

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, Ἐρχοῦ, Κύριε Ἰησοῦ.



Chicago:

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

Publisher of Evangelical Literature,

1879.

BT 885

WA

57265

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F. H. REVELL,

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CHRIST'S COMING—IS IT PRE-MILLENNIAL?

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THAT the Lord Jesus Christ, in his glorified human nature, is yet to return to this earth, is and always has been the faith and hope of the Church. In this article of faith, Protestant and Romanist, Greek and Oriental Christians, are all agreed. That same Jesus which was taken up from us into heaven, shall so come in like manner as He was seen to go. The so-called Millennarian controversy has never involved any doubt as to the fact that there is to be a literal bodily return of the risen Jesus in the clouds of heaven to this very earth which witnessed His humiliation and rejection. The undivided Church joins with one accord in those words of the Te Deum, "We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge." Nor is the question before us whether this world shall become subject to Christ. The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. "All nations shall serve and obey Him." On this subject Scripture is so explicit that no body of Christians has ever rejected the doctrine. This is the eternal decree of the Father: "Ask of Me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Nor is there any question as to whether the preaching of the Gospel shall be a success. There may be, and indeed is, among good men, a question as to what the present preaching of the Gospel is intended to accomplish. But whatever that may be, there can be

no doubt that the purpose of God in this proclamation of the Gospel shall be accomplished to the very letter. "My word shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." If, therefore, it be the purpose of God that it shall issue in the conversion of the whole world, then, without doubt, whatever be the difficulties in the way, these instrumentalities now in operation shall yet bring about that glorious result. There is, most assuredly, no lack of power in God, the Holy Spirit, nor of inherent virtue in the Gospel to this end. And if, on the other hand, it be the purpose of God that, in this present dispensation, the preaching of the Gospel shall only issue in the gathering out of an election from all nations, then also that purpose of God shall be accomplished, and no more. But it is plain that, in this case as well as the former, the preaching of the Gospel will have been a success. In either case, it will have accomplished all that it was intended to accomplish, and that is what we call success.

It should be scarcely necessary to remark that the question before us does not concern the absolute time of the coming of the Lord. Concerning that, the testimony of the word of God is most emphatic. "Of that day and hour knoweth no man—no, not the Son, but only my Father which is in Heaven." It is a matter of the greatest regret that so many have forgotten the explicit teachings of the Scriptures upon this subject, and suffered themselves to be led aside into deliverances upon this matter, which, as a matter of course, being falsified by the event, have served to bring the most precious hope of the Church into disrepute, and deterred many good and earnest men from even entering on the consideration of a subject which, to their minds, seemed so fraught with evil consequences to the sobriety of Christian life. We, one and all, can not do

better in this matter than stand firm on the words of one of the great historical confessions: "As Christ would have us certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, so will He have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not what hour the Lord will come." Nor is there any question between Millennialians and others as to the essential nature of that resurrection life upon which all agree that all believers shall enter at the coming of the Lord. Millennialians have sometimes been charged with holding that those who shall rise and reign with Christ when He shall appear will enter upon an earthly life, after the fashion of the life which we now lead in the flesh. Thus an eminent theologian argues against the doctrine of the Pre-Millennialists, that it is inconsistent with what the Scriptures uniformly teach as to the nature of the resurrection body; that it is to be spiritual, and not natural, or flesh and blood. Whereas, according to the writer quoted, "it is an essential part of the doctrine of the Pre-Millennialists that the saints are to rise and reign a thousand years in the flesh." This passage rests upon a strange misapprehension of what Pre-Millennialists understand the Scriptures to teach upon this subject. It is safe to say that no Millennialian of any repute holds to a resurrection of the sort suggested in the passage cited. A life of the risen saints in some special connection with this earth, even as it is at present constituted, no more implies that their resurrection bodies will not be in the sense of the Apostle, "spiritual," or that their resurrection life is to be a life in the flesh, after the manner of this present life, than the undoubted fact that the Lord Jesus Himself, during the forty days after His resurrection, appeared in a body of flesh and bones upon this earth, to men in the flesh, implies that His life was at that time, in the sense of

our author, a life in the flesh. As was the body, and as was the resurrection life of our Lord, so, beyond all doubt, according to the abundant testimony of the word of God, shall be the resurrection bodies and the resurrection life of this people.

Still further, in order to reach the truth upon the subject before us, it is important to separate this question from others closely connected therewith. For example, the question before us is not whether or not the kingdom of Christ be as yet, in any sense, present in the world, a question to which, in passing, we may remark the parables in Matt. 13 seem to give an affirmative answer. Neither is the question before us in this paper whether there shall be a first and second resurrection, nor whether Christ shall yet reign personally upon this earth. These questions, indeed, have been and are closely connected with the question of a Pre-Millennial advent, but they are not so closely connected but that, in instances, not a few men have rejected the doctrine of a converted world previous to the coming of the Lord, while yet not affirming the doctrine of a first and a second resurrection, nor that of a personal reign of the Lord upon the earth. Such, indeed, appears to have been the position of most of the reformers. In order to clearness of discussion, it is important, for the present, to waive all reference to these or any other related questions, and confine our attention strictly to the precise point before us, which we may state as follows: "Does the word of God teach that, prior to the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are to look for the conversion of the world to Him, and a prolonged season of universal peace and prevailing righteousness, or does it teach the contrary?" According to the opinion of the Pre-Millennialists, which prevails most widely in the present century, and more especially in our own country, the conversion of the world, both Jew and

Gentile, and the consequent establishment of the Kingdom of Christ, is to precede the personal return of the Lord Jesus. By the use of means at present employed, accompanied by unprecedented operations of the Holy Spirit, it is supposed that the world is to be totally transformed, and in some sense converted. The Spirit is to be poured out so abundantly that, as the result, righteousness will prevail throughout the whole earth. As to how extensively men shall be individually renewed and converted, in the Gospel sense of those words, there seems to be a great difference of opinion. Some have even supposed that the expected conversion shall be literally universal. A greater number, probably, seem to think that very many, in the aggregate, may remain inwardly unrenewed, but that, on the whole, the great majority will be truly converted unto God; and that, as the result of this, sin, where it still remains, will be universally restrained, so that "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall men learn war any more." Others, again, seem to expect little more than a merely nominal and outward profession of Christianity by the nations of the world, as such, and the practical recognition of the principles of the moral law in social and political life. As to how far such an issue could, in the Scriptural sense of words, be called a conversion of the world to God, we leave to others to judge. The happy state of things to be brought about, sooner or later, by the preaching of the Gospel, of whatever sort it be, it is believed, will continue for a very long time, which is called the Millennium. Its duration it is commonly argued from Rev. 20, will not be less than a thousand years. After that it is understood that the Bible teaches that there will be a general apostasy from the faith, which will be shortly and finally brought to an end by the return of the Lord to judgment, when the present order of

things will pass away forever. If this is the teaching of the Scriptures, then it is plain that the coming of the Lord is not even possible for more than a thousand years to come, and how much longer no one can tell.

As opposed to all this, Pre-Millennialists, believing, indeed, with the Post-Millennialist, that righteousness shall yet prevail over all the earth, understand the Scriptures to teach that this is not to be expected before the Lord Jesus shall return. That although the Gospel shall, indeed, be ever more and more widely spread abroad, yet the word of God gives us no reason to look for any radical and real spiritual change in the condition of the world till the glorious appearing of the Lord. This, then, in a word, is the question: "Do the Scriptures teach, or do they not, that the world is to be, in any true sense of the word, converted before the return of the Son of Man?" Before entering upon the investigation of this question, it is well that we bear in mind the following two considerations: It is of the greatest importance, in dealing with this subject, as, indeed, with any other question regarding the teaching of the word of God, that we allow no preconceptions of our own, whether derived from the natural reason or from any traditional interpretation of the Scripture which we may have received, even from good and devout men, to determine our judgment in the decision of the matter. The question before us is purely and simply a question as to the teaching of the word of God. Let us, therefore, beware of determining, *a priori*, what, as regards the government of this world, God may or may not be expected to do. The words of the Lord are ever to be borne in mind: "My thoughts are not as your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways." And, in the second place, it is to be remembered that we can not, in this matter, any more than in many other teachings of the Scriptures,

demand that all difficulties shall be removed. To insist that every difficulty shall be removed, and every possible question answered before we shall give our assent to a doctrine of the Bible, is not the part of a wise Christian. In how many matters, even more central and vital than that which is before us to-day, are we shut up to a choice of difficulties. Let us remember well that, although we may not be able to answer every question or difficulty that may be urged against a doctrine, it by no means follows that we are justified in rejecting it. On this principle, we should be justified in rejecting the doctrine of the Atonement itself. So, in the present question especially, as it seems to me, are we shut up to a choice of difficulties, which ever side we take. We have simply to take that side which is encumbered with the fewest and least serious difficulties. What, then, does the word of God teach as to the question of a conversion of the world before the coming of the Lord?

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE WORLD'S CONVERSION.

It is often charged that the arguments of the Pre-Millennialists, on this subject, rest chiefly, if not entirely, upon the more obscure and symbolical portions of the Scriptures. It is even said by some that their case rests chiefly, if not entirely, upon a certain interpretation of Rev. 20, touching the first and second resurrection. It is proposed, therefore, in the present inquiry, to waive reference to the prophecies of the Old Testament, and the symbolical portions of the Bible generally. We shall all agree that in our interpretation of the Bible, the interpretation of that which is obscure or symbolical is to be determined by that of those portions which are evidently to be taken in a literal and didactic sense. Especially must the New Testament be ever allowed to determine the interpretation of the Old, and not the reverse. On these principles, all wise

interpreters of every school must agree. What, then, saith the Scripture on the subject before us?

1. The first notable fact bearing on the decision of the question before us is the utter absence of any statement in the New Testament that any such period of universal conversion and long-prevailing righteousness is to be witnessed previous to the Coming of the Lord. This fact is peculiarly notable and significant in the case of the Apostle Paul. In our day the expected conversion of the world is constantly held up as the great motive and incentive to missionary labor. We are even told by many who ought to be able to judge, that if through the prevalence of the contrary view people shall come to doubt this, a sad decline in missionary activity of the Church must be expected as the inevitable result. But here is the very Chief and Prince of all Missionaries, holding His commission direct from the Master, taught, as He tells, not by any fallible or even inspired man, but directly by the Lord Himself and His Spirit. More than once He tells us of the motives that urged Him on, and filled Him with a zeal for the salvation of men which has been rarely equaled and never excelled, but never does He state that His motive was found in the expectation that the world was to be converted by His preaching or that of any other man. He speaks, indeed, of a time when all Israel shall be saved. But that does not affect the precise fact which we now urge, that nowhere does He represent the subjugation of the world to Christ as the *motive* which was the inspiration of His unequalled labors and sufferings. On the contrary, when He states His motives, He does it in language like the following: "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; the love of Christ constraineth us." 2 Cor. 5:11, 14. "Endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus

with eternal glory." 2 Tim. 1: 10. "I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some." 1 Cor. 9: 23. Nor does it appear as if He expected the conversion of the world as the final result of such labors by His successors in the future. "The last times," He tells, shall differ from the times before only in that they shall be "perilous times." 2 Tim. 3: 1. On one occasion in particular the Apostle had very special reason, if he expected a millennium of peace and holiness before the Coming of the Lord, to refer to the fact. When the Thessalonian Christians on one occasion were greatly troubled because they had been led to believe that the day of the Lord had already come, Paul quieted their apprehensions—how? By telling them, as was most natural if the modern doctrine were true, "that the day of the Lord would not come except the world should first be converted unto God?" If this were the truth, it was the very thing to say. It were, indeed, simply inconceivable that the Apostle, if he knew anything about this coming conversion of the world as the necessary antecedent of the Lord, should not have said so. But the fact, simply unaccountable upon the truth of the modern theory, is that he did not. Nay, so far from this, he told them the exact reverse; not that the Millennium must come first, the world be converted, but that "the man of sin" must first be revealed, whom the Lord would "destroy with the brightness of His coming."

2. But we may go yet further. Not only does the New Testament nowhere state that the intended result of the preaching of the Gospel in this dispensation is the conversion of the world to God, but when that object is formally stated, as it is in two places, it is stated in terms which imply the exact reverse of this. The first passage we may note is in Acts 15: 14. The Jewish Christians

were greatly scandalized that Peter should have preached the Gospel to the Gentiles, or heathen as we should call them, and received them into the Church along with the circumcision. Peter, it appears, felt it necessary to justify himself for this before the council of the Church in Jerusalem. How natural it were, again, if that preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles were for the conversion of the whole of the Gentiles to God, that Peter should have said so. But here again we have no hint from him of such an issue, though, if he knew about it, it was evidently the very thing to say. His language, on the contrary, seems rather to exclude any general conversion. For we read: "God did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name." But some one may ask, is it not possible that the preaching should go on until all mankind, in an age to come, should be numbered among the people of God? This question is explicitly answered in the other passage, where, according to the usual understanding, the object of the present ministration of the Gospel is formally stated, viz.: Matt. 24: 14, where we read: "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world," not for its conversion. Why did not the Lord say so if that were indeed the object?—"but for a witness unto all nations, and then"—without waiting for a general conversion of the nations—"then shall the end come, all nations must hear, and then shall the end come." To sum up this argument, we may safely say that in the whole Bible among the formal statements of the object of the preaching of the Gospel by Christ's ministers, there is not a single one which states that object to be the conversion of the world to God. If we are to expect a Millennium of righteousness before the Lord's return, how is this fact to be accounted for?

3. Again, any theory which, like the modern Post-

Millennial doctrine, interposes a period before the Advent so long that it should be known as impossible within the lifetime of any individual generation of believers is irreconcilable with the repeated statements of the Scripture that we know not the day "when the Master will return from the far country" whither He has gone; whether His coming will be "in the first watch or in the second watch, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning." According to these words, it was far from being certain that He would not come until almost the morning watch; that it was represented as likely enough, for anything that His people knew to the contrary, that He might come even in the first watch of the night. So far from there being any revelation which should warrant any generation of believers in assuming that the Coming of the Lord was a thousand years or more away, this postponement, as it were, of the Coming of the Lord, is in utter opposition to all those statements of the word of God that we know not the day of Christ's appearing. On this subject Archbishop Trench has well and truly said, "It is a necessary element of the doctrine concerning the Second Coming of Christ, that it should be possible at any time, that no generation of believers should regard it as impossible in theirs." Those, therefore, who fix a time in the distant future before which Christ *can not* come, equally with those who fix a time in the near present by which He *must* come, place themselves in conflict with this word of the Lord.

4. And this argument becomes even more forcible when we consider the duty which, in view of this utter uncertainty of the time of the Advent, is everywhere urged upon the disciples of Christ in all ages to watch continually, (Matt. 24:42, etc.) We can not refer these words to death, as is sometimes done, because in no place where these words occur is there the slightest reference to death in the

whole context, but only to the return of the Lord Jesus. Not an instance can be adduced in the whole Bible where the phrase "the coming of the Son of Man" can be proven to refer to death. Nor can we accept that exegesis which, in certain places at least, refers the phrase to the destruction of Jerusalem. For although undoubtedly the chapter in Matthew's gospel, to which reference has been made, does contain a prophecy of that event, yet that coming of the Son of Man for which Christ bids His disciples to watch can not possibly be understood of the destruction of Jerusalem, for the simple reason that the coming in question is expressly said to take place "*after*" that event, and therefore can not be the same thing. It can only be that glorious coming of the risen Jesus in the clouds of Heaven, which the universal Church expects sooner or later, of which, in the passage cited, we are told that no man knows the time, and for which all believers in all ages are therefore bidden to watch until He shall come. Now, on the common hypothesis that the entire world is to be converted and continue in that happy state for centuries before the Lord can come, how is it possible for any generation of believers receiving that theory as certain truth to watch for the coming of the Lord till that expected Millennium shall have come and gone? It is too often forgotten that theories as to the interpretation of prophecy should never be allowed to affect our attendance to plain precepts. It is quite safe to say that any interpretation of prophecy which makes obedience to any command a moral impossibility is *ipso facto* proven to be erroneous. But is it a possibility for a believer who is assured that the Coming of the Lord is at least a thousand years away, to watch for that coming in his lifetime? If, for example, I take a journey to another country, and on departing tell my son that I shall not return for ten years, or for any other fixed

and definite time, and then tell him to watch for me every day, would I not seem to him utterly inconsistent? If, on the one hand, he believes my assurance that I will not return before a certain appointed time, will it not for that very reason become impossible for him to watch for me till that time is up? And, on the other, would not my charge to watch for me every month and year inevitably suggest to him a doubt whether after all I am sure that I will not return much sooner than I had said? For it is plain that the mental state or act of watching for a person implies not only a general expectancy that the person will come sometime, but, beyond a doubt, involves as a necessary condition the belief that the person may come at any time. Inasmuch, therefore, as no candid person will deny that the Lord does command His disciples in all ages to watch for His coming, it follows irresistibly that the Lord intended that we should think of His advent as always possible, and forbids us to interpose any such fixed period of time between us and His coming as shall make it impossible for us to believe that He may come in our own day.

ARGUMENTS FOR CHRIST'S COMING.

The ablest work that has been written in defence of the current theory on this subject is probably that of the Rev. David Brown, on the Second Advent. He devotes several pages to the consideration of the weighty argument derived from this command of the Lord to watch for His appearing. His argument is, in brief, after this manner: That the New Testament is full of intimations, as of a predicted apostasy in the church, a universal proclamation of the Gospel, etc., which he says must have compelled the early Christians to believe that the Lord's Coming was not to be expected in their day because all these developments required much time; nay, he reminds us of what no one

can deny—that the Lord Himself, while telling the disciples to watch, gave them distinct intimations that His coming would be delayed. To all which we answer, that although without doubt we do have such intimations of a delay, yet it by no means follows that the Christians of the first century were able to see all this. For there is not a single one of the passages adduced which contains within itself the slightest chronological note which might have guided the early Christians to such a conclusion. Who among them, any more than among ourselves, knew, for example, how much time might be covered by the phrase, “the times of the Gentiles,” in the passage in Luke 21:24, which Dr. Brown quotes as illustrating his position? Those predicted times, for all we absolutely know to the contrary, may have centuries yet to run before they shall have expired; on the other hand, we know not but that they may even now be closing. And certainly the words could have conveyed no more hint of the time involved to the Christians of the first century than to ourselves. Even the phrase, “a long time” (Matt. 25:19), which is much pressed, has no bearing on the question, which is, not whether an intimation of centuries *was* conveyed in these words, but whether the words necessarily conveyed that meaning to those who first heard them. The phrase “a long time” is evidently a purely relative term, and may mean either days, years, or centuries, according to the scale of time before the mind. As a matter of fact, in the parable in question, the phrase could not denote a period equal to the ordinary lifetime of a man. “After a long time the Lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them.” The whole story of the parable was comprehended in *the lifetime* of the nobleman who went on the far journey, leaving his servants in charge.

But it is still more to the point, in replying to this

evasion of the argument for an Advent to be regarded as ever imminent, as derived from the command to watch, that as a matter of confessed historical fact, of which Gibbon, for example, assures us, the primitive Christians did *not* understand any of these words of our Lord as precluding the possibility of His return in their lifetime. On the contrary, so widely prevalent was the expectation of the speedy return of the Lord in the glory of His Kingdom in the first ages of the Church, that that historian assigns this as one of the various causes which, in his opinion, serve to explain the astonishing progress of Christianity in the first centuries.

But the most plausible argument against the statement that the New Testament represents the Advent as ever imminent, and, therefore, to be regarded as possible in any and every generation, is derived from 2 Thess. 2:2, where the apostle exhorts the Thessalonian Christians, according to our version, "not to be troubled * * * as though the day of Christ were at hand." Here, we are told, the apostle expressly warns the Thessalonians against regarding the Coming of the Lord as imminent; so that in His mind, as he had already charged the Thessalonians to watch for the Coming of the Lord, watching did *not* necessarily imply that the Advent was possible in the lifetime of that generation. On this objection we may remark first of all, that it is certain that Paul did not mean to contradict himself or weaken in the least the force of the exhortations in the previous epistle in which he had reminded the Thessalonians that "the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." Nor can these words, by anyone who believes in the inspiration of the Scriptures, be understood really to contradict the many passages of the New Testament in which the Coming of the Lord is spoken of as imminent. Nor can these words, however they may be

explained, touch the fact that, according to the common use of the word, no man *can* be said to watch, except he regard the event for which he watches as at least possible at any time.

In the second place, if the rendering of our version be correct, it assumes a state of mind among the Thessalonians in regard to the advent of the Lord of which we have no example in the Primitive Church, and which in particular is entirely exclusive of that eager desire to have a share in the coming glories of the Advent which is revealed in the first Epistle. For, according to our version, it would appear that the apprehended nearness of the coming of the Lord was an occasion not of joy but of trouble to the Thessalonians. But there is not the slightest evidence that until the defection of the Church from primitive apostolic truth Christ's coming was ever anything but an object of intense desire and longing to His people. When we regard these historical facts, we may safely say that the apprehended nearness of the Advent could by no means have been an occasion of trouble and distress to the Christians of Thessalonica. So far from this, it appears from the previous Epistle that so desirable did the coming of the Lord seem to them that they were in great concern of mind lest any of their number who had died might by their death be excluded from participation in the glories of that day.

Again, we have from the lips of our Saviour and His Apostles numerous statements as to the condition of the Church between the Ascension and the Second Advent which utterly preclude the common modern expectation in the interim. The entire New Testament uniformly represents the condition of the Church on earth during this period as one not of peace and prosperity, but on the contrary of sorrow and humiliation. First of all in this con-

nection we may note those words of our Lord in Matt. 9: 14. The disciples of John had complained that the disciples of Christ did not fast. Christ answers to the effect that fasting, being an expression of sorrow, was as much out of place while He, the Heavenly Bridegroom, was with His disciples, as a piece of new cloth on an old garment; but that days were coming when He, as to His bodily presence, should be taken from them, and those should indeed be for the children of the Bridegroom days of fasting. Here indisputably the entire period of the personal absence of the Lord from His Church is represented as a time in which for them fasting shall be suitable and proper, and therefore, by fair implication, as a time of grief and sorrow for His people. But is a millennium of universal peace of righteousness likely to have been included in this representation of the period in question as one of unbroken sorrow? But in perfect accord with the intimation of this passage are all the statements of the New Testament which refer indisputably to the state of the Church in the present dispensation. In the very beginning Christ sends forth His missionaries, not with the grand promise that their ministry should at last issue in the conversion of all nations of the world to Him, but with the assurance that they have to expect the same treatment from the world that He Himself had; that if they had called the master of the house Beelzebub they would even more surely call His servants the same. He accordingly speaks of His people, most tenderly, as a little flock; He tells them that in this world they shall have tribulation; that is, as the whole context shows, tribulation, not from causes common to all men alike, as sickness, poverty and death, but tribulation at the hands of the world, and because of their personal relation to Him; that as the world had persecuted Him, so it would also, in one

way or another, persecute them, and be no more ready to keep their saying than it had been to keep His. Indeed, in Romans 8:17, and elsewhere, this fellowship in the sufferings of a rejected Christ is declared to be the inseparable condition of sharing in His glory. The ministry of the Church to the world has been, and still is, a ministry of rejection and sorrow. Where in the New Testament is there any intimation that in this present order of things and before the coming of the Lord, there is to come a time when all such representations as these shall be no longer true? We do indeed read much of a time when the Church shall be delivered from her sorrows and tribulations, but in perfect accord with that intimation of our Lord with which we began, the promise is always and only placed in connection with the return of the Absent Lord, the Bridegroom of the Church. Rest is indeed to be recompensed to the troubled Church, but only, says the Apostle Paul, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels. 2 Thess. 1:7. It is only, according to the intimation of the parable, when the Son of Man cometh, the cry of the widowed Church so long apparently neglected, shall at last be heard. Luke 18: 1-8. How are such passages as these, to the general tenor of which no exception can be found, to be reconciled with the modern theory of a Church of the future in the flesh on earth, victorious over the world before her Lord's return?

V. Again, as the state of the Church is uniformly described in the New Testament as one of rejection and humiliation until her Lord shall come, so also do the same Scriptures describe the state of the world during the same period, in terms which are simply exclusive of any general conversion of the world to the true faith prior to the Advent. This gospel of the Kingdom, saith the Saviour, shall indeed be preached in all the world—but why? For the con

version of the world? That is not what He says, but "for a witness." And may not that witnessing go on until all the ends of the earth shall hear and also obey Him? That again is not what He says, but rather when this witness shall have reached all nations, "then shall the end come." Matt. 24:14. Thus also in the parable of the sower, which sets forth the various results of the preached word as historically experienced until the present time, we have not the slightest hint of a time when this parable shall no longer be a correct description of the various results of the ministration of the Gospel. Of a time when the seed shall all come up, when birds shall no more pick up the seed, nor thorns spring up and choke it, nor the heat of persecution burn it, the parable does not contain the slightest intimation. If any one will say that this is merely a negative argument, we have only to read further on the parable of the tares and wheat. In this latter parable, as expounded for us by the Saviour Himself, we are explicitly taught that the tares, or children of the wicked one, are to exist in the world along with the wheat, or children of the Kingdom: that the two are to grow and develop together, each after its own peculiar manner until the end of the age. The Lord indeed represents the servants of the landholder as proposing to do away with this unsatisfactory state of things; but they are answered at once in terms which one would think had been quite sufficient to preclude forever any hope of any radical spiritual change in the condition of the world before the Lord's return. Let both grow together till the harvest. And the harvest, we are told, is the end of the world or age. Where does this parable leave any place for the interposition of centuries of a universal conversion of the world to God before the Lord shall come? It tells us indeed of a growth of the wheat progressing until the har-

vest; it therefore, in perfect consistence with the foregoing parable of the leaven (if that be taken to represent a continuous growth of the Church in the world), suggests the expectation of a fuller and fuller growth in the true and invisible Church as the centuries roll on, until the Lord shall come; it therefore forbids us to join in those inconsiderate and mistaken representations which one sometimes hears, as if the Saviour taught that there was *nothing* in the future of the history of the world but a development of sin. But at the same time, if the parable forbids us to deny a continuous growth of the spiritual Church into fuller and fuller fruit bearing, just as distinctly does it forbid us to expect that the wheat shall so grow and increase as to choke out the tares. Just as clearly as the words of the Lord point to a spiritual development in the Church, just so clearly do they teach us to expect along with this a continuous development of sin in the world, reaching its final culmination at the same time as the other. The wheat and the tares are both to "grow together till the harvest," the end of the *Æon* and the appearing of the Son of Man. How, with an ever increasing growth of evil in antagonism to a growing Church, we are to find any place for a Millennium of universal righteousness and peace, we must leave to others to explain. In entire agreement with the teaching of this parable as to the matter before us is the parable of the nobleman who went into a far country, as recorded in Luke 19:12-27. In that parable the Lord represents Himself, soon to depart from this world to the Father, as a nobleman who went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. During his absence, we are told there is a great difference in the conduct even of his servants; some are more faithful, some are less so; some are grossly neglectful of their duty; outside of his own household, his citizens, we are told, hated

him, and angrily repudiated his dominion. After a while he returns, rewards his servants according to their several works, and visits the rebel citizens, who would none of his rule, with a fearful punishment. The time of the nobleman's return, by universal consent, refers to the second coming of the Son of Man for the great work of judgment. This is plain because it is the time when the loyal and the rebellious alike receive their reward. Here, then, we are to observe again that the parable does not give us the slightest hint that there was any change in the attitude of the rebellious citizens during the whole period of the absence of the king. But is it not plain that if the modern theory of a universal turning of the nations unto God before the coming of the Lord were true, we must needs have had, in this parable, a very different picture? We should have rather read that at last through the earnest labors of the servants of the nobleman, the most, at least, of the rebellious citizens were led to submit to that rule which at first they had rejected, and become loyal subjects of the coming king? But that is not what the parable teaches. And if not, then the question is at once forced upon us—How with the mass of men remaining as in the imagery of the parable, at enmity to the Lord and His Christ, we are to find time or place for a thousand years of millennial peace?

THE PERIOD BEFORE THE SECOND ADVENT.

But we may advance yet further. Not only do the Scriptures of the New Testament give these representations of the general state of things in the world during the period between the first and second coming of the Lord; not only do they speak of no general improvement to be expected before the Lord shall come, as the time of His second appearing approaches, but in several passages we have the most formal and didactic statements that "the last times"

shall not be good, but evil times. To this fact we have no exception. Thus in 1 Timothy we read as follows: "The Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils." In 2 Timothy 3 : 1, 5, we read again: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof." To the same effect writes also the Apostle Peter, (2 Peter 3 : 2, 5), wherein he charges the Christians of that day that they "be mindful" of the words of the prophets on this subject, who had so warned the Church that in the last days there should come "scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of His coming?" So, also, the Apostle John declares, in so many words (1 John 2 : 18), that the prevalence of many Anti-Christ's was a sign of the last time. If it be the truth of God that the latter days before the Advent are to be distinguished by a period of universally prevailing holiness, such as is described in the glowing language of the Old Testament Prophets, how are we to account for it that the writers of the New Testament, in all their description of the last times, never once describe them in such terms, but always as times in the last degree perilous to souls? And in view of the expectations which so generally prevail in our day as to the coming of a golden age of peace on earth before the coming of the Lord, there is a most solemn significance in the very peculiar emphasis of such phrases as introduce these impressive descriptions of the state of the world in the last

days. The Spirit speaketh expressly: "This know, that in the last days perilous times shall come; I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance, that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us, the apostles of our Lord and Saviour." And can we forget that the Apostle warns the Church that, when at last the Lord should come, He would find men not expecting Him, but looking forward to years of peace and safety? (1 Thess. 5 : 3.) Nor can the argument derived from these descriptions of the character of the last times be evaded by referring them to that short period after the so-called Millennium, when, according to the Scriptures, Satan is to be loosed for a little season, for more than one of these descriptions of the latter days represent evil as continuing to rule throughout all time until the Advent of the Lord. Thus, for example, John, when declaring that the prevalence of many Anti-christs was a sign of the last time, tells us, also, that that sign had already begun to be fulfilled in his own day. Of especial importance, in this connection, is the account which the Apostle Paul gives, in 2 Thess. 2 : 1-8, of the rise, development, and final destruction of the apostasy and the Man of Sin, as covering the whole time from the date of that epistle to the appearing of the Lord. In that notable passage, he tells the Thessalonians that the mystery of iniquity was already working, even in their day; that something, which he does not precisely indicate, was at that time hindering the full manifestation of the apostasy; that when that hindrance should be taken out of the way, then the Man of Sin would be revealed, and continue his blaspheming and God-defying career until destroyed by the brightness of the coming of the Lord. It will be very clear to all that, if by the phrase, "the coming of the Lord," in this chapter, we are to understand His

personal appearing—which the whole Church expect as certainly in the future—then beyond all doubt, as the rise, development, and culmination of the apostasy cover the whole time from the date of that epistle to the coming of the Lord, it is perfectly certain that, during that period, there can be no conversion of the world.

Does Paul, then, in this passage certainly refer to the personal appearing of the Lord? In determining the answer to this question, observe first of all that the Greek word *parousia*, here rendered “coming,” in every other of the twenty-four places in which it occurs confessedly denotes a real, literal, and not a figurative presence of the person referred to. Thus, for example, in 1 Cor. 16:17, Paul writes that he was “glad of the coming of Stephanas.” In 2 Cor. 7:7, we read that “some said that the apostle was in bodily presence (*parousia*) weak. So also it is confessedly the word which is elsewhere used to denote the personal return of the Lord to this world, in passages where no one has ever claimed that there was the slightest ambiguity. Thus we read in 1 Cor. 15:23, that “the dead in Christ shall rise from the dead at His coming.” In the first epistle to the Thessalonians the word occurs four times, and in each instance it is admitted to refer to the personal advent of the Lord. In 1 Thess. 4:15 and 23, it is used in connection with the apostle’s statements as to the resurrection of the righteous and the translation of the living at the Coming of the Lord. In the face of such facts as these, to affirm that the word only refers to a so-called presence or coming of the Lord by the power of His Spirit, is simply to set at naught every rule of sound exegesis. Of this alleged meaning of the word it is safe to say that not a single example can be shown in the whole New Testament.

Hence, again, all agree that there can be no Millennium

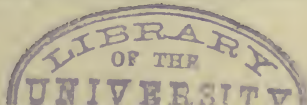
of holiness so long as the Jewish Nation remains cast out in unbelief. Do the Scriptures say anything upon that subject which may throw any light upon the question before us? In Matt. 24:15-20, all agree that we have a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, and the consequent scattering of the Jews among all nations, which has been historically fulfilled. And it is important to bear in mind that the prediction in question, which our Lord calls the "great tribulation," comprised not only the destruction of the Jewish capital, as is often assumed, but, according to Luke's account of the same discourse (Luke 21:24), was to continue, and is, in fact, still continuing in the "Treading down of Jerusalem by the Gentiles, till the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Keeping this in mind, we are now prepared to understand the words in Matthew's gospel, which tell us in so many words that "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory." That the coming of the Son of Man here referred to can not be the so-called providential coming of the Son of Man in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies, as some have maintained, is plain, from the simple fact that the coming here spoken of is expressly said to be after the destruction of Jerusalem, and, indeed, after the whole long tribulation of the centuries, and, therefore, can not be the same thing. Nay, it follows from the very terms of the prophecy, that this Coming, of whatsoever sort it be, must still be in the future. In fact, it were easy to show that this phrase, the Coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven, first used in the book of Daniel, has a meaning perfectly definite and fixed. It is by common consent the phrase which is everywhere used to denote

the future personal advent of the Lord for judgment. And hence it seems unavoidably to follow that whenever the long captivity of Israel shall end—as to the time of which the passage gives us not the slightest hint—immediately after that shall appear the solemn signs which at last announce the near appearing of the Son of Man. Where, then, according to this passage, does this prophecy leave any room for centuries of universal righteousness after Israel's conversion, and before the appearing of the Son of Man?

Once again, instead of representing the Kingdom of Christ as triumphant in the earth before the Coming of the Lord, in several places the word of God explicitly sets forth the triumph of that Kingdom as synchronous with the glorious appearing. We may refer to one notable example. No words of the Scripture are more frequently referred to as precisely expressing the object which every Christian heart desires than these—"the Kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." But when we look at the context in which these words occur, we find that this glorious event, instead of taking place centuries before the Coming of the Lord, is expressly said to be synchronous with that event. For we read, Rev. 11:15-18, that it was on the sounding of the seventh trumpet, in which we are elsewhere told that the mystery of God should be finished, that great voices in heaven cried "the Kingdoms of the world are become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ." Immediately the four and twenty elders gave thanks to God that He had "taken to Himself His great power and reigned," and then say "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 them that fear Thy name, small and great; and shouldst destroy them that destroy the earth."

DOCTRINE OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

But the limits of this paper will not permit anything like an exhaustive exhibition of the Scripture testimony upon this subject. As the history of this doctrine is to be presented in another paper, we need only to remark on this occasion that the doctrine which has been argued in this paper, according to the uniform testimony of the best church historians, was the doctrine of the primitive Church. In the first two centuries of the Church's history, centuries distinguished above all others for their record of evangelistic zeal and activity, there is not the slightest hint that the Church was expecting any general conversion of the world to follow as the result of her glorious labors and sufferings. A careful comparison of Scripture with Scripture brings us out in accord with the practical belief of the whole primitive Church. Ought not this, whatever difficulties, through our ignorance of the future, may still remain, to lead us to accept the results of that exegesis? Are we not, therefore, bound to conclude that the Advent of the Lord is to be regarded by us always as immediately impending, and, therefore, that we are not at liberty to interpose between the present and that event any period of time which shall make the coming of the Lord in our own day a thing impossible? And if this be not a popular doctrine, in the boasting and self-sufficient age in which we live; if, which is still harder, in taking this position we are compelled to differ with many Christian brethren and profound students of the word of God, who are by us, none the less for this difference of opinion, honored and beloved in Christ Jesus, yet it may help us to remember that, on this point, we stand with such men in the Church as Martin Luther, Rutherford, Latimer, with a large part of the divines of the venerable Westminster assembly, and



many others of equal standing in the Church of Christ. And, if we may be permitted to refer to those who, in our own day, hold to what seems to us to be the primitive and apostolic faith upon this subject, we shall find them not by any means among the ignorant and superficial, but most notably among those who, by common consent, hold the very highest place as learned and devout expositors and preachers of God's word. We shall find ourselves in such company, for example, as Stier, Auberien, Luthardt and Lange, among the Germans; Professor Godet, of Lausanne, among the French; Bishops Trench and Ellicott, Dean Alford, Mr. Spurgeon, and others, among the English; the brothers Andrew and Horatius Bonar, among the Scotch; Van Oosterzee, Professor of Theology in the University of Utrecht, among the Dutch—not to speak at this time of well-known names among the living and the dead in our own country.

With this we might leave the subject, but perhaps it may not be amiss to refer to two or three of the more common and plausible objections to the doctrine which we have argued.

A very common and somewhat influential objection to the doctrine before us is that it "disparages the Gospel," in that the doctrine of the Pre-Millennial Advent makes the subjection of the world to Christ to be brought about by a stupendous display of the Divine wrath on the ungodly. On which has been remarked: "Wrath never converted a single soul, and never will."

To this it may be remarked in the first place, that the objection rests on a misapprehension. Beyond all question the Gospel heard and received by faith is the only way of a sinner's salvation, whether in this present dispensation or in any other. Nor, to go further, will any son of man ever receive the Gospel except as he is thereunto disposed and

enabled by the Holy Spirit. But the real question is not upon these matters at all. Here we are all at one. We shall all agree that "wrath never converted a single soul." The real question is as to the special means which God intends to employ to introduce the Kingdom of His Son. While neither wrath nor the Gospel itself, apart from the energy of the Holy Spirit, can save a man, yet as a matter of fact see that God often makes use of wrath and various sorrows to awaken men and dispose them under the influences of the Spirit to receive the Gospel in true faith. Now, the Pre-Millennialist simply understands that He intends to bring about the final subjection of the world to the Lord Jesus instrumentally by unprecedented displays of His wrath, and most notably by the revelation of the Lord in flaming fire, taking vengeance on His adversaries. As to what may be the Divine intention in the matter, it is plain that we are not competent to determine this *a priori*. This is simply a question as to what the word of God reveals on this subject. It will be, for the present, sufficient to remark that there is an awful uniformity and emphasis in the numerous representations of the word of God upon this topic.

But, it is again urged by many good and earnest Christian men, that it must be admitted that the greatest extravagancies and many very grievous errors in doctrine and practice have historically connected themselves with this doctrine of an advent ever possibly imminent. Thus there are many, who, rightly jealous for the integrity of the faith, think that they can see in the train of this doctrine annihilationalism, restorationism, separatism, and a nameless motley brood of such-like hurtful heresies pressing in to disturb the peace and purity of the Church of Christ. They accordingly argue that whatever a man may hold upon this subject, if he is prudent he will hold it in quiet-

ness. All admit that the reception of the doctrine as argued at this time is not essential to salvation. Why, then, not prudently leave the whole question alone? To which we answer—Just because of the extravagancies of which complaint has so justly been made. Had the Church been more faithful of late years in preaching the ascertained truth of the Scriptures concerning this subject, we should have probably had less to mourn over in this matter. As it is, all the more need is there that trained students of the Scriptures, well balanced and settled in the doctrine of the Scriptures and disciplined in the interpretation of the Scriptures, should not leave this most momentous doctrine to be preached only by ignorant, ill-instructed, and fanatical men. For what are the ministers of the word appointed but for the defence of the truth of God from error and misinterpretation? Is it defending the truth, under a mistaken prudence to leave difficult doctrines to be discussed and preached by incompetent men? Because many, for example, pervert the precious doctrine of justification by faith alone into antinomian licentiousness, are we therefore to be cautious about preaching a free justification? Is there not all the more need that we preach the truth which is most often and mischievously misunderstood and thus labor against the abuse of the doctrines of the word of God at the hands of ignorant and fanatical men? How are the most of men who have little leisure to study the Bible for themselves, to learn to distinguish the truth of the word of God from the caricatures of that truth, except from the lips of any who, set apart by the Church to study and teach the word, by the grace of God may be enabled to state and hold that truth free from the distortions and perversions of ignorance?

With this we conclude our consideration of this most momentous question. In holding the doctrine which we

have argued we admit that many things remain obscure, that many questions may be put which in the present state of our knowledge we may not be able to answer. But, in general, we may urge that this fact does not prove the doctrine not to be taught in the Scriptures. It is of the greatest importance to bear in mind the principle which is laid down by the late venerable Dr. Hodge, p. 527, vol. II, of his *Theology*: "The only legitimate method of controverting a doctrine which purports to be founded on the Scripture is the exegetical." Thus in regard to the doctrine of the Pre-Millennial Advent, as every doctrine is affirmed to be taught in the Bible, objectors are bound not merely to make objections and ask hard questions, but in particular to show by the acknowledged canons of interpretation, that the passages which have been cited as directly or indirectly forbidding the expectation of an era of universal peace and righteousness before the coming of the Lord, have been misunderstood and misinterpreted. Otherwise they have to show for example how a millennium is possible with an apostasy steadily developing from the days of the Apostles until the "Brightness of the Lord's coming." Or again they have to show how a millennium is possible with the great Jewish Tribulation still continuing, of which we are told that "immediately after its completion the Son of Man is to be seen coming in the clouds of heaven to gather together His Elect." They have to show how it is possible, if it be really certain that at least a thousand years of universal peace still lies between us and the Advent, for believers to watch for the coming of the Lord. But finally, let us remember that whatsoever our views may be, it must certainly be safe to obey Him who again and again has charged us to "Watch, because we know not the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh." To this may the Lord give us all His grace.