life, and finally in the hour of departure also, when the enemy assails our life! And should it be our lot on earth to witness the coming of this last time, may we at last lift up our heads with joy, and go forth to meet the Lord Jesus when He comes, humbly as unworthy sinners, but joyfully as accepted ones! AMEN.

The Last Judgment.



“ And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away ; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God ; and the books were opened : and another book was opened, which is the book of life : and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”—REV. xx. 11, 12.

BELOVED IN CHRIST JESUS,—Be not surprised at the choice of this text for the present day.* It is chosen not only because in our series of Meditations on the Last Things we have come to the contemplation of the last judgment, but also because we celebrate to-day the festival of the Reformation. The last judgment also is a world-festival, the greatest of any, except that other in which God rested from His works. As this was the beginning of all festive life in the creatures of God ; as the rest of God from creating, and in the creation of His hands,

* Anniversary of the Reformation, 1854.

was the consecration of Nature's being, which alone made possible the rest of the creature in God, so, for the world of completion, the last judgment is a high and glorious world-festival of the revelation of the truth and righteousness, the grace and compassion of the Three-one God. For only when all the judgments of God in the history of the world have found their close and final seal, will it become manifest for all who are in heaven and on earth, and under the earth—incontestably, and beyond the possibility of an objection—that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, to whom the Father has committed all judgment, is the Lord, in whose name all knees must bow. This great world-festival has, like the first, the rest of God in His works, relation to all our festivals; yea, these Divine festivals give to our human ones their basis, and are pre-celebrations and after-celebrations of them. For all our festivals are at the same time days of judgment, days of separation; and in them is made manifest who belongs to the number of those who love the blessings of God's house, the children who have their sweetest possession therein; and in them is separated that which is yet unfilial, and alien to the Father's house. In them is seen whether our souls are wholly uplifted in festive thanksgiving, in joy, blessing, and peace; or whether we painfully snatch from the world and its engagements a brief pause of sacred repose. This applies especially to our present fes-

tival—the festival of the Reformation. It is allied to the judgment of the last day, and in close connection therewith, and yet is related to the primitive festival of God's rest. On the present day we commemorate the sharply-defined beginning of the Reformation, when, on the 31st of October, 1517, Dr. Martin Luther affixed the ninety-five theses against the Papal indulgence to the door of the Electoral Church of Wittenberg. In these ninety-five theses is contained nothing but the Scriptural doctrine of the works of men in relation to God's free grace, of the forgiveness of sins on account of the sacrificial death and all-sufficient merits of Jesus Christ, and not for the merits of our fellow-men, be they ever so pious, or, as the world calls them, saintly; they assert that man cannot merit heaven, but that it is pure grace whereby a sinful creature is enabled here on earth to enter into the rest of God, and may become assured through faith of the perfect rest of the glorified. The festival of the Reformation is a day of judgment, and separates those in the Evangelical Church who are satisfied with their own works and merits, or even cherish the presumptuous opinion that God himself must be satisfied with these, from those who, in humility and poverty of spirit, know they are unprofitable servants, not worthy of all the compassion and faithfulness which God has shown to them, and unworthy in themselves of everlasting life, but who yet can make their boast, "By grace am I

saved!" There is separated also in ourselves on this day that which inclines to the side of self-righteousness and human merit, and which, growing up from the root of our old fleshly nature, would ever gladly again entwine itself around us and overrun us, all seeking of salvation and peace in our own strength; from that which places itself, lowly and broken, at the feet of the Lamb. I do not, therefore, hesitate to choose as the subject of our festive meditation the LAST JUDGMENT, as a JUDGMENT OF GRACE, and a JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO WORKS. Lord, Thou everlasting God and Saviour, Thou wilt come again to judge the living and the dead—Thou who hast ascended to Heaven, Thou who didst rise from the dead, Thou who wast crucified, didst die, and wast buried, for our sins! O let us, through Thy Holy Spirit, contemplate Thy return to the last judgment with feelings of deep solemnity, with hearts thirsting for Thy grace! Amen.

GRACE and WORKS, these have become watch-words in Christendom. Not merely has conscious and deliberate error ever raised the standard of works, but ignorance, blindness, want of acquaintance with the ways of God, want of familiarity with Holy Scripture, has gathered thousands around it; and not merely another Church ranges its thousands around this banner, but also in our Evangelical Church has the doctrine of works gained so much ground, which it has retained unto this hour, that

we have no cause to look down as from higher ground upon our Reformation festivals, or even to look with hostile glance into the opposite camp, but rather the greatest cause to look closely around us, and, still more, to look within ourselves.

GRACE and WORKS. In what relation do they stand to each other in our case? This will decide our portion at last. The last judgment is a judgment upon every soul that is yet liable to judgment, which has not already, through faith in the Son of God, passed from death unto life. It is, therefore, with serious and earnest purpose we set before us the last judgment. First, as a *Judgment of Grace*. It is written, "Books were opened, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." "Another book," however, was also opened; that is the "book of life," and whoever was not found written in this book was cast into the lake of fire.

The *Book of Life*, beloved, is *grace*. Works have no place here; they stand written in the other books. Here we have only to do with the *names*, which are written in heaven. There appear before the judgment-seat souls who, while on earth, lived in unconscious union with the Lord in heaven, who earnestly sought Him without ever coming truly to know him here. They now see themselves known of Him even in their most hidden life, and in the actions forgotten by themselves, and find themselves

acknowledged by Him as blessed of the Father. Not before the last judgment does Jesus become manifest to them as the Saviour, towards whom the dim longing of their souls had been directed. He is altogether the same Saviour for them as for those who, by the ordinances of God's love, by the well-known word of the Old and the New Testament, by all the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, had been consciously and willingly united to Him. It is not, however, these, His faithful ones on earth, of whom it is said, their names are at the Last Judgment found written in the Book of Life. They are already at home with the Lord;* and as many of them as are upon the earth when the trumpet of the archangel sounds, will be caught up to meet Him in the air, and changed, that they may be ever with the Lord. The others are the dead who did not rise again in the first resurrection, but come forth from their graves at the trumpet-call to stand before His countenance. For them is there yet a Book of Life; and for them He sits upon the throne, whom they know not, but whom in their ignorance they sought; and for them the Lord pronounces that unspeakably precious word of compassionate love, which sounds forth to us from His own description of the last judgment, "Inas-

* There has been for believers a prior *manifestation before the judgment seat of Christ*, and an awarding of their position in the kingdom of glory, proportioned to their faithfulness in the service of the Saviour during their life on earth. Compare 2 Cor. v. 10, Rom. xiv. 10.

much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

This is GRACE. He who, according to the teaching of the New Testament prophets, will sit on the judgment-throne, is the same who on the Cross bore upon His mighty soul the burden and guilt, the death and condemnation due to sin, and endured unto perfect victory. It is He who has borne the wrath of God, and the severity of His holy righteousness, enduring unto the last drop of the bitter cup, and coming forth Victor over death, the devil, and hell. The person of the Judge in itself proclaims that it is a judgment of grace, through which those standing at the right-hand enter into salvation. Christ, the God-man, of whom the men in white raiment said, "He shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven"; the God-man it is who takes His seat on the great white throne; and His face, the face of the King of Eternity it is, before which heaven and earth shall flee away, so that no longer shall room be found for them. Grace upon those who even in their ignorance and blindness stretched forth towards Him the arms of longing—free grace is proclaimed in that great, majestic, and terrible moment, when all the bridges are broken behind those of the human race who are still unsaved, and they can only advance towards the throne of judgment. Then these blessed ones take their place at the right-hand, for He leads them thither. How

comes this to pass? Do they understand wherefore they are placed at the right-hand? Do they see in it already an indication of their deliverance? Oh, no! but it is the wondrous and mysterious attraction of fellowship, which even on earth rested not in their hearts, though they did not yet possess a living knowledge of Christ, that so irresistibly urges them to take their place on that side on which the Lord will have them; they take their place on the right-hand.

I have, on a former occasion, spoken of the *Resurrection of the Just*, but have there said nothing of the resurrection of the ungodly. The day of judgment is the last day of the resurrection, and on this day some appear unto everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. The resurrection form of those whom Jesus calls the blessed, already proclaims, beyond a doubt, to whom they belong. The resurrection of the ungodly is an act of judgment, and forms part of the last judgment; since all who have not fallen asleep in Jesus will not rise otherwise, or earlier, than at the last day of judgment. At the same time also arise those who have already lived in a hidden and unconscious communion with Him, the All-present Saviour, and who, therefore, in their bodies, are not forms of darkness, but of dawning light. Their standing at the right-hand is in itself an object of wonder and astonishment for these lowly souls. And now the books are opened: the Book of Life is

unrolled, and in it stand written their names—their names, but not their sins, for these have been forgiven and blotted out through the blood of the Lamb.

It is this, my brethren, which we must bring into such prominence on the day of the Reformation: the grace of God in Jesus Christ. The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, and comes effectually, either in this world or in the next, to all who do not reject it. But all who do not lay hold of the grace of God presented in Christ Jesus, do not experience it, and know not what grace is. All who stand at the left-hand on the great day of judgment are rejecters of grace, are out of Christ, have themselves with guilty hand severed the gracious bonds with which during their earthly life the Lord would unite them to himself, have chosen to effect their own salvation, or have even desired no salvation at all. Those, however, who are saved by grace, know right well that their life, their blessedness, their deliverance, depends entirely and alone upon the word of Him who sits upon the throne; they know it well, with trembling, in the feeling of their own poverty and sin; but they see shining in His countenance the everlasting light, of which a beam has fallen into their heart, and on this account there is present already a gladdening hope within their soul, before the judge opens His mouth. And when He does speak, His first word is a proof that their names are written in the Book of Life; for He acknowledges

all the good they have done, and knows not their sins. He, the righteous judge, who discerns so exactly the presence of sin, even under its most refined forms, speaks nothing of their sins, but addresses them at once as the blessed of His Father, as the heirs of the kingdom founded from the beginning of the world. This melts the heart, this incomprehensible love towards poor sinners, who did not even belong consciously to Jesus on earth. In this fervour of heavenly love is dissolved the last trace of the heart's coldness; *their* hearts flow forth like the hearts of all who have here on earth repented in the dust, and have found their peace in the blood of Calvary. Untrue and unworthy, therefore, is the doctrine which some would have our Lord to have taught in His description of the judgment, namely, that man is saved by his works. No; all those who are saved in the judgment know nothing of their own works. When He says to them, "What ye have done unto one of the least, ye have done unto me," and when He calls them the blessed of His Father, they have no words in which to reply, but the heart sinks before Him in silent wonder and joy at such compassion and glory, reserved for the most unworthy.

Let us hear, then, my beloved in the Lord, the doctrine of the Reformation proclaimed from the throne of the world's judgment. This is the banner which our own Luther has raised, and around which

we rally against all foes without and within. Grace, free grace for the sake of Christ, proclaimed and communicated by the Son of God, even though it should only be manifested at the last day—free grace alone it is which saves. Amongst the countless hosts above who sing the victorious song of their deliverance, there is not one who knows of any works which have been able to form for him a flight of steps leading up to Heaven; not one who does not rejoice in salvation through Christ alone, and join in the confession :—

“ Mine, mine was the transgression ;
But Thine the deadly pain.”

Wherefore, my brethren, rejoice if your names are written in the Book of Life, if your guilt is blotted out; rejoice and be glad all you who can feel the merits of the Saviour yours, even while you are on earth. But then must you also venture, because the word of God demands it, to draw nigh with me, and contemplate the gloomy and awe-inspiring picture of JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO WORKS. I return to the resurrection of judgment. “To shame and everlasting contempt,” says the prophet Daniel, “will many arise.” But not Daniel alone, even many heathen sages have had some foreboding of this; when they taught that those who were here on earth, ungodly and wicked, despisers of God and violators of sacred ordinances, would, in the world

to come, appear in frightful forms, as wolves and other ravenous beasts. In this teaching there is some conception of that which the Godless man spiritually becomes. We, however, on the authority of Holy Scripture, proceed further, and consider how the man of the world, in his tumultuous passage through life, has marred and defaced the image of God in which he was created. What terrible forms must at last become the expression of the inner hatefulness of a soul alienated from God! The image of God in its perversion can produce only that which is most terrible and revolting, just because it is in itself so glorious and noble. And now conceive of the resurrection of those who have Christ only as an inexorable judge, because they have rejected Him as a Saviour and Mediator! Is it any wonder that they cry, "Mountains, fall upon us; hills, cover us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne?"

They have risen in the body, and their bodies are the visible image of their souls. All the desolation, perversion, corruption, in the life of a Godless and Christless man, will find its corresponding manifestation before the eyes of all the world. They will appear in the shame of their nakedness, for the whole inner and concealed sinfulness of their character is apparent; they appear what they are. Thus the irresistible power of guilt of itself drags them to the left-hand; thither must they go, and every arbitrary wish to place themselves at the right-hand

were as the resistance of a straw to the raging of a hurricane. The force of inner conviction ranges them on the side of those upon whom the sentence of the judge is pronounced, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!"

"The books were opened, and they were judged according to their works." In these their works are described with minuteness—every word; for "by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned;" and "every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment." With minuteness are described the thoughts of the heart—the emotions of which they are scarcely conscious—thoughts of hatred to God and of opposition to Christ. Before them will lie depicted, with unspeakable clearness and fidelity, the image of their past life; and each one will be already judged by the contemplation of this image. For each, a glance from this picture to the countenance of Christ—that countenance which beams with a grace and compassion intolerable to those who have refused to humble themselves before Him—reveals only thunder-clouds and consuming flames; and He, the righteous judge, will render unto every man precisely as his work shall be.

I might almost say, it is already rendered to them according to their works when they appear, and every one outwardly manifests what he has inwardly become. In this is his melancholy destiny already

expressed before the eyes of the world. But no! There yet lives in the soul of the man—until he is judged—the last trace of the image of God. As yet, the servant called to give an account has in hand the pound which was entrusted to him; as yet, the gifts, talents, natural capacity with which the man was born into this world, are present, however horribly defaced by sin; as yet, there are to be perceived traces of those things which were conferred upon him without his contributing thereto—through education, society, the Church, the State, art and science—certain purer, nobler traces; not his own work, but things he has inherited. The judgment,* however, this great separating process, separates not merely the good ones from the bad, but also that which is inwardly good from the inwardly bad. From the wicked servant is taken the one pound which he has hidden in a napkin. From those on the left is all natural good taken away; the flame of higher life is quenched, which till then, occasionally at least, shed some light on the dark inner nature of the man; nothing remains but the piercing light of the thought, “There is a God, an eternal God, and thou art His creature.” Taken away is all that of which men here on earth have so much that is beautiful to say—natural goodness, softness of heart, kindly feeling, nobleness of character; taken away, also, is all know-

* Compare the Greek word *κρίσις*, “separation,” which corresponds in use with our word *judgment*.

ledge and recognition of truth. The man is thrown back upon that which he has become by his own actions. He is the creator of his own state, and as such is consigned for eternity to his wretched poverty, emptiness, blindness, and perversion.

Consequently, only the work of your own perversion and marring will you become—poor, poor sinners, who deny and reject the Saviour—then to hear the word of condemnation, “Ye cursed;” that thereby from you the blessing of God may be taken away—the blessing of grace, descending from the first day of rest, in which God rested from His work, and caused His blessing to descend on the yet unfallen creation. This is the only curse which is entirely without a blessing; for all the curses of God pronounced upon the sins of men were, until the judgment, accompanied with a blessing. Then, finally, curse without blessing, a shutting up of the soul to its own dark and dreadful form, this is JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO WORKS. For not the isolated deed alone, not the sum of these evil deeds, but the whole conformation of life, the whole acting, doing and becoming of the man, the expression of his sinful, corrupt nature, stands written in the books. “Every man shall bear his own burden;” and no one will be able to doubt that his condition of misery, his everlasting destruction, is the fruit of his own work alone, clung to by him with all his power, in opposition to the urgent importunities of God’s grace in Christ.

The doctrine of the Reformation is this, that man can be saved only through the one ever-availing sacrifice of Jesus Christ, imputed unto faith, even though that imputation be made first on the day of judgment. But the Reformation has also something to say of works, for it preaches a *living* faith. Works, true works of love, self-sacrificing deeds of help done to the least of the brethren from love to Jesus, are the signs of faith. So the Evangelical Church teaches from the Apostolic word; insisting that that faith which is merely a conviction of the intellect, a thought of the mind, is dead, and is properly no faith. She teaches, indeed, that man shall be judged by his works, but that all evil works proceed from unbelief. It is, therefore, unbelief which condemns, as it is faith which lays hold of saving grace.

My brethren, look forward to the end. God grant that not one of us may stand before the Judge, but that, having all passed from death unto life, we may enter safely into the Master's joy, and may appear among the many thousand saints who will come with Christ to hold the judgment. But look forward. It were possible that one or another soul among us should be snatched away into eternity ere it had made its calling and election sure in Christ Jesus. Oh, I pray you, to-day, now, let no hour, no moment pass without having embraced your Saviour who offers to you His everlasting grace, with forgiveness of sins, to the end that you may triumph over

death, the grave and judgment, and your resurrection be a resurrection unto life, and your name be written in the book of life, and you may receive a new name, which is promised to those who overcome in Jesus Christ! May this be our Reformation! AMEN.

The Destruction of the Visible World.

“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. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?”—2 PETER iii. 3—12.

BELOVED IN JESUS CHRIST,—It is one of the last epistles of the New Testament from which we have

just read this terrible word of prophecy. Yea, there is even reason for the supposition that these words were read by those to whom they were addressed, only after the writer—the Apostle Peter—had already glorified God by a martyr's death. They sound, therefore, like a legacy from one for whom the earth has already passed away like a dream, and who has an eye only for the everlasting future, the home in heaven. These words take their place for us in the succession of those texts of the New Testament which we have been now a long time studying together, in following the Apostolic prophecies which are able to set before our eyes more clearly and fully than the prophets of the Old Covenant, the history and growth of the kingdom, as it proceeds from Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and makes progress unto its final goal. We have already, on several occasions, spoken of a coming of the Lord—a glorious period of His kingdom on earth—which will intervene partly as a judicial coming, a terrible anticipation of the last judgment, partly also as the longed-for and prayed-for goal of all Christian hope for this earth. Already with our text of the present day we have passed beyond this goal, near to the last goal, the consummation of all New Testament prophecies. This lies no longer here in this old earth, but extends into the period of the new earth, into the new creation of that which now exists. First, however, we must speak of **THE PERISHING OF THAT WHICH**

EXISTS—THE WHOLE VISIBLE CREATED WORLD; and this perishing of the visible world the Apostle Peter sets before our eyes to-day. To meditate thereupon with prayer and supplication is our task; and in order, by the help of our text, to fulfil it, we must first speak a word AGAINST THE UNBELIEF WHICH REJECTS THIS TRUTH, then seek to EXPLAIN THE APPARENT DELAY, and finally STRENGTHEN EACH OTHER UNTO A RIGHT EXPECTATION OF IT.

Lord God, Thou perfected Prince of our salvation, Thou givest us in grace to look forward into that future which, before Thee, is present; and biddest us meditate upon that which Thou hast given Thine Apostles to speak and write through the Holy Spirit, that we may receive into our hearts the impressions Thou didst design by these prophecies. Help us, that this may now be realized, that unbelief in us may be vanquished, that we may at least approximately understand Thy triumph, and that we also may expect and hasten unto Thy coming. Amen.

That we first of all speak a word against unbelief with regard to this whole visible world being destroyed in judgment, will not surprise you, brethren, quite apart from the fact that the words of our text compel us to do so. For nothing is further from the greater part of the human race now living than to regard the solid ground—undisturbed for many thousand years—on which they tread as insecure, and to think of a breaking up of all the supports which, only

through the death of the individual, lose their significance for him, but seem to remain unchanged and unweakened for all succeeding races. It is true, every one knows and confesses that in this world all is exposed to chance and change, that nothing endures for a moment; the present, scarcely expressed, becomes already past, and again is made the basis and home of the new-born future. But, nevertheless, the ground form of our earthly life and being during thousands of years, and in respect of the main phenomena—that the vault of heaven spreads itself over the earth and brings forth its stars above our heads, that the sun rises and sets, day and night alternate, and spring, summer, autumn, and winter are dissolved into each other; that life and death, growth and decay, pass before our eyes or are experienced in ourselves—has been the same as with long past generations, of whom only faint and dim traditions have reached us. Therefore, we also easily repeat the word of many a one known to the Christian Church in the time of the Apostles, and having to do with that church: “Since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” We might almost say, that ever similar changes and the unchanging ground-tone of all created life have for men—created for and called to eternity, the invisible world—an almost somniferous and depressing effect, because they give so greatly the impression of the

abiding and unchanging. We even derive all our figures of the intransitory from our earth. We speak of a foundation of rock which never yields, of enduring as the mountains of God ; we speak of the mighty pillars which He has raised, and which no finite power is able to cast down, and express thereby our view of the intransitory character of earthly things ; and when we look forth, and by the help of science, spiritually enter upon the great paths of the universe, and its movements and alternations, and think of the countless years during which it has thus proceeded, it seems to us almost impossible that it should ever become otherwise.

The Apostle, however, calls those who thus speak, "Scoffers." He says : "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 ?" and they appeal to the fact that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Against them the Apostle speaks an earnest word in giving them the name of "scoffers." He designates them enemies of the truth, servants of falsehood, those who scorn the word of God and the eternal counsel of His Majesty. And the scoffing lies in this, that they regard the stedfastness and unchangeableness as we call it—the deep-laid order of God's creation—as an argument against God's word, which describes all these things as finite, as having an end as they have had a beginning. The word of

God itself also is applied in like manner by the scoffers; and all those are scoffers who, in order to take away the force of a prophecy of God's word which is unacceptable and troublesome to them, or to render it doubtful, adduce other texts and thoughts of Holy Scripture in opposition. The most complete refutation lies in this very designation of them; for once you have driven home to a man's conscience the thought, That which you speak is not spoken in the service of truth, but because you would gladly walk after your own lusts, and because that which you combat in the Divine word forbids your doing so, the man is vanquished, even though he does not acknowledge it. Yea, if he even becomes harder, more resolute in his false assertions, more hostile in his assaults upon the word of God, he is, nevertheless, vanquished; and the great day of the Lord will make manifest many who here on earth have passed for mighty heroes in the knowledge of the truth, but who had received the testimony of the Spirit of God in their hearts that they are scoffers, who for their own pleasure declare the word of the Lord to be folly, or at least veiled in human weakness, and therefore unintelligible, or not simply and clearly intelligible in its sense.

The Apostle goes further, and more clearly defines the language of these scoffers. He represents them as saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?"

for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were." The world goes its way, and no man can alter anything in it—no one can accelerate anything, no one delay it. They, therefore, manifestly deny—as is shown by the subsequent appeal of the Apostle to the flood—the destruction of the visible world, and with it also the judgment. They exclaim, It has long been said that Christ will return in His majesty to hold judgment; but there is no appearance of His coming; things are ever, on the whole, the same as they have always been. Will you always await such a coming of your Lord to judge the quick and the dead?

Can the reason be for us doubtful why they wish to set before us in such beautiful language, or with such convincing arguments, the unchangeableness of Nature and its course, and in like manner the laws of history, which are placed under the spell of the same iron necessity? Is it any other than that the coming of the Lord is unacceptable to them? I do not here mean those who in honest, well-meant error cannot understand what the Lord speaks of His coming; not those who, merely in the interest of the knowledge of natural things, are too much shut up by the fulness and greatness of the objects which here tower around them, to be able to look forth to the final goal; but I speak of those to whom the promise of the coming of Jesus Christ is a very disagreeable thought, as it were a break in all their

calculations, and especially in those calculations which arise not from the intellect but from the passions, and would gladly avoid the final account. That such unbelief existed in the Apostolic age may afford us some consolation. Thus, at least we are not compelled to regard its presence in our days as a sign that the power of God's word, the distinctness of Evangelical knowledge, and the blessing of communion with the Lord has vanished and disappeared. The Apostolic Churches had power, light, and communion in a high degree; notwithstanding such scoffers arose partly around them, partly even in them and from them. We, therefore, in the midst of salutary terror, may remain consoled that the Lord is yet within the City of God, and that we are, or can be, still the people of His possession, although we have to bewail such dark and gloomy manifestations within the circle of Christendom, and even of the Evangelical Church.

Yet more, they say, The fathers are fallen asleep, and all things remain as before. In this they naturally could not be thinking of the fathers of the Old Testament; for the coming of the Lord which was there promised had indisputably taken place; He had appeared, and His disciples had seen His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten Son, full of grace and truth. The fathers, to whose falling asleep the scorners made their appeal, are the Apostles. Of these the most distinguished ones had,

at the time when this epistle was read, passed to their Lord. They existed no longer, who had so often expressed the hope—as we can even now read in their letters—that they should perhaps behold His face with joy when He should come in judgment to establish His kingdom. The completion of His kingdom on earth, and His final coming to judgment at the end of this world, was not yet so clearly distinguished by them as we see it distinguished in the last book of Holy Scripture, the Revelation of John. They had fallen asleep and had not been partakers in the fulfilment of that earthly hope of the kingdom of Christ, which had often raised their hearts so high, although through the everlasting home and glory they had received a much greater fulfilment, and one leaving far behind it all that has been realized or hoped for on earth; and now men pointed scoffingly to their death.

And do not men also in our days point to those witnesses of the Gospel who—especially for our nation, for our Church—were privileged to begin a new life, but who have long since died; and say to us, You would call up that which has long vanished and deservedly passed away; you would bring back old times with their forms and ways, in that you would have the old truths of the faith still recognised, confessed, and proclaimed, and applied in our whole life, in all their fulness and power? Is it not also said to us, Luther has long been dead; it is long since

Calvin fell asleep ; it is now long since Spener's head was laid to rest ; and Francke and Zinzendorf, and all the great living pillars of the Evangelical Church, and the men whose hymns we sing, are men of past generations, and only a few have continued to our time—another culture has succeeded to the former, other aims are chosen, other conflicts are to be endured than they endured ; therefore the work is to be done in another way than by restoring the past ? This is said, indeed, not merely in regard to those tendencies which may be justly charged with hanging to that which is past, with an exaggeration of forms belonging to bygone times ; but it is urged in opposition to those who say, So long as we have not again amongst us the full, living, operative faith which our fathers—the Reformers and their successors—had and testified, so long is our Church, our society, and our whole life, afflicted with a grievous sickness, so long we shall not be saved from our misery. Now, in opposition to all this, the outstretched finger of the Apostle points back to the flood, with the words, The mountains then stood as firm as now, and the course of Nature was as much regulated by law as now, and yet the waters burst in, and fell as a judgment upon the ungodly generation of that time. Yea, he refutes them most completely in the single sentence, “The heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and

perdition of ungodly men." It is not a case for scientific discussion as to whether the visible world, heaven and earth, can pass away, or whether there is already to be discovered in them a tendency to decay; but it is proclaimed that a destruction by judgment will take place at the command of Him who made heaven and earth. This alone refutes all the words of unbelief as to the eventual destruction of the present world. It will not be destroyed merely by the process of Nature and in a natural manner, but its destruction will take place by a judicial act of the same Divine omnipotence by which it was made.

My beloved, the unbelief against which we speak is not to be found merely amongst those who merit, in the full sense of the word, the name of scoffers and ungodly men, but it insinuates itself also into the mind of believers, and we have to combat it continually in one form or another. For this cause it is needful to speak a word against it.

Let us, however, no longer dwell on this, but fix our attention upon something that may have much greater importance for our hearts; for, after all, we are able to oppose to unbelief the simple reply, I rest my faith upon the Word of God, and in this it is written, that one day heaven and earth shall pass away, and a new heaven and a new earth shall take their place. What you speak—however many arguments it may seem to have in its favour—is, as

opposed to this Word, entirely vain, and I hold steadfastly to that which the mouth of revelation speaks. But when it is objected to you, Behold the Apostles in their day hoped to live to witness the glorious appearing of Christ to complete His kingdom on earth; and after the Apostles each successive generation of those who have longed for His appearing have cherished the same hope. No century of the Christian Church has passed without some voice being heard to proclaim that the end of all things was at hand, and that every one had cause to prepare for an appearing of the Lord to judgment probably within his own lifetime. They have all fallen asleep, and one century has followed another without the last having arrived. And how will it be in the future? Will it not be the same over again, and will not our expectation, which receives its character from the Word of God, be again disappointed? Will not the sun of life have set for our whole generation before the coming of the Lord? And how long will it thus continue? The Lord *delays His coming*, so that it almost appears as though the words of His mouth, which so clearly speak of a coming in the clouds of heaven, with great power and glory, to be seen of all the tribes of earth, were not spoken in all earnestness. Yea, this doubt steals more frequently than the one we have just mentioned over believers themselves, so that at last it is said, Yes, it is written in the Word of God. But these are things which properly do not

greatly concern us ; we have at the present time too much to do every day, in working out our salvation with fear and trembling, to admit of our devoting time and energy to looking beyond the bounds of the present—I will not say that every one who thus speaks in his heart belongs to the scoffers, but he diminishes the power of the whole Word of God for him, so soon as he excepts anything out of this Word from his earnest and thorough study as a matter of duty, and draws for himself an arbitrary line within which he has to do with the contents of the Word of God, and outside of which all must remain an unknown land. The Word of God is for him no longer a whole, no longer that whole of which no single word can fall without meaning to the earth, without all the rest being assailed with it.

Therefore, my beloved, it is very necessary that we more closely examine the Apostle's words on the APPARENT DELAYING OF GOD, and receive from him the explanation thereof. It is said : "The heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." These words of the Apostle shed some light upon this point. The Apostle says, They are preserved ; God has His times, and where He will not hasten—where the development of His kingdom seems to be slow—He has His causes for this delay. He has His causes in His eternal compassion, in order that time and space

for repentance may not be shortened here on earth for ungodly men who will at last be condemned. This principal cause is afterwards more clearly expressed: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any shall perish, but that all should come to repentance." You may perhaps object, God allows men to die; our life lasts but seventy years, or at the most but eighty years, and many die without repentance, many without the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, and consequently without a sure hope of everlasting life; and in like manner God may suddenly cut off and bring to an end any race now living.

But, beloved, not thus upon the surface does the matter lie; on the contrary, we must ask in what the long-suffering of God, which is our salvation, is revealed in the life of an individual. Is it in the length of that life, the long period that is granted to the man to come to the living God? Assuredly not; but rather in the inner history of the life, in that which God does for every man to bring him to a knowledge of his state, and by this to conversion—a turning away from the world, and a turning to eternity. Thus it is also with humanity as a whole. He is long-suffering to us-ward; He will not that any should perish, and on this account He causes to arise, stratum upon stratum, so long a history—a history of many nations and of many million hearts, who,

one after another, have exhausted, experienced, and called forth all the possibilities of Divine help and deliverance—so that we may obtain upon the foundation of the perfect revelation in Christ Jesus, a structure many thousands of years in completion, as we have already one of many hundreds of years. How long this will be in growing no human thought can determine; but that its long duration is a constant act of God's long-suffering and patience, is clear to every one who reflects how many years of his life have passed in darkness or obscurity, before he recognised and apprehended the Lord Jesus as his Saviour. If he has now truly recognised and apprehended Him, he finds that the years of his ignorance and darkness were not entirely without light and devoid of the gracious operations and influences of the Holy Spirit; yea, he discovers on deeper reflection, even in this world, and will yet more discover in eternity, that from the very beginning there has been in his life a concurrence of Divine operations for his salvation.

So, also, is it with humanity. It has need of its own history and experience; and this serves us and our posterity in the same manner as the miracles of the Lord and His Apostles served those who lived in the time of the Saviour. It shows us the Lord as the deliverer of those who need salvation; how He, in His gracious preventing compassion, and in His holy power, overcomes all hindrances that oppose

our salvation, if only we do not ourselves place in the way unbelief as the greatest hindrance. This history, which exists for every one of us, forms a root-ground, whose fibres consist entirely of God's gracious wonders. If one begins by allowing them to influence himself, and takes a retrospect first of the history of his own life, he will then in like manner proceed to the history of his family, and then to that of the whole nation. By such a contemplation of the past, it becomes manifest to him that God's waiting is not a delay, an inactivity, a vacant interval, in which God's working for our salvation ceases; but that He has His hour, in which He, as by a sudden impulse, urges forward the march of His kingdom, and others, again, in which it seems as though all things were arrested by His Almighty hand, and compelled to pass through a slow and wearisome course; that both, however, His hastening and His delay, belong to one and the same general plan.

Upon thyself, therefore, dear soul, must thou look, if thou wilt understand the apparent delay in God's promise; for thy sake does this delay take place, that thou mayst have a so much richer work of God's grace and God's compassion as the ground beneath thy feet; for the sake of those who live around thee and with thee, and who have not yet come to the knowledge that salvation can be theirs only and solely through faith in Jesus Christ the Crucified.

It is further said in our text, "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." We are consequently told, my beloved, in what manner this destruction will take place. And if God, for our sake, seems to delay—if, in other words, His hour has not yet come, because many souls, either of those now living, or of those who shall yet be born, are to be brought to the knowledge of the truth—yet the stupendous goal is appointed for all things earthly. One day will the world sink in ruins as a house in the fiery glow; one day will the Lord visit the earth, yea, the whole visible creation, with the same mighty creative power with which He called forth all things into being, and which we cannot grasp or comprehend, which remains for us ever an object of wonder and adoration. Naturally they are but feeble human images, when the Apostle speaks of a great crash and passing away of the elements, and a consuming with fire. No one is able on earth and in human language to give even an approximately accurate description of this most mighty and terrible event, but yet it will be; and there shines, as it were, the lurid light of the last judgment in all the prophecies of the Apostles; it shines forth in the Holy Scripture, and its beams fall from thence upon our faces. But if they fall upon our faces and hearts, it

is not merely that we may close our eyes in terror and turn away, or that we may cover before this light, but that we may be strengthened unto a waiting, a salutary watching for this event—for God's judicial dealing with the visible world.

Unto this the Apostle earnestly exhorts us: "Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." It is there written, beloved, in two words: Waiting and hastening. A contradiction in a breath. The one is a restraint, a waiting for the coming of the Lord; the other is a hastening, a pressing forward, an applying of power, an exertion. Both are indispensable to be prepared, in holy conversation and godliness, for the appearing of the Lord. Wait for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ will every one who knows how greatly he stands in need of the long-suffering of God; hasten towards this coming will every one whose longing for that which is perfect is not satisfied here below.

My dear hearers, if we not merely recognise, in relation to the past of our life and to the days of preventing grace, the long-suffering of God, which has wrought *for* us and *in* us, and in this recognition fall down, and adoringly exclaim, "Lord, Thy long-suffering I account my salvation!" but also observe how greatly we are still dependent on Divine com-

passion, and with our manifold sins, ever afresh stand in need of God's gracious forgiveness, we shall not then be so impatient for the coming of the day of the Lord. We would then gladly yet live a long life upon earth, to become prepared by a deeper experience of our own character, by a more thorough examination of our hearts, so difficult to understand, and in a more complete penitence before the Lord, and in an ever-fresh and more powerful apprehension of His merits. We should then gladly seek preparation, by maintaining a truly holy conversation and godliness of life, and in no longer finding around us and in us so much weakness, misery, and sin, we should be really new men, and as such walk in deep humility and poverty of spirit. Then should we also willingly end our course in His righteousness, whether we are caught up to meet Him in the air, or we lay aside the earthly house of this tabernacle, and go home to the everlasting house, to the building not made with hands, in Heaven. This is waiting. Such waiting does not exclaim, "Oh, it will always be soon enough for me!" The world declines it; the natural man will know nothing of this promised end. Waiting, however, is a continual, stedfast looking forward to this end, with the fervent prayer, Lord, first prepare me for it; and the more we seek this preparedness, the more clearly shall we perceive all that belongs thereto, and that is yet wanting to us.

But, with the waiting, hastening is also united. We

are called not only to wait, but also to hasten. We might, perhaps, from mere waiting, fall into a certain fearfulness and despondency, and think, I must first become in *my own eyes* a man of God. Ah, poor soul! on the day in which thou hadst become that—in which thou hadst been so greatly the victim of self-deception that thou couldst regard thyself as fit for heaven—the coming of the Lord would indeed be for thee as the breaking in of a thief in the night, as the surprise of a robber. We must hasten by virtue of our longing for the Lord, after perfect intercourse and unhindered and unbroken communion with Him. This longing must grow here upon earth. I know well we have from time to time, in days of suffering, a longing after heaven: when life with us is sad, when earth is embittered for us, or when the dearest ones, who have become almost inseparably one with our heart, are snatched away from our arms by death; or when we become old and weak, and can accomplish nothing more on earth, and feel ourselves rather a burden upon others, and earth a burden for us, we long for heaven. All this is right, and not to be condemned; but it is not this longing of which I speak, but the longing of a heart bound to the Lord Jesus by the holiest, tenderest, and most enduring ties, for whom He is the pole around which life ever revolves—the centre towards which the heart is drawn with all its powers. The longing for the Lord, which the Apostle expresses in the words, “I

have a desire to depart and be with Christ, this makes us hasten. He who has such a longing hastens to meet the Lord Jesus, and asks day and night after His coming, with all those mighty and terrible events and perturbations of the vain and earthly existence which accompany it.

Yet more, he for whom this worldly existence—for whom this creation, spoiled and dominated by sin, and by it brought into the bondage of corruption—becomes ever more clearly understood; he who evermore distinctly perceives and experiences that there is nothing here that can calm and satisfy him—that rather, as the body, so also the whole earthly life has become subject to death as the wages of sin; he for whom visible Nature itself, in its fairest and most majestic manifestations, in which it proclaims the Creator, His goodness, and faithfulness, and glory, yet ever awakens a melancholy feeling of an alien state, a pilgrimage, a stranger-life on earth, and whose spirit can, on this account, never be entirely at home on earth,—he, at the same time, both waits and hastens.

Where is now the contradiction between waiting and hastening? Both are at the same time enjoined upon you. The coming of the Lord with all its judicial manifestations, is, for a child of God, only his final and complete redemption. We are waiting here on earth, not for the fire and destruction, but beyond this, for the new heaven and the new earth,

wherein dwelleth righteousness. We wait also, and hasten in this waiting, for the redemption of our body.

Oh, let us, beloved, in faith full often look forth into this future, and become ever more consoled by the reflection that this oppressive earthly burden, and also the body of this death, will be for us done away; and we are hastening towards a day—whether it be the day of death or the day of the Lord's coming—which will set us free into the perfect glorious liberty of the sons of God. Amen.

The New World of the Redeemed.



“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”—2 PETER iii. 13, 14.

MY BELOVED IN JESUS CHRIST,—The period of the Christian year in which we now stand,* we may call the time of the Holy Spirit, although Pentecost lies yet before us. For as our Lord before He ascended to heaven breathed upon His disciples and said, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost,” and only after He had gone to the Father, shed forth upon them the Holy Ghost and constituted them Apostles, so also may we regard the Sundays which lie between Passover and Pentecost, and especially the Sunday which comes between the Ascension and Pentecost, as a time of the Holy Spirit in an especial sense.

* Preached on the 16th May, 1858, Sunday after Ascension-day.

He is already breathed upon us before He is shed forth. It is the Holy Ghost who, through the word, makes all things in us, and around us, and through us, new. He works a renewing in our inner hidden man, a renewing of our whole doing and avoiding, a renewing of the family, of the church, of society. This work of the Holy Spirit is already present in prophecy; and precisely because the final goal of all the operations of the Holy Spirit is a perfect renewal, we have in our meditation—based upon the text chosen for the present day—come to the highest round of the heavenly ladder on which prophecy rises to its highest fulfilment, a fulfilment surpassing all human thoughts and all human wishes. We have hitherto followed the Apostolic prophecies—so far as they stand forth and may be singly presented, apart from the whole of the Apostolic doctrine—step by step, and cannot now do otherwise, when we have the highest summit thereof before us, than to dwell with adoration thereupon, and to open our hearts to the thoughts of eternity. This we do in fixing our eye upon THE NEW WORLD OF THE REDEEMED, and learn from the words of the Apostle first, WHAT THE REDEEMED EXPECT FROM AND IN THIS NEW WORLD, and then take to heart HOW WE HAVE TO WAIT FOR THIS NEW WORLD.

O Lord, Thou everlasting Head, in whom all things are comprehended and gathered up, which are in heaven and upon earth, in whom all past and all

future unites in an eternal glorious present, Thou everlasting Saviour, help us to meditate upon the word which Thou hast spoken to us in the Holy Spirit, through Thine Apostles, with deep earnestness and with the concentration of our whole inner man—the closed doors of our hearts being opened—as is needful, that it may manifest its living power in us, and prepare us for the great future towards which we are hastening. Amen.

OF THE NEW WORLD OF THE REDEEMED we are about to speak, as it is pointed out to us in the words of our text, "We look for new heavens and a new earth." For the first word of revelation from the mouth of God in Holy Scripture reads, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," and the last word of prophecy is that we have just read. Consequently, between the first arising of heaven and earth, and the last ever-abiding state of heaven and earth, is wrought out all the Divine economy, so far as we are able to understand it here on earth. And that not merely a new and better understanding, but that also a new sway and dominion is necessary, Holy Scripture makes known to us from beginning to end, in giving us to recognise in the mirror of God's truth, how greatly the old life of this present creation is involved in the darkness and wretchedness of sin and death. There is no Christian heart that has not many times in its life sighed over the old creation—over the whole present

state of things—and has longed for a new. There arises in every believer, at least at times, a fervent longing that at length all things might become entirely new, and that he himself might be able entirely to put away from himself all that belongs to the old.

This longing, however, is met by the promise. WE LOOK FOR SOMETHING IN AND FROM THE NEW WORLD, just because we are the redeemed of Jesus Christ. He who is not this, or who knows nothing of this redemption, can have no hope. He may, indeed, long, and be wearied of life—of the tabernacle in which he dwells, and of the wider dwelling-place in which he moves ; but hope and look forward can no one unless a Divine promise has been given him. Let us, however, well understand : it is not said that that which God has created—the whole great, fair, glorious, faultless world of God—is in itself rejected ; but it is said that as sin through man came into the world, and passed upon all men, so the curse was imposed upon man and upon humanity, and from thence upon all human relations, and therefore the bond of union with the earth, our common mother, has ceased to be merely a bond of blessing. God, indeed, blessed men and said, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it,” and thereby proclaimed His eternal purpose of love, that the blessing—the ever-enduring powers of life—which He breathed into man, should

flow forth from man again, and become scattered and diffused over the whole creation, so that man—man created after God's image, and developing himself in God's image, and ripening after the image now given us, unto the perfect standard of the manhood of Christ—might be the renewer of the earth. In this completion through man the whole visible world would reveal the image of God on a wide scale, as man originally revealed it on a narrow scale and in the individual. The impress of blessing, and, as it were, the countenance of God, was to be reflected from the whole creation. But into this scene, Satan, through the fall, has introduced a dark, sinister, and marred expression; into this harmony, originally designed by God, has come, through man, the discordant note of death, and from being a home of blessing—a mother in whose bosom the children peacefully sleep—the earth has become an all-devouring abyss, into which, by an inexorable law, every one must sink. “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

But not this only. Not merely physical death, and the struggle of life therewith—the whole toil and weariness by which we are worn away, and from which, sooner or later, we fall victims to the grave and corruption—but also the passionate conflict within, the struggle of passion and aversion, earthly love and earthly hatred, which more or less strongly runs through our whole life by way of attraction or

repulsion, has placed the life of earth under a curse. The curse, I say, is not laid upon the creation of God ; but through man, who, on account of his sin and guilt, is accursed, it has passed so greatly upon all earthly conditions of life, that there is no tender, fine, or even appreciable relation between man and the earth—between the individual and the whole in the visible world—in which there is not a trace of this curse and a testimony of decay and death.

Therefore, the whole world, when we regard it in the light of God's word, everywhere gives us to recognise that we are by nature the children of wrath and of death. Even the sweetest, loveliest inspirations of the natural life, and the fairest, noblest, and loftiest feelings derived from the contemplation of the beauty of that which God has made, are continually disturbed by the thought of the disquiet which makes its abode in this wide earthly domain ; by the blood-spots, the dark stains, with which the earth has been marked in the history of humanity ; yea, still more by the disquiet in our own hearts, by awakening out of that sweet dream of Nature to the sad reality of our life unreconciled to God, of our unforgiven sin, and, therefore, of the last judgment and the everlasting death which threatens us. Therefore, my beloved, can only the redeemed—who know that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Word by whom all things were made, has marked and consecrated this earth with His atoning blood ; and,

above all, has removed our guilt, and has delivered us from everlasting death—look forward with confidence to a new heaven and a new earth, which, according to the promise, are reserved for us.

Our text speaks not of some disconnected promise, some dark oracle which, scarcely intelligible, utters only uncertain tones, which point forward to renewal of some kind ; but this promise stands in connection with the fact that God from the beginning—by the curse which He has imposed on human life, and therewith upon man's whole relation to the earth and to the world—has not removed the original blessing, but that He caused the blessing to continue under the curse and beside the curse ; yea, ever afresh ratified it in the blessing of Noah, of Isaac, of Jacob, in the high-priestly benediction upon Israel, yea, perfectly and incontrovertibly, and with universal efficacy, in the appearing and incarnation of His only Son. In the life of our Lord Jesus himself—from His humiliation in the form of a servant, through His suffering upon the cross, and sinking into the gloomy depths of death, into the grave, but also through His resurrection and His being glorified until the Ascension—is the way given by which henceforth all those who have become one with Him in faith must also pass, and by which the kingdom of God, which embraces earth and heaven, must pass in its degree, and whose end is a renewing even unto the glorifying of this physical

nature which is now subject to vanity. Believers will arise in the power of Jesus Christ with fair and glorious bodies, like unto His body ; and the Holy Spirit will and must work renewingly in all those who seek first the purifying and glorifying of the inner man, will work the deliverance of that spirit in them which is allied to God, from the power of the flesh ; and from thence, through the soul, upon the body, and from thence upon that which surrounds them and upon the whole of Nature, so that the way which the curse has taken will be afresh for us pursued in Christ through the Holy Spirit. When, therefore, we now read that which the Apostle presents as the object of this expectation, it is not only that which is new, not only something more perfect, a higher degree of that which is already present, but he describes the new world as that “wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

Here, beloved, have you at once the key to the whole contemplation of the new world. Righteousness is its characteristic. But why does he not say, Glory? Wherefore not perfect innocence, sincerity, purity? All this dwelt upon earth before the fall ; dwells, in a certain sense, still upon earth, where man does not come with his torment, or rather with his inner corruption. Where God's creation reigns alone, there is still in the present day innocence, purity, we might even say glory, in which no human judgment can find anything to censure. But is *righteousness* –

that is to say, the condition upon earth according to God, fully corresponding with the holy will of God, presenting and expressing the image of God—anywhere to be found in the present visible world? Alas! if that were so, whence comes all the wretchedness, whence the many thousands who pass through life inwardly troubled and restless through sin, and—in order only to possess something—cling to Mammon, or to the enjoyment of the earthly nature, or to pride and the visionary glory of their renown for the present and the future? Whence comes it that so many thousands shudder at the thought of death and judgment, whenever the thought thereof in unguarded moments steals over the soul? Whence comes it that an undertone of sorrow is heard throughout the whole conscious creation? And if we look upon the outward fruits of the inward condition, alas! my beloved, whence comes it that so many thousands in Christendom are impelled to the last fruits of sin, to crime; that our prisons are overflowing, and the arm of Justice is well nigh wearied in doing that which devolves upon it? Whence comes it, that when help is sought for their deliverance, some hearts indeed beat with this desire and many hands are offered for this work, but the people as a whole, with coldness and indifference, go on their accustomed way, pursue their labour, their repose, their pleasure, and their enjoyments, and, revolving as in a circle, desire and seek for nothing

new? All this can only arise from the fact that here upon earth the new lives only in its first beginnings, in miniature, hidden for the majority, and the old—that which is laden with sin and the curse—enormously preponderates.

But righteousness will fill the new heaven and the new earth. Then, consequently, will there be no more sin ; for whoever has here lived to sin, and has died in it, will have gone to his own place. Upon the new earth and in the new heaven, however, will righteousness dwell, will be fulfilled the decree which has gone forth from the heart of the Three-one God which—realized in the earthly history of man, through the incarnation, the suffering, death, and resurrection of our Saviour Jesus Christ—is now translated into deed and life. Then it will be the impress everywhere prevailing ; and in all which the new heaven and the new earth contains, will everywhere be the one penetrating light of the righteousness of God—a righteousness which avails with God, and which God has created. Then will they live free from the sin which here ever cleaves to us and impedes us, from the fearful power of corruption ; free, therefore, also from the continual approach of death, free from all bondage ; as the freedmen of Jesus Christ, dearly purchased, and as the children who have been brought through sin and suffering to the glory of the Father.

This is expected by a redeemed one of the Lord

from and in the new world to which he is hastening. And, therefore, also he waits for the same; and IN WHAT MANNER DOES HE WAIT FOR IT? This the Apostle tells us in clear language. It is also to be understood from the nature of that which he expects; for if righteousness adorns, fills, and dwells throughout the new heaven and the new earth, yea, forms the true foundation of their newness, it is manifest, my beloved, that the unrighteous cannot enter into this new life. And unrighteous are all those who do not stand before the holy eyes of God, "pure and free, and perfectly moulded after the most perfect image." Unrighteous, therefore, are we all and each in our natural life, the noblest among us, as well the most degraded; unrighteous is all that bears the name of man upon earth, because all that bears the name of man bears also the name of sinner. Therefore must every one who looks for the new heaven and the new earth be already delivered from sin and its guilt, its death, its everlasting curse, and, therefore, also from its power. This was already expressed in the first general announcement of our subject. We spoke of the new world of the *Redeemed*. If thou art not yet assured of thy redemption through Jesus Christ; if thou hast not yet the testimony of the Holy Spirit that thou art a child of God; if thy sins still trouble the conscience, and thou dost shrink from the contact of death, and from the grasp of the powers of the second death, and of judgment, then

dost thou not yet wait for the kingdom of God, the kingdom of perfection beyond, the new heaven, and the new earth. For thou livest still in that which is old: the old surrounds thee, crushes thee still. But hast thou this assurance of redemption; art thou truly a child of God, made free from the former world of sin and death? Then hast thou peace within thyself; and of it the Apostle says, in this very text, "Be diligent, that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

To the question, How does the redeemed one wait for his new world? the Apostle gives the answer, He waits for it in peace. If man has not peace—peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and from this the peace of God which passeth all understanding—there is with him no true waiting for the new heaven and the new earth; but he waits for some other thing, perhaps only that the earthly may again assume for him a fairer, more agreeable, and less troublesome and straightening form. Alas! many are waiting for that which is new, but not for the new world; yea, many speak of a new world which must soon appear, and understand thereby only a new disposition of earthly things, in regard to themselves—not a world in which the peace of God reigns, but a world in which full satisfaction is granted in a grosser or more refined manner to the flesh and its desires. How often do we hear it said, we are on the eve of great events; something very

different must succeed. And the majority desire this new state ; but it is, when more closely looked upon, nothing but the old. That which is truly new is attained only when one is himself made new in the peace of God, and, consequently, has recognised flesh and blood as that which cannot inherit the kingdom of God ; when one has trodden under his feet pride, avarice, pleasure of the world ; when one has given himself up to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, and has experienced that there is nothing here on earth more blessed than with Him to be hated by the world, to bear reproach, with Him to suffer, that we may also with Him be glorified. This peace is not a repose, a quiet seclusion from the world, a passive and pleasant gliding at the impulse of Nature.

At the same time, it is not the intention of the Apostle, and not our design, that we should occupy ourselves merely with the glorious future, with that which will one day be, the great and blessed renewal of all things ; and thus to rise above all which we have to do and to learn. Waiting is rather a duty, and not always an easy task, but often an exceedingly difficult one ; for the problem is, while surrounded by all the daily claims of the present, while the heart is entwined with the sweetest and Divinely-consecrated bonds, yet to live in spirit beyond these things, and ever to await that which is new ; and yet again to live in the present, and even here to seek the completion in us of the work of renewal, and so far as our

powers suffice, to help to complete it. This apparent contradiction is comprehended in the words in which we are called to "give diligence." Not to a pleasant and luxurious seclusion within ourselves does the Apostle call us, or within a chosen circle of those who do not cross us in our way of thinking, who rather render the way smooth and plain for us, but to a labour, in doing which we must give diligence, a labour directed to the end that we "may be found of Him in peace."

We know not at any moment when the Lord may come; and no one, therefore, can be found of Him in peace, for whom this peace is not daily renewed. He who has once possessed it, and will live on the memory of it all his life, he who makes it a weakly thing of sentiment, and not an object of his daily seeking and apprehending, will hardly be found in peace. The Apostle on this account adds the words, "Without spot and blameless before Him." To be found without spot; how shall I attain to this? Thus much is clear, that if we are, as redeemed, ones looking in faith for the new heaven and the new earth, we shall find everything hateful and terrible for us which is not in harmony with this new world, and will not be meetened for the new world; that we consequently shall make our own daily renewal the great object of life. Only make the attempt, dear Christian, to set before thee as the one object of life thy daily renewal after the image of God—daily to

experience the forgiveness of sin, and daily, in return for this forgiveness, to present as a sacrifice to thy Lord Jesus, every drop of blood that flows in thy veins—and thou wilt find that there is no danger of forgetting the present, and living merely in longing desire for the glory of the new world. Thou wilt, in this way, find the Prince of Darkness thine enemy, and wilt have to combat thine own flesh and blood, and the present will truly give thee enough to do. In this case thou wilt come to perceive and experience that after once thy sins have been taken away through Jesus Christ, henceforth it is thy work daily to cast thyself afresh, with all that thou willest and doest, at the feet of the Lord, that thou mayest appear before Him without spot. Only this one thing suffices: daily anew to be clad in His innocence, holiness, and righteousness. Thus dost thou become blameless, so that even the law of God, the Word which is sharper than any two-edged sword, and the ever-active enemy of souls with his charges against us, and all those with whom we live or have lived on earth, and for whom our acts have been a cause of hindrance or of destruction, will not be able to take up against us a breath of accusation.

Venture for a moment to think of accomplishing this in your own strength! If even from this day you were able perfectly to renew your life, what power have you over the words you have spoken in the course of your life? Who knows whether

one of them was not the spark which has enkindled a forest; whether by one thoughtless or unguarded expression you may not have led many to destruction? What power have you over your past deeds, of which not one has remained without influence upon others? My dear friends, so to stand before the Lord, that no accusation may be taken up against us, when one day all things shall become manifest, and the hidden currents of influence which pass from one man to another—all the connected relations between our own state of heart and that of persons far removed from us—shall come to light: this is no human work. Only if Thou, Lord Jesus, Thyself dost purify, every day and hour, my life, past as well as present, unconscious as well as conscious, through Thy redemption and atonement, only if Thou coverest me with the robe of Thy righteousness, can no power in the world—none in heaven, none in hell—venture to open the mouth against me.

Beloved, thus indeed does the looking for the new world very seriously and powerfully lead our thoughts back to this present world. Oh, that we may follow this leading, and already begin our renewing through the blood of Jesus Christ, and continue therein, through following in His footsteps with unceasing prayer, and with the ruling desire, which shall control or uproot all other desires in us—the desire of becoming perfectly like our Lord Jesus Christ!

This were the beginning of the new world in the old ; and only he who has already on earth received the renewing of the Holy Spirit, will be at home in the new world, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Thither, Lord, draw our hearts ! Amen.

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