

Second Coming of Christ

PREMILLENNIAL ESSAY

OF THE

PROPHETIC CONFERENCE,

HELD IN THE

CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY, NEW YORK CITY.

WITH AN

APPENDIX OF CRITICAL TESTIMONIES.

BY

NATHANIEL WEST.
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Ναὶ ἔρχομαι ταχύ. Ἀμήν, Ἐρχου, Κύριε Ἰησοῦ.

Chicago:

F. H. REVELL, 148 AND 150 MADISON STREET.

Publisher of Evangelical Literature,

1879.



BT 885

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57265

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A SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT IN DEFENCE OF PRE-MILLENNARIANISM.

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THE Scriptures unquestionably teach that the Lord Jesus, once on this earth in an estate of humiliation, shall return again "in His glory," and "the glory of the Father, with His holy angels." The Scriptures also contain many predictions yet unfulfilled, of an era of universal righteousness and peace on earth, when there shall be "given to the Son of Man dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people and nations and languages should serve Him;" when "the nations shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks, and shall learn war no more;" when "they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying: Know the Lord, for all shall know Him, from the least to the greatest;" when "the kingdoms of this world shall become (the Kingdom) of our Lord and of His Christ."

The question at issue between Pre-Millennarians and their brethren is as to *the order* in which these two predicted events shall occur. Will the universal reign of righteousness and peace on earth—from Rev. 20:3, commonly called "*the Millennium*"—precede the Advent; or is this Messianic Kingdom of prophecy to be manifested at, and not before, "the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ?"

Whilst there are some predicted events, yet future, in regard to which a difference of opinion as to the order of their occurrence is a matter of little or no practical moment,

the question as to the order of occurrence of the two events just mentioned is one of the highest importance, affecting as it does the meaning and practical influence of much of the Saviour's instruction, especially of that solemn injunction, emphasized by repetition and illustrated by parable, with which He closes His discourse on eschatology—a discourse which occupies a larger place in the inspired record than any other of the recorded discourses of the Saviour, not even excepting the Sermon on the Mount. The order of occurrence of the two events mentioned affects, further, the meaning and practical influence of a doctrine urged by the inspired apostles more frequently and prominently than any other, as an incentive to holy living and fidelity in Christ's service.

It is with this conviction of the importance of the question at issue, we have met together, that with united prayer for divine guidance, we may "*hold forth*," what we regard as a precious, though now much neglected, portion of "*the Word of Life*," and, with all respect for our brethren who differ from us, may submit for their serious consideration, the "*reasons for the faith wherein we stand*."

In the discharge of the particular duty assigned me, of presenting a summary of the argument in defence of Pre-Millennarianism, permit me to do it in the form of a reply to the question—*Will the predicted Millennial era of universal righteousness and peace on earth, precede the Advent?* Whilst there are other questions of exceeding interest involved in the Pre-Millennarian controversy, the question proposed is undoubtedly *the main question*—I might almost say, the only question of immediate practical importance.

In view of much that has been said and written on the discussion of this subject, it may not be amiss to remark, that the question at issue is a purely Scriptural one—to be

decided solely by God's word. We might, indeed, maintain that there is nothing in the past history of the Church or of the world, to justify the expectation that at any future time the Gospel will prevail throughout the entire world as it never has prevailed in any portion of it. But we place no confidence in any mere influences of the human judgment in regard to the future. God undoubtedly might convert the world in a single day. The question is not one of *power*, but of *purpose*, and what God's purpose is, we can learn only by reference to His revealed will. Never is the wisdom of this world more conspicuously foolishness, than when it seeks, in regard to the future, "to be wise above that which is written." And especially we may say, is this true, with respect to the question proposed. For the revelation that Christ will ever again return to this earth, is no more distinct, than is the revelation that when He does come, it will be "at an hour when men think not." "To the law," then, "and the testimony." If any, on this question, "speak not according to God's word, there is no light in them."

In reply to the question proposed, we remark:

1. If the Millennial era is to occur during the present Dispensation, *we should expect to find the Doctrine prominent in the New Testament.*

At the present day those who hold the above doctrine regard it as of eminent practical importance, and continually urge the prospect of the conversion of the world, and the introduction of the Millennium, as the main if not the sole incentive to the fulfillment of the great commission given to the Church by her ascending Saviour. So, undoubtedly, would Christ and the inspired Apostles have regarded this doctrine, and so would they have proclaimed it, distinctly and prominently, had they believed it. What, then, are we to infer, when, throughout the New Testament, the doc-

trine is not only not prominent, but is not taught—certainly is not expressly and unequivocally taught—in a single passage? We feel justified in making the assertion by the fact, that so far as we have seen or heard, the only passages of the New Testament, adduced in support of the doctrine, by its advocates, are the following: The Parable of the grain of mustard seed, the Parable of the leaven, the Commission given to the Church, to “go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature,” and the Saviour’s declaration, (John 12:32) “And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.” Now, without stopping to discuss the meaning of the passages, and to present—as we might—an interpretation of them entirely consistent with pre-millennarianism, we respectfully ask, do they teach the doctrine of a Millennial era before the Advent, so expressly and unequivocally as to be decisive of the question at issue? Would they be so, even were there not—as there are—numerous other passages of Scripture which certainly seem to teach—and that in express terms—the very opposite doctrine? Had the Saviour intended the Church to expect the Millennium during the present Dispensation, is it credible that He would have made no more distinct allusion to it than is contained (as is alleged) in the passages referred to? Would He have failed to assert it distinctly, when giving to His disciples their great commission? Would He have omitted—as He has omitted—any intimation of it, in His extended discourse on Eschatology, uttered for the very purpose of instructing the disciples as to the state of the Church, and of the world, during the entire period of the present Dispensation? He does predict “wars and rumors of wars, famines and pestilences and earthquakes;” He does forewarn the disciples of the opposition of the world to themselves and their message. He foretells corruption in the Church, that “iniquity

shall abound," that "the love of many shall wax cold," that only they who "shall endure unto the end shall be saved," adding: "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,*" but not one word respecting the Millennium. Had he intended the Church to believe what is now the prevailing belief on this subject, is not this omission wholly inexplicable?

But further—and to this we call particular attention—the advocates of the common doctrine do not, so far as we are aware, pretend to find a single passage in its favor in the *Book of the Acts, or in any of the Apostolical Epistles*. Now, again we ask: Is it credible that the Apostles held the doctrine which now prevails in the Church, and yet in all their preaching and their writings, should make no allusion to it? If this doctrine be, as many allege, of paramount importance, as an incentive to missionary effort now, was it less so in apostolic days, when the Church was just entering on the fulfillment of her great commission, and the *work of Missions* was the one work above all others to which her energies were to be specially directed? As the Apostles spoke and wrote under the influence of the promised Spirit, of whom the Saviour said: "He shall teach you all things and bring to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you," is not their silence conclusive, not only that they were not taught the doctrine directly by the Spirit, but, also, that they did not understand it to be taught by the Parable of the grain of mustard seed, or the Parable of the leaven or the terms of their Commission, or by any other utterance of the blessed Saviour? Now, we respectfully submit: "*Can that be an article of the Christian faith which is nowhere to be found in the teaching of Christ, or of His Apostles?*"

2. This *negative* argument, which of itself would seem

to be decisive as to the point at issue, is confirmed by *the distinct and abundant positive teaching of the New Testament, respecting the present Dispensation.*

Until we come to the closing chapters of the Apocalypse, the Church is uniformly represented as the Church *militant*—not the Church *triumphant*. The antagonism of the Church and the world, the elect and the great mass of mankind, is asserted or assumed on every page. The Gospel was, indeed, to be preached among all nations—not with the assurance or intimation that the world would thereby be converted, but “*for a witness* unto all nations.” Matt. 24: 14. The last recorded utterance of the Saviour ere He ascended into heaven was the declaration of His disciples, “*Ye shall be witnesses unto Me* in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Acts 1: 8. God is visiting the Gentiles to “*take out* of them a people for His name.” Acts 15: 14. This idea as to the purpose for which the Gospel is to be preached to all is signalized by the very name by which the people of God are designated. The Church is the “ἐκκλησία”—the “called out” from the mass of mankind—the “redeemed *out of* every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.” “Many shall be called, but few chosen.” To illustrate and enforce this very truth, three notable parables were uttered by the Saviour, and to emphasize their importance and prevent the possibility of misapprehension as to their meaning, their interpretation was given to the disciples and recorded in minute detail for the instruction of the Church throughout the New Testament dispensation. Only a portion of the seed of Gospel truth falls “on good ground”—the rest on “the wayside,” “on stony places,” and “among thorns.” The visible Church is as “a net cast into the sea,” it may inclose “a great multitude of fishes,” but not all; and of those that are gathered in there are

“bad,” as well as “good.” There are tares among the wheat—“the children of the wicked one” among “the children of the Kingdom,”—both are “to grow together until the harvest,” and “*the harvest is the end of the world.*” “This world”—“this present evil world”—*world*, not as denoting the great mass of the unregenerate, but “this *αἰών*,” or *dispensation*—“this present evil *αἰών*”—is contrasted with “the *αἰών μέλλων*”—“the world to come”—and “the Prince,” and “the God” of *this* world, is not Christ, but Satan. “We see not yet all things put under Christ.” It is “the world to come” that is to be in subjection to Him. *Now*, the Christian life is a warfare, and *the world* and *Satan*, as well as the flesh, are enemies. We are exhorted to “clothe ourselves in the armor of God, that we may be able to withstand the wiles of the devil.” Is there any intimation in God’s word, that at any period of the present dispensation, this and similar representations with which the New Testament abounds, are to become obsolete? And yet, will not this be so, if for a thousand years before the Advent, Satan is to be “bound and cast into the bottomless pit, that he go not forth to deceive the nations?” Is there any intimation in the New Testament that at any period of this dispensation, the commission to “teach all nations,” is to become obsolete? And yet, will not this be so, if, before the Advent, there is to be an era when “they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know Him, from the least to the greatest?” In the second Epistle to the Thessalonians, 2d chapter, Paul foretells what would occur before the Advent, and he mentions, not the Millennium, but *an apostasy*. “That day shall not come except there be *a falling away* first, and the man of sin be revealed;” and as if to exclude the idea of *the Millennium* intervening, he adds: “Whom the Lord shall

destroy with the brightness of His coming" the *Epiphany* of His *Parousia*—terms which, throughout the New Testament, are specially appropriated to designate the personal Advent of the Lord, when He shall come again "in His glory."

These references to the *positive* teaching of the New Testament respecting the present dispensation might be extended indefinitely. But it is needless. If the question at issue is to be determined by the authority of God's word, do not the passages above referred to furnish a demonstration of the pre-millennarian faith, which can not be successfully gainsaid or resisted?

3. Whilst the New Testament makes no allusion to a universal reign of righteousness before the Advent, *the Advent itself is repeatedly, prominently referred to, and as an event ever imminent—the great object of the Christian's desire and expectation.*

As Christ's "appearing and His Kingdom" are in the New Testament conjoined, He has made the desire for His "appearing" part of the first petition of our daily prayer. That His followers might have it ever in view, He reminds them of it in every administration of that Holy Sacrament in which we "do show the Lord's death *until He comes.*" "Paul in all his Epistles speaketh of these things." (2 Peter 3:16.) Peter speaks of it again and again in his first Epistle, and then makes it the one theme of a second Epistle. James and John, and even Jude in his brief Epistle, holds it prominently forth. The Apocalypse opens with the announcement, "*Behold He Cometh,*" and closes with the declaration of Christ Himself, "*Surely I come quickly,*" and the responsive prayer of the beloved disciple, the last utterance of the breath of inspiration, "*Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus.*"

Not only is "this blessed hope" thus prominent, but no

other truth of our holy religion is more frequently urged as an incentive to holiness, to patience under suffering, to steadfastness in the faith, to vigilance and fidelity in Christ's service. "The day is at hand, let us, *therefore*, cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." (Rom. 13:12.) "Be patient, brethren, the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." (Jas. 5:7.) "The end of all things is at hand, Be ye *therefore* sober and watch unto prayer." (1 Pet. 4:7.) "The day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night, *therefore*, let us watch and be sober." (1 Thess. 5:2, 6.)

It should be observed that the point of these inspired exhortations, and of other similar passages that might be quoted, is not the mere *fact* or *certainly* of the Advent, but its *possible nearness*, that for aught that was revealed, it might occur in their day.

Now, is this the language of men who believed that a millennium was to intervene before the Advent? Had such been their faith, could they have uttered such exhortations? Pre-millennarians express their distinctive faith in the very language of the inspired Apostles. Could they do so if the inspired Apostles were not pre-millennarians?

And here, without subjecting ourselves to the charge of uncharitableness, may we not be permitted to ask, do our post-millennarian brethren treat the doctrine of the Advent as the Apostles treated it? Are they heard proclaiming, with the emphasis, and frequency, and urgency, with which the Apostles proclaimed it: "*The coming of the Lord draweth nigh!*" "*The day of the Lord is at hand?*" Does "the glorious appearing," and the possible nearness of it, occupy that prominent place in the teaching and the experience of the church at the present day, which, beyond all question, those precious truths do occupy in the inspired word? Or has not the expectation of the conversion of the world and the millennium *before* the Advent, thrust

into the back ground, and crowded almost entirely out of view, and of influence, the Apostolic doctrine and Apostolic exhortations respecting "*the glorious appearing?*"

In probably the ablest work which has been written in defence of the common *opinion*, Dr. Brown, with commendable candor, says, "Pre-millennialists have done the Church a service by calling attention to the place which the Second Advent holds in the Word of God and the scheme of divine truth. When they dilate upon the prominence given to this doctrine in the Scriptures, and the practical uses which are there made of it, they touch a chord in the heart of every lover of the Lord, and carry conviction to all who tremble at His word. With them we affirm, that THE REDEEMER'S SECOND APPEARING IS THE VERY POLE-STAR OF THE CHURCH. *That it is so set forth in the New Testament is beyond all dispute.*" He subsequently adds, "If Christ's Second Appearing, instead of being full in the view of the Church, is shifted into the background, while other anticipations are advanced into its room, which, though themselves Scriptural, do not occupy in the Scriptures the place which we assign them, *are we trembling at the authority and wisdom of God in His Word, or are we not rather leaning on our own understanding?*"

In view of such declarations by one of the most eminent defenders of the common doctrine—whose Biblical scholarship none will call in question—are we not justified in saying, that when any presume to denounce pre-millennarianism, as many do, as a wholly unscriptural and hurtful delusion, they but make manifest that they have never given to the subject, calm, dispassionate, and unprejudiced consideration?

4. The doctrine of a millennium before the Advent is inconsistent with the Saviour's solemn injunction, five times repeated in the Gospel record, and illustrated and enforced again and again by parable, "*Watch, for in such an hour*

as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." (Matt. 24: 42; 25: 13. Mark 13: 33, 35. Luke 21: 36.) "*And what I say unto you I say unto all, watch.*" (Mark 13: 37.)

The coming here referred to is described in the context as "*the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*"

Now, the point to which we would direct attention is, that the duty here enjoined is not simply that of *believing that the Lord will certainly come again at some time in the distant future*—it is that of *watching for His coming as an event ever imminent*. Watching for the occurrence of an expected event, and believing that an event will occur after a long interval of time, are two entirely different states of mind. Now, can we believe that when the Lord enjoined the former, He intended to enjoin the latter? Further, *the reason annexed to the injunction* determines its meaning beyond the possibility of excusable misapprehension. We are to do what is here commanded because we "*Know not the hour when the Son of Man cometh.*" The duty has respect, not to the certainty of the event, but to *the uncertainty as to the time* of its occurrence.

If watching with expectation as for an imminent event be the duty enjoined, the force of the reason annexed is evident. On the other hand, if believing in the certainty of the event is what is intended, is not the reason annexed wholly irrelevant? Is it credible that the Saviour meant to enjoin, "Believe that I shall certainly come again in the distant future, after the conversion of the world and one of universal righteousness on earth, *for ye know not the hour when the Son of Man cometh?*"

So also would the accompanying parables be wholly irrelevant, if the Coming of the Lord is not to be regarded as an event ever imminent. "If the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would

have watched." We are to be expecting the Lord's Coming as the virgins the coming of the bridegroom, as servants the return of their master, not knowing whether he would come at "even, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning." The offence of "the evil servant" was not that he denied or doubted the certainty of the Master's return—that he acknowledges in the very language attributed to him. His offence was "saying in his heart"—what many of the Lord's servants nowadays say with their lips, and even insist on as an article of faith—"My lord delayeth his coming."

In view of the unequivocal language in which the injunction is expressed, the reason annexed to it, and the parables which accompany it, is any other interpretation possible, than that given in our Westminster Confession, Chap. XXXIII., Sec. 3—"Christ will have that day unknown to men that they may shake off all carnal security, and be *always watchful because they know not at what hour the Lord will come?*" And if this be its meaning, is it not inconsistent with the doctrine that the millennium is to intervene before the Advent?

5. The doctrine is also inconsistent with the repeated and explicit teaching of the New Testament, that *the manifestation of the Messianic Kingdom and the Second Advent are to be synchronous events.* (Luke 19: 12-27.) "He spake a parable because they were nigh unto Jerusalem, and because they thought that the Kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said, therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. And when he was returned, having received the kingdom," etc. We are here taught two things—first, that the disciples were not in error in expecting a kingdom to be manifested here on the earth, under the personal reign of the Messiah. Their error was

as to the time of the manifestation. The correction of their error as to *the time*, is an implied acknowledgment that their expectation was correct as to *the fact*. Secondly, we are expressly taught that the Kingdom which Christ has gone into the heavens to receive of the Father, is to be manifested at, and not before, His return again to this earth.

Luke 21:24-31—The Saviour here predicts events that are to immediately precede the Advent—"signs in the sun and moon and in the stars, and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity—and then shall they see *the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory*. And He spake a parable, Behold the fig tree and all the trees, when they now shoot forth ye see and know that Summer is nigh at hand. So likewise when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that *the Kingdom of God* is nigh at hand." The coming of the Son of man, and the Kingdom of God, are here assumed to be synchronous events—with respect to the time of their occurrence, the one is referred to as identical with the other.

Again, Acts 3:19-21—"Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, whom the heavens must receive UNTIL the time of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." That the expressions, "the times of refreshing," "the times of restitution of all things, refer to the Messianic kingdom predicted by all the Old Testament prophets is not, so far as we are aware, called in question. We have here, then, an inspired declaration upon the very point at issue, so explicit that we might have supposed it would have been regarded as decisive. Yet, to avoid its force, the advocates of the common theory (see Dr. Brown, Dr. Alexander, Mr. Barnes, and others) maintain that by the words

“until the times of restitution,” we are to understand until the times of restitution are *fulfilled or ended*. That is, if the apostle had declared that Christ should not come *until the nineteenth century!* he would have meant until the nineteenth century had been “*completed*”—that is, *until the twentieth century*. For an interpretation so unnatural what other reason can be assigned than the exigency of an erroneous theory? In the passage quoted above from Luke 21, when the Saviour wished to teach that Jerusalem should be trodden down until the times of the Gentiles *were fulfilled*, he said so. Why should not Peter have said so here if he had intended to express the same idea?

Again, 2 Tim. 4:1—“I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at *His appearing and His kingdom*.”

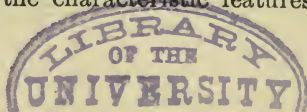
Again, Rev. 11:15-18—“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in the heaven saying, *The kingdoms of this world are become (the kingdoms) of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever*. And the nations were angry, and Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead that they should be judged, and that Thou shouldst give reward unto Thy servants the prophets, and to Thy saints, and to them that fear Thy name, small and great, and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth.” Now, there are undoubtedly many things in the Apocalypse, as in the other Scriptures, “hard to be understood,” but unless the title of this book be altogether a misnomer, we are here taught that *when Christ shall come to judge the world*, then, and not before, “the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.”

6. That we have not misapprehended the New Testament doctrine respecting the Millennium is confirmed—were confirmation necessary—by the fact that *the Apostolic*

Church understood the Apostles to teach that the Second Coming of the Lord was an event ever imminent.

They accordingly "looked for" the Advent with longing desire and expectation—not (as many misapprehend and misrepresent the doctrine of the Apostolic Church on this subject) with expectation that the Advent *would certainly occur* in their day, but, that for aught that was revealed, *it might occur* in their day. The Corinthian Christians are commended by Paul, in that they "came behind in no gift, *waiting for* the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 1:5.) The conversion of the Thessalonians from heathenism to Christianity is described as "turning from idols to serve the living and the true God, and to *wait for* His Son from heaven." (1 Thess. 1:10.) So common was this expectation in the Apostolic Church, that Christians were designated by this characteristic of their piety. "Unto them that *look for* Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." (Heb. 9:28.) "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me in that day; and not to me only, but unto all them that *love His appearing.*" (2 Tim. 4:8.) See also Rom. 8:19-23; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 4:15; 5:10; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 3:11-13.

In his commentary on 1 Cor. 1:7, Dr. Hodge remarks: "The second advent of Christ, so clearly predicted by Himself and His Apostles, was the object of longing expectation to all the early Christians. So general was this expectation, that Christians were characterized as those 'who love His appearing'—as those 'who wait for Him.'" Mr. Barnes, on the same passage, remarks: "The earnest expectation of the Lord Jesus became one of the marks of early Christian piety." In Lange's commentary on the same passage it is said: "This constant expectation of our Lord's Second Coming is one of the characteristic features



of primitive Christianity; hence the clause has been taken as a simple paraphrase of the word Christians." In Conybeare and Howson's *Life of St. Paul*, (Vol. I, p. 401, Amer. ed.) it is said: "The early Church, and even the Apostles themselves, expected the Lord to come again in that very generation. St. Paul himself shared in that expectation."

In his recent work on "The Beginning of Christianity," Professor Fisher—who is not a Pre-Millennarian—says: "This expectation (of the personal Coming of the Lord) is expressed by all the Apostles in terms which fairly admit of no other interpretation. It is found in Paul, Rom. 13:11, 12; 1 Cor. 7:29, 31; 10:11; Phil. 4:5; 1 Tim. 6:14. The same expectation is expressed in Heb. 10:25; Jas. 5:3, 8; 1 Pet. 4:7; 2 Pet. 3:3; Jude, verse 18; 1 John 2:18; and in the Apocalypse 1:1; 3:11; 22:7, 22, 20. To put any other construction on these passages, as if the *Parousia* to which they refer were anything else than the Second Advent of the Lord to judgment, would introduce a dangerous license in interpretation, and one which might be employed to subvert the principal doctrines of the Christian system."

Without extending these references to authorities—as we might—it may be regarded as an acknowledged historical fact that, on the main point at issue between Pre-Millennarians and their brethren, the Apostolic Church was Pre-Millennarian. The question under discussion, therefore, resolves itself into this: Was the Apostolic Church in error on this subject? If the question were as to the meaning of some obscure and comparatively unimportant passage of the New Testament, the interpretation of the Apostolic Church might not be regarded as authoritative and final. But when the question has reference to a doctrine repeatedly and prominently presented by both Christ and the Apostles—presented, too, as a matter of the highest practical moment

and in terms, moreover, which imply that the subject was familiarly known and well understood—is it not simply incredible, that after all, not merely here and there an ignorant believer, but that the whole body of believers—the Church in which dwells the promised Spirit as a guide to truth—should have entirely misapprehended the meaning of their inspired teachers, and have been, not merely in doubt, but in positive error, as to the duty to which they were exhorted? Is it credible that a doctrine which uninspired men at the present day have no difficulty in stating in terms that can not be misunderstood, those holy men, who spake and wrote “as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,” not only failed to teach intelligibly, but even commended the misapprehension of those who were led into error by their teaching? Or, if we accept the inevitable conclusion that the inspired Apostles did not teach this doctrine, by what authority do any teach it now?

7. The doctrine of the Pre-Millennial Advent continued to be *the unquestioned faith of the Church until near the close of the third century*—that is, until the time of Origen. He taught that “the Scriptures are of little use if we understand them as they are written;” and, with reference to his allegorizing—now called *spiritualizing*—method of interpretation, Milner says: “No man, not altogether unsound and hypocritical, ever injured the Church more than Origen did.”

In proof of our main statement above, the following authorities may suffice:

Mosheim says: “The prevailing opinion that Christ was to come and reign a thousand years among men before the final dissolution of the world, had met with *no opposition previous to the time of Origen.*”

Gieseler says: “In all the works of this period (the first two centuries) Millenarianism is so prominent that *we can*

not hesitate to consider it as universal." Hagenbach qualifies this statement of Gieseler by mentioning certain Fathers of this period whose writings contain no reference to the Millennium, but neither Hagenbach or any other Church historian refers to any expression opposed to Millennarianism in the writings of any, of the Fathers before Origen.

Chillingworth, with his characteristic invulnerable logic, argues: "Whatever doctrine is believed and taught by the most eminent Fathers of any age of the Church, and by none of their cotemporaries opposed or condemned, *that* is to be esteemed the catholic doctrine of the Church of those times. But the doctrine of the Millennaries was believed and taught by the most eminent Fathers of the age next after the Apostles, and by none of that age opposed or condemned; therefore, *it was the catholic doctrine of those times.*"

Stackhouse, in his "Complete Body of Divinity," says: "It can not be denied but that this doctrine (millennarianism) has its antiquity, and *was once the general opinion of all orthodox Christians.*"

Bishop Newton says: "The doctrine of the Millennium (as held by Millennarians) *was generally believed in the three first and purest ages.*"

Bishop Russell, though an anti-Millennarian, says: "Down to the beginning of the fourth century, *the belief was universal and undisputed.*"

Gibbon, who is at least an unprejudiced witness, says: "The ancient and popular doctrine of the Millennium was carefully inculcated by a succession of Fathers from Justin Martyr and Irenæus, who conversed with the immediate disciples of the Apostles, down to Lactantius, who was the preceptor of the son of Constantine. It appears to have been *the reigning sentiment of orthodox believers.*" He

adds: "As long as this error (as he calls it) was permitted to subsist in the Church, it was productive of the *most salutary effects* on the faith and practice of Christians."

Not to needlessly extend this list of authorities, we would only add the testimony of Whitby, the father of the modern anti-millennarian theory. In his "Treatise on Tradition" he candidly acknowledges, "The doctrine of the millennium passed among the best of Christians, for two hundred and fifty years, as a tradition apostolical, and as such is delivered by many fathers of the second and third centuries, who speak of it as *a tradition of our Lord and His Apostles, and of all the ancients who lived before them*, who tell us the very words in which it was delivered, the Scriptures which were so interpreted, and say that *it was held by all Christians that were exactly orthodox.*"

8. The common doctrine respecting the Millennium is *a novelty in the history of the church*. It is not to be found in the standards of any of the churches of the Reformation—by several it is impliedly repudiated. The same may be said of the writings of the Reformers. The doctrine was first proposed by Whitby, but little more than 150 years ago, and avowedly as "a New Hypothesis."

Respecting the Millennium, the prevalent doctrine in the churches of the Reformation—though by no means universally accepted—was that held by the Romish Church, that *the Millennium had already occurred*—some dating its commencement from the birth of Christ, others from the day of Pentecost, others from the destruction of Jerusalem, others from the conversion of Constantine. Those who held this opinion differed from the Pre-millennarians on the comparatively unimportant question respecting the events to occur subsequent to the Advent, but on the main question—the only question of immediate practical importance—that now under discussion—they were in entire accord with the Pre-millennarians.

The language in which several of the Confessions condemn the Anabaptist heresy, is inconsistent with the idea of a Millennial era before the Advent. The Augsburg Confession condemns those "who spread abroad Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall get the sovereignty of the world and the wicked be brought under in every place." The later Confession of Helvetia "condemns the Jewish dreams that before the judgment there shall be a golden world in the earth, and that the godly shall possess the kingdoms of the world, their wicked enemies being trodden under foot."

As to the Westminster Confession, a recent writer in defence of the common doctrine says, "the only recognition we find anywhere in the Standards (of the Presbyterian Church) is *that* in the Answer of the Larger Catechism to the Question, 'What do we pray for in the second petition of the Lord's prayer?' It is said among other things that we pray, that 'the Gospel may be propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, and the fullness of the Gentiles brought in.'" Now, is there anything in this language inconsistent with Pre-millennarianism? Taken in connection with the language quoted above from the Westminster Confession—that "Christ will have the day of His coming unknown to men that they may be ever watchful"—is it not just such a *recognition* of a Millennium before the Advent, as we should expect to find in Standards framed by an Assembly, of which Baillie, one of the Commissioners from Scotland, and an Anti-Millennarian, writes, "The most of the chief divines here, not only Independents, but others, such as Twisse (the Moderator), Marshall, Palmer, and others, are express Chiliasts." As the question has recently been gravely—we can scarcely say, seriously—raised, whether Pre-millennarians shall be tolerated in the Presbyterian Church? we may be permitted to suggest that

the discussion may be materially abridged by stating the question in the following form: Shall a doctrine which was held by most of the eminent divines of the Westminster Assembly, including the Moderator, be tolerated in the Presbyterian Church?

As to the views of the Reformers:

Luther, in his commentary on John 10:16, says: "Some say that before the latter day the whole world shall become Christians. This is a falsehood forged by Satan, that he might darken sound doctrine. Beware of the delusion."

Again he says: "I believe that all the signs which are to precede the last day have already happened." "Let us not think that the Coming of Christ is far off; let us look up with heads lifted up; let us expect our Redeemer's coming with a longing and cheerful mind."

Melancthon, as quoted by Elliott, says: "This aged world is not far from its end."

Calvin, in his Institutes, Book III, chap. 25, says: "Scripture uniformly enjoins us to look with expectation for the Advent of Christ." Again, Commentary on 1 Thess. 1:10: "Whoever would persevere in the course of a holy life, let him apply his whole mind to the hope of the Advent of Christ." Commentary on 1 Thess. 4:17 ("we which are alive," etc.) "By speaking in the first person, making himself, as it were, one of the number of those who would live until the last day, he would arouse the Thessalonians to wait for it—nay more, to hold all believers in suspense."

John Knox, in his treatise on fasting, says: "The Lord Jesus shall return, and that with expedition. What were this else but to reform the face of the whole earth, which never was, nor yet shall be, till that righteous King and Judge appear for the restoration of all things." Again: "Our Heavenly Father, to hold us in remembrance that in

this wretched world there is no rest, suffereth us to be tried, that with an unfeigned heart we may desire not only an end of our own troubles—for that shall come to us by death—but also of all troubles of the Church of God, which shall not be before the Coming of the Lord Jesus.” Again: “By the signs forespoken by our Master, which for the most part are now present (fulfilled), consider the end of this most corrupt world to be short.”

Without further particular quotation, the following testimony of the martyr Latimer, as to the faith of the Reformers, may suffice: “All those excellent and learned men whom, without doubt, God hath sent into the world in these latter days to give the world warning, do gather out of Scripture that the last day can not be far off.” (*Third Sermon on the Lord’s Prayer.*) Again, he says: “Peradventure it may come in my days, old as I am, or in my children’s days.”

After carefully investigating the subject, Dr. Henshaw, the late Bishop of Rhode Island, in his treatise on the Second Advent, says: “We may safely challenge its advocates (the advocates of the common doctrine) to produce one distinguished writer in its favor who lived before the commencement of the eighteenth century.”

Now, we respectfully submit: Can that be an article of the Christian faith which not only was not believed, but is inconsistent with what was believed by the Apostolic Church, by the Church for the two succeeding centuries, and by the Church of the Reformation? Ought not such *consent* in favor of the Pre-Millennial Advent to be regarded as decisive?

Our reasons, then, for rejecting the doctrine of a millennial era of universal righteousness and peace on earth before the Advent, are summarily as follows:

1. The doctrine is not taught by either Christ or His Apostles.

2. The uniform teaching of the New Testament respecting the condition of the Church and of the world during the present dispensation, forbids the expectation of such a millennium.

3. The Advent itself, not the millennium, is prominently presented in the New Testament as "the blessed hope" of the Church, and is uniformly presented as an event ever imminent.

4. The Saviour's repeated command to "watch" for His coming, because we "know not the hour," is inconsistent with the idea of a millennium intervening.

5. The New Testament teaches that the manifestation of the Messianic Kingdom is to occur at, and not before, the Advent.

6. The Apostolic Church was pre-millennarian.

7. The Church for two centuries immediately succeeding the Apostles, was pre-millennarian.

8. The doctrine of a millennial era before the Advent is a novelty in the history of the Church proposed but little more than 150 years ago, and avowedly as "a New Hypothesis."

We have given a summary of the argument in defence of pre-millennarianism. Permit me in closing, to direct attention to the summary of Christian faith and practice given by an inspired Apostle. "*The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, LOOKING FOR THAT BLESSED HOPE, EVEN THE GLORIOUS APPEARING OF THE GREAT GOD AND OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST.*" "*These things,*" said Paul to Titus—and through him to all who labor in the ministry of the world—" *These things teach and exhort.*" In obedience to the Apostolic injunction, let me exhort you who hear us this day, to "watch" for the

glorious appearing, as servants for the return of the master, "*for ye know not the hour when the Lord cometh.*" Let scoffers ask, "Where is the promise of His coming?" Let believers ask, "Why think ye that His coming is imminent?" Brethren, "Ye are not in darkness that that day should overtake you unawares, ye yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord shall come," that it shall come "as a thief in the night," "in an hour when men think not," when the world is saying "peace and safety," when even the vigil virgins are slumbering and sleeping, as the flood in the days of Noah, as the lightning from heaven on Sodom, unexpected, unsuspected, "*So, shall the coming of the Son of Man be.*" "Let us, then, who are of the day watch and be sober." With trimmed lamps and loins girded, let us watch and wait with longing desire and expectation for the coming of the Master, for "*Blessed is that servant whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching.*"