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SERMON CXVII.

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PHILADELPHIA.

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

MATT. xvi. 3.—Can ye not discern the signs of the times?

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES are the character and aspect of the passing age; its distinguishing events and productions, preparations and proceedings, doings and projects. Time has been compared to an ever flowing river; but such a river assumes different appearances in different parts of its course, is wider and narrower, now smooth and now ruffled by winds and obstructions in its bed, sometimes moves slowly and softly, and sometimes with haste and noise.—The stream of time never stops in its solemn course; but there are divisions on its banks,—days and seasons, years and ages; and as one day is cloudy and another fair, one season genial and another “horrid with frost and turbulent with storm,” one year fruitful and healthful, and another a year of famine and trouble, so the different ages are distinguished from each other by peculiar marks and characteristics. The characteristics of the present age, those things wherein it is peculiar, or which distinguish it from other ages, are the signs of the times.

II. Now every age receives its impress from the hand of God, who hath put the times and seasons in His own power.—He upholds, moves, guides, controls, determines, works all things after the counsel of His will. The transactions and affairs of the times, though brought to pass by a vast multitude of free and accountable agents, fulfil His counsel and contribute to the perfecting of His plan. Be the signs of the times therefore what they may, they are such as God has stamped upon them, and are significant of

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something pertaining to God and His purposes ; and something, of course, most interesting to us.—The context mentions the signs of fair and foul weather ; these are appearances in the sky from which the character of the coming weather may be inferred : “ When it is evening, ye say it will be fair weather, for the sky is red ; and in the morning, it will be foul weather to-day, for the sky is red and lowering.” The phases of the sky show what sort of weather is approaching, and the phases or distinguishing features of the age, the signs of the times, show what God is doing, and about to do, in fulfilment of His eternal designs.

III. To DISCERN the signs of the times is to mark and comprehend them ; to be acquainted with the true character of the age, and with what it teaches and prognosticates concerning the counsels of God. It includes also a right state of heart towards the moral lessons of the age, and a practical conformity to them. God makes known His will to men, both by His word and His providence : in the one He speaks, in the other He acts ; and actions are instructive as well as language. His word indeed is more explicit, and is our only universal and infallible rule of life, but as His word helps us to understand His providence, so His providence reflects light upon His word, and though it does not originally prescribe our duties, yet does it present new motives to the performance of our duties ; and to certain duties, as fasting, thanksgiving, benevolent exertions and sacrifices, does it present special and extraordinary calls.—He who truly discerns the signs of the times is aware of the obligations which the character of the age imposes on him, and has a conformity in spirit and in life, to the spirit and movements of the age. True discernment of things, according to scripture, implies a sense of their qualities ; and he is ignorant of a matter whose heart and conduct show that it has no practical influence upon him. Not to love and trust in God is not to know Him ; not to keep Christ’s commandments is not to know Christ ; to depart from evil, is understanding ; obedience is knowledge ; sin is darkness, ignorance, madness. The man who does not live as the character and spirit of the age requires, does not discern the signs of the times. Any light which he may think he has on this subject is darkness ; darkness hath blinded his eyes ;—he walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth.

IV. The IMPORTANCE of discerning the signs of the times is assumed in the text, and deserves our consideration. On this point let the Scripture first speak. While it connects the greatest advantages with knowledge on this subject, it threatens ignorance with the Divine indignation ; declaring on the one hand, that whoso is wise and will observe these things shall

understand the loving-kindness of the Lord ;” and on the other, that “ because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of His hands, He shall destroy them and not build them up.” Elsewhere we are instructed that God’s inexorable anger may be kindled by not giving heed to His providential voice. “ In that day did the Lord God of Hosts call to weeping and to mourning, and to baldness and to girding with sackcloth ; and behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine ; let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die : and it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of Hosts, surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of Hosts.” God in His word has made some things our daily and stated duties, as devotion, kindness, industry in our callings ; and some things, duties which are not stated and ordinary, but which we must hold ourselves in readiness to perform at the summons of His providence ; as the observance of fasts and coming up to the Lord’s help by special labors and sacrifices of benevolence.—Now these latter duties are as much *duties*, as binding on the conscience, as the former ; and the forecited scripture shows us what may be the consequence of failing to discharge them in their season.—Again, a large portion of God’s word is prophetic :—the times and seasons which are to come, prophecy in its own manner hath characterized beforehand ; and though the main design of this may be to confirm our faith, by comparing the age when it is past with its description in the prophetic word, and observing the correspondence of the one with the other ; yet this is not the only use of prophecy : “ Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein : FOR THE TIME IS AT HAND.” Meditation on the prophecies may be useful BEFORE THEIR FULFILMENT ; it receiveth blessing from God : and if we inquire for the reason, this is what we find :—The times as they come forth at the Father’s bidding, do not come disjointed and isolated, but one draws on another in perfect continuity : one prepares the way for another ; one in a true sense *causes* another :—so too are they connected in prophecy from the beginning to the end of the world. Now if you know well the signs of the present time, you may, even of yourself, form some useful anticipations of the character of that which is next to come ; but as that time is described in the page of prophecy, the study of the prophets may greatly assist your anticipations. You know where you now are, both in prophecy and in fact, and your own reflections guided by the prophets may, to most useful and important purposes, enlighten you concerning the days which are coming upon the world. But it is manifest how all depends on your understanding the true character of the time that now is. Without this knowledge the page of prophecy might as well be blank ; and meditation therein

were but musing upon nothing. What advantage meditation may yield, with this knowledge, we may learn from what is related of Daniel, Anna, Simeon, and others, who were hereby led to be waiting for redemption in Jerusalem when it was coming; and of the disciples of Christ, who, observing the signs of the times as foretold by their Master, made their escape from the destruction which befell the Jewish nation.—He who neglects God's prophetic word, forfeits His blessing; but of what use can the prophets be to him who does not discern the signs of the times?

But there are stronger illustrations of the danger of this ignorance. We select a few out of almost numberless instances. Why did the old world bring upon itself the waters of a flood? They did not discern the signs of the times when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing. Why did Pharaoh bring the ten plagues upon his land, and ultimate destruction upon himself and his army? He did not discern the signs of the times: otherwise he and his people might have escaped. Why did the Jews reject their Messiah, and thereby bring wrath upon themselves to the uttermost? They discerned not the time of their merciful visitation. If they had opened their eyes to see the miracles, the fulfilments of prophecy, and the other evidences of Messiah's presence among them, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. Why is it that so many professed christians, at this day, take little or no interest in the exertions which are now made, and the things which are coming to pass, under the divine agency and blessing, in the kingdom of grace? It is because they do not discern the signs of the times. The importance of this duty cannot be too much magnified. Thousands will owe their eternal destruction to the neglect of it. The habitual neglect of it infers the entire want of grace. What is unregeneracy but being without God in the world, and what is being without God in the world but having no impression of His presence and agency on the heart. I wonder not at the saying of the Psalmist, "because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of His hands, He shall destroy them and not build them up,"—that is, finally and irretrievably destroy them.

V. And equal to the importance is the FACILITY OF PERFORMING this duty. So we gather from Christ's way of reasoning with the Jews. They wanted a sign from heaven, but he referred them to the signs of the times, saying, "When it is evening, ye say it will be fair weather, for the sky is red; and in the morning, it will be foul weather to-day, for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, but can ye not

discern the signs of the times?" No more sagacity is required in the one case than in the other. When men are so void of understanding that they cannot comprehend the prognostics of the weather, then may they excuse themselves for remaining ignorant of the signs of the times.

VI. But do we not read in Scripture that God moves in great mystery and darkness; that his works are great and marvellous; His ways unsearchable and past finding out; and are not men cautioned against presumptuous conclusions concerning the Divine conduct, and rebuked for attempting to scan the Almighty, and admonished to wait till the mystery of God be finished? Yes. But the true inference from such passages is not that *nothing* may be learned from God's conduct; but merely that his conduct in all its relations, bearings, and results, cannot be *fully comprehended*.—God crowns the year with his abundant goodness; you see not all that He intends, or all that is to result from what He herein does; but you see enough to teach you your obligations to thankfulness and praise.—God visits with pestilence and famine: you know not every thing which that visitation may involve; but you know enough to make you stand in awe, and go into your chambers, and shut your door about you, until these calamities be overpast.—God, by the plenteous effusion of His Spirit, revives His work around you; you know not what that revival may lead to or end in; but you may know that now is the accepted time, and that wo is probably your doom for eternity if you now neglect the salvation of your soul.—God walks abroad among His churches, and excites them to great and combined enterprises for the furtherance of the gospel; you do not see, you cannot conjecture the end of these movements,—they reach into eternity, and spread abroad through the measureless empire of the Almighty; but you understand enough for your own condemnation if you refuse to take part in these sacrifices and labors of love.—In all things, the full latitude and extent of God's operation appears only to Himself; but it has meaning which the feeblest intelligence can understand. It does not satisfy man's curiosity, but it loads his conscience with obligation, and its very mystery should make him fear, and keep him ever in a waiting and worshipping posture of mind. God's movements in providence, however unsearchable, call for some holy feeling and activity in us, and the call is so clear, that the ox who knoweth his owner, or the ass his master's crib, rebukes the man who does not hear it. It is not the want of sufficient powers of discernment, but a sensuality which banishes the Holy Spirit, an earthly, godless, atheistical temper,—this it is that hinders men from discerning the signs of the times.

VII. And now, my brethren, if these be just and faithful observations,

they should incline us to serious thought on **THE CHARACTER OF OUR OWN TIMES**. They have truly a character of their own. Never, perhaps, had any times signs less negative, less unperceivable, less unmeaning, than those in which we live. All men are conscious of this general fact; all men feel that there is a spirit—a mighty, commanding, pervading, uncontrollable spirit in the age. But what it is, and whither it tends; what lessons it reads to us, what duties, admonitions, and encouragements, few seem to comprehend. That the Lord God of Hosts doth in this day call to something peculiar, is as certain as that there is a Lord God of Hosts who changeth the times and the seasons, and ordereth all things in His pleasure; and peculiar is their guilt who do not hear this call. Still is it with the multitude of mankind as it was before the flood, and as it has ever been, whatever the signs of the times have revealed or portended: they are eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, planting and building; but they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of His hands. Some indeed meditate the aspect of the age towards politics, learning, and the arts; but their view excludes God altogether, and they are as blind to all traces of His agency, as deaf to all the admonitions of His providence, as though they disbelieved His existence. Others speak as if they meant to admit the Divine agency, and the high claims of the age to moral regard; but they speak not aright, for their tongue is all they employ in acknowledgment of those claims. All these are atheists in heart. They profess they know God, but they deny Him in works: they discern not the signs of the times. In the hope that by the Divine blessing they may animate you to the high endeavor of living as **THE CHARACTER OF THE AGE** requires, I submit the following observations concerning it.

VIII. I premise that a just view of the signs of the times extends to all departments of human action and existence,—to all that is doing and going on among mankind, and in the whole world of nature. God works not only in the church; He ruleth among the heathen that know Him not, and controlleth the wrath of the wicked to His praise; and by all the inventions, schemes, projects, discoveries, learning, and high aspirings of men, in whatever direction, is fulfilling His counsel and revealing His hand as really as in the operations and advances of the kingdom of grace and righteousness. They take but a narrow survey of the signs of the times who confine their observation to the affairs of religion and the church. These, indeed, are the main affairs. All others are important only as related and subservient to them. But in this view they are infinitely important; and if it were unwise in endeavoring to understand the designs of an enemy in war, to limit our notice to his actual entrance into conflict,—if knowledge

of his preparations, and of the number of his forces, and of all his preliminary movements, would help us to interpret his meaning and infer the result of his success; then should the Divine conduct in all the departments of creation, as far as it falls under our notice, be most thoughtfully considered. All things in this world—all the kingdoms, and people, and creatures, as well as the church, belong to God, who works in all things, and works to fulfil one plan—to answer one end—the church's establishment and ultimate extension over the face of the whole earth; whereof we are confident from this Divine assurance, that the Head of the church is head over all things to the church, and will maintain His universal supremacy until He hath brought all things in subjection under His feet, and destroyed the last enemy.

IX. In pondering the signs of the times, therefore, our survey should be broad; but it were of small avail should it be confused or indefinite. Let us fix, then, first on one department and then another, and consider, if it be but in a moment, what peculiar things God is doing in each. And first, What is He doing IN THE WORLD OF NATURE? Here we remark little but proofs of bounty. Famines, pestilences, earthquakes, winds and waves roaring, fearful sights, signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, have marked other times, but are not the signs of ours. The elements are not in any uncommon strife; and the earth not only yields her usual increase, but opens for the augmented happiness of her population, new and astonishing, and exhaustless stores of wealth.

X. IN THE POLITICAL WORLD, God's agency now is wondrously auspicious. In the midst of strange confusions and overturnings, how manifest, how sublime is the advance of liberty! When have the prospects of despotism been so appalling? When have tyrannical governments been in greater perplexity? Light is flashing all abroad upon the darkness of the nations; and revolutions and counter-revolutions are preparing the way for the universal dominion of Christ in the earth.

XI. Next, behold what God is doing by IMPROVEMENT IN THE ARTS. We are bold to say that neither Rome, nor Greece, nor Egypt, ever knew such a day for useful inventions and contrivances as ours. We boast not over them in architecture, sculpture, painting, the monuments of mere taste; but for all the purposes of human happiness and advancement, never have the arts so flourished as in our times. Had our methods of navigation and internal intercourse, and especially of book-making, been made known to the ancients, they would have thought little, in comparison, of their own

chief inventions. Now, is he not utterly blind, or unable to see afar off, who doubts whether in these things the gracious hand of the Lord is to be acknowledged and magnified?

XII. The progress of the arts has been accelerated by that of science. In moral science we claim the pre-eminence, while we acknowledge our obligations to former times; but in natural science, especially in one most important branch, our attainments are at once transcendent and unassisted.

XIII. We have not so much to say for the LEARNING of these times. For profoundness, for variety, for extent of learning, there are in these days no rivals of Hooker, or Bacon, or Milton, or Locke, or Baxter, or Howe, or Owen, or of Calvin and Melancthon, and hosts of their contemporaries. None in all the earth, not excepting even the students of Germany, whose claims seem to be the highest. Why it is we cannot stay to inquire; but the fact seems to be conceded, that coming ages will look back upon ours in vain for many monuments of learning. STYLE is in some respects improved, and LITERATURE has been more successfully cultivated, and we have some highly gifted authors; but depth and vastness of learning are not among the marks of our times. But then we are reaping some fruits from the learning of other days. Knowledge is far more general, if it is not in some instances so profound. The mass of men is more enlightened. Our books are more numerous and more easily read and comprehended; and we have more VEHICLES OF KNOWLEDGE. Our newspapers, tracts, magazines, reviews, aided by our wonderful facilities of intercourse, almost annihilating distance, give rapid and universal circulation to knowledge. Never had other times signs like these; and they are not more peculiar than full of gracious promise.

XIV. But when we pass into the enclosure of the church, God's doings here almost constrain us to cry out, "How great are His signs, how mighty are His wonders." For first, *the spirit of intolerance* is bound, whose claim to dominion over men's faith was until lately enforced where it could be by the highest temporal penalties. That furious spirit seems near its end. In some few places, indeed, it is not wholly unrestrained; but generally no one is now in danger from freely expressing his thoughts, unless it be he who holds to the right of forbidding others to do so. Men now view nothing so much like the very doings of diabolical malignity as the imprisoning, the beheading, hanging, and burning of other days for religious opinions.

But Christians now not only forbear threatening and slaughter against one another for differences among themselves; they have learned again

to love one another, these differences notwithstanding. This glory of the primitive times, the predominance of brotherly love, has not yet fully returned, but return it must and will ere the millennium comes; and never since the beginning have any times been so beautified and brightened by this fair sign as ours. It is now more than forty years since the glory of this light began to appear. It has been shining more and more until the present moment. The adversary, knowing that his kingdom of darkness must decline as this light increases, is striving to quench it; but in vain his attempts thus far, and so we trust they will be. All our hopes depend on his not succeeding here. We shall succeed if he does not, and shall fail if he does. Then will the world believe in Christ, and appreciate the character of his disciples, when Christ's prayer is heard, that they loving one another may be all one, as "Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us."

Our times are distinguished also by *improved methods of propagating the gospel.* Our preaching, though not so learned as that of other days, is for the most part more simple, direct, pungent, and, we will add, judicious. Among divines, the puritan, generally, deserve no inferior rank; and there were preachers among them of great power as well as erudition; but their views, especially in some points of much pulpit-moment, were obscured by the influence of their philosophy, and of some ancient errors from which the reformers, not having escaped themselves, could not deliver the church. While we defer to those mighty men as superior to our own in intellectual strength and learning, we should confess ourselves guilty of a stupidity for which they would upbraid us, if, released from the chains of an erroneous philosophy, and tutored by providential doings and discipline for one hundred and fifty years, we had not learned, by their assistance and the help of those events which have been fulfilling the Scripture since their day—they would have cause to upbraid us for a criminal stupidity, if, with these advantages, we had learned in no respect either to think or to speak more correctly than themselves; especially since we have the teachings of God's own Edwards, a burning and a shining light, whom no luminary, whether puritan, reformer, or father, hath excelled in gifts, or equalled in elucidating and enforcing the gospel.—Said the great Dr. Owen, about one hundred and eighty years ago, "Let new light be derided whilst men please, he will never serve the will of God in this generation who sees not beyond the line of foregoing ages." Would not such a man as Owen wonder, if he were now living, to find the church knowing nothing more of Scripture truth,—improved not at all either in her conceptions or utter-

ances, after almost two hundred years ; and two hundred as pregnant years as ever passed over our world.

Let no one misjudge what we say. We are far from alleging that the church has been at any time a stranger to the substantial truth of the gospel. No new doctrines are to be expected,—none to be received. But were it not reproachful to the Divine Wisdom to suppose that no more just and enlarged views of old doctrines may be hoped for by a careful observer and improver of the signs of the times ! since it is certain that the times, as they roll forth to accomplish the Father's will, are ever giving new and more perfect fulfilment of the inspired oracles. God's works in some measure bear the impress of his incomprehensibility ; and he surely is an arrogant man who pretends that he thoroughly knows every thing which the Book of God, whether of nature or revelation, was intended to teach.—Let us not then be judged irreverent to our fathers, or boastful of our own attainments, when we affirm that God has doubtless taught his people a *more useful way of preaching* than has generally prevailed heretofore ; a way which brings the gospel to bear on all the powers of the soul more skilfully and perfectly ; a way embracing more definite views, especially, of the provision of the gospel, man's relations towards it, his obligation and duty to embrace it, and the ground of his dependence on the Holy Spirit. In the statement and application of these cardinal points, the preaching of our days, though still defective, excels as far as we know, that of any except the apostolic.

Besides, we have our own *methods of enforcing the gospel out of the pulpit*. Catechising has been of old, but not our sabbath and infant school, and bible-class operations, and meetings for spiritual inquiry, and other revival measures. These are peculiar signs of our times, in which it much becomes all men to rejoice and be glad.

XV. And we cannot but think that the **PERSONAL PIETY**, as well as the preaching and instruction of this age, is in some respects improved. We would ever give praise to God for such examples of spiritual religion as those which the puritans and their descendants have left us. They were men of deep experience, of eminent devotion, of profound acquaintance with the Scriptures, of close intercourse with God, of very peculiar uprightness and holiness of life ; and in these things they were greatly our superiors. It is to be feared that the comparatively light reading of our day has tended to lightness of thought, and feebleness of feeling ; and that

much outward action has excluded in some cases deep meditation and heart-searching. But the puritans had their defects also. While they searched their hearts and minded their closets and families so faithfully, they had not just impressions of that grandest duty of the church, spreading the glorious gospel abroad through the earth;—a great point, truly, to be wanting in which is no unimportant deficiency. This deficiency was theirs. What did they do to evangelize the benighted and perishing nations? Why, when intolerance robbed two thousand of them of their pulpits and their churches, and hindered them from preaching the gospel to their countrymen, did they not turn to the Gentiles, as did the first preachers when rejected by the Jews? They were spirits not to be restrained altogether; and when they could not preach, they wrote, and their writings are a rich legacy to the church, and on the whole perhaps a greater blessing than their labors among the heathen would have been. But still is it not surprising that they did not go forth lifting up their holy and their mighty voices in the wilderness of the unevangelized world?—Now, far as the piety of our times falls behind theirs in other things, it goes beyond it here. Piety is now crying for the breath of the Lord to breathe upon the slain of mankind. Piety is now contributing its large offerings to carry measures forward which contemplate directly the world's conversion. Piety, in many forms, is now running to and fro, that the knowledge of God may be increased among men. Piety now consecrates itself, in many instances, among ministers and people—and of the latter both male and female—to the exclusive work of making Christ known where He has not been heard of; and, at the hazard of life, is at this moment successfully performing this work in the ends of the earth, and in the islands of the sea. Does not the piety of these times, in one respect at least, look more like that of the apostles and first disciples of christianity?

XVI. But the chief glory of these latter days has not yet been mentioned. It is the ASSOCIATIONS OF CHRISTIANS OF THE VARIOUS DENOMINATIONS IN THE ENTERPRISE OF EVANGELIZING THE WORLD. Who since the apostles fell asleep hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? Christians of every name forgetting their differences, and banding themselves together,—their hearts, their influence, and their substance,—in societies, for the salvation of the human race!—in bible societies, which are pledged to supply the world with the oracles of God;—in tract societies, which make a sermon for a man;—in sunday and infant school societies, which gather together the

* This exception to the high excellence of puritan piety was suggested to the author by the Rev. Professor Alexander's essay preliminary to a little work entitled "Advice to a Young Christian."

youth on the sabbath and at other times, to impress upon them the lessons of eternal truth and grace, as the schoolmaster impresses the first rudiments of knowledge;—in missionary societies, which support the heralds of the cross in their noblest of all the works of faith and love;—in education societies, which train the sons of the church in the necessary nurture and knowledge, to furnish them well for the work of the ministry; and, though last in this enumeration, not least in their favorable bearing on the temporal and eternal well-being of mankind—in temperance societies, which have undertaken to stem and exhaust that burning flood of inebriation, which has so long been spreading crime and misery in all their forms over the fairest portions of christendom:—free associations of christians of every name and every sect for such purely benevolent purposes. What times except our own had signs like these? In other times, christians contended against one another; now behold again how they love one another! Not indeed as they ought; nor as they must and will before christianity becomes universal; but as they have not done since the early days of the gospel.

XVII. Now these signs are bright marks of the hand of God—tokens of coming good and glory, which may well renew in us somewhat of that exceeding great joy, with which the wise men rejoiced when they saw the star which had conducted them out of the east, offering itself again, to lead them from Jerusalem to where the young Child was; tokens, doubtless, which even the eye of God rests on with great delight; and partly to testify His joy in which He has given another sign, whose light has been all along mingled with the other lights of these times, and has been the main strength and vigor wherewith they have been shining. For from the time the churches began to meet monthly for prayer, about forty-six years since—from that time, when our age had its beginning, God has been granting the EFFUSIONS OF HIS SPIRIT in a measure unprecedented since the apostolical period; and these effusions have been the life and the energy of every gracious movement and doing before mentioned. Our revivals have been so much spoken of that some may be wearied by another allusion to them, but they deserve more consideration than they have received; and God deserves to be more praised and sought unto for revivals, ten thousand times, than He has been, even by those who have had the deepest sense of their importance. Let our revivals cease, and our other signs will soon depart also; and signs may come in their stead, portentous of distress of nations, and men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.

XVIII. I have spoken of little besides things of a most desirable and

enlivening kind; there are things of another character, adapted to infuse trembling into our joy; but on that very account, rather encouraging expectation than otherwise. Satan does not look on the signs of these times without concern: he knows their meaning, and not being yet bound, his subtlety has never perhaps been more deeply exercised to invent contrivances of resistance and frustration. What will ultimately come forth from his wily malice can scarcely be conjectured; but both in the church and in the world there are plain traces of his artful and deep-plotting wrath. In the world he is forming counter-combinations, and raising loud outcries of slander and falsehood. In the church, he is laboriously sowing seeds of division and discord, and strengthening the bands of sectarianism, by means of groundless jealousies and guilty envyings: and he is seeking also, not only to scatter, but devour Christ's flock, by turning into it wolves in sheep's clothing—infidels and heretics we mean, under the name and garb of christian teachers. But God observes these movements of satan, and nothing yet appears to make us doubt whether any thing but good will come out of his evil agency.

XIX. Now, from the survey which has been taken, this inference impresses itself on our thought, not as a dubious conjecture, but as almost a moral certainty, that the millennium is drawing near. Do you ask, watchman, what of the night? We answer, "the MORNING cometh: the night is far spent; the day is at hand, it is high time to awake out of sleep." As our times themselves are nearer those of the millennium, so the signs of them more definitely portend and promise the millennium, than any other that the eyes of men have ever seen or their ears heard of. The signs of the first age were glorious, but they did not promise the millennium. That age did not and could not give the bible to all the world, or lay permanent foundations for even growing knowledge, and hence was room left for satan to bring in upon the church ten centuries of grosser darkness than paganism itself. The signs of the times in the reformation did not promise the millennium. Associations for giving every creature a bible, and our tract, and sabbath, and infant school labors were then unknown; and the reformers, while with unrivalled pains and ability they disabused the great truths of the gospel of popish perversions and absurdities, had learned imperfect obedience to the law of brotherly love, and with the truth conjoined some errors of great practical force—whereby the reformation was itself greatly marred and hindered, and was speedily succeeded by strange degeneracies and overturnings. Our age has an influence of a different kind—its aim is to advance and perpetuate knowledge through all orders and nations, and it pursues its aim, not by isolated efforts of individuals, but by the combined

endeavors of christians of all sects and countries—assisted mainly by means of that best of all human inventions, the art of printing. If knowledge is stability, this looks like giving permanence as well as universality to the reign of the gospel. We seem to see the foundations now laying of many generations—work now doing which shall make Jerusalem a praise in all the earth, and shall last a thousand years.

XX. And with this thought impressed on our minds by such and so many converging influences, that we are living near the millennium,—that is in an age which seems to promise it speedily,—what, brethren, should be our model and standard of life? We must not go to other ages for patterns; their signs were their own, and their own were the obligations which grew out of them. We have signs of which they knew nothing, and obligations of course, which in respect to them did not exist. If a man ought not to conduct himself, as at ordinary times, during the prevalence of a plague, or conflagration, or when war spreads desolation through the land; if with death in his house, a man ought not to behave himself as when health and laughter dwell in every face; then ought not we, under the high and unusual teachings of such signs as ours, to live after their pattern who were strangers to such light. Brethren, christian character takes a new die and tint from the aspect of our age, as we have sometimes seen the color of the sky color the face of the earth. A christian now has in some respects a different look from one of former times. The substantial of christian character are the same always, but those substantial show themselves variously, according to various circumstances. And where some variety of manifestation is not seen, when circumstances are various, there is reason to think that the manifestation itself is not of true christian character, but some counterfeit of it. Let a man be self-denied to a certain degree in certain circumstances, and in other circumstances not more self-denied; and you may have cause to think that his former self-denial was not christian, but convenient and selfish. A man who out of his abundance will do something for the poor, ordinarily; and will do no more, when the poor would perish upon ordinary charity, is not a truly benevolent man. Circumstances now put his benevolence to the test, and prove it spurious. So may circumstances show the spuriousness of a man's religion, by making extraordinary exactions of him, which the man will not meet. We ought not then to inquire what a puritan christian did for the promotion of the gospel among the heathen, in order to find out what the gospel requires us to do. A puritan christian living in our times would not have been in this respect just what he was in his own: his piety would have been as transcendent here as it was in other things.—He would have been as much more self-sacrificing

being and devoted than we are in advancing the cause of missions, as he was more spiritual and prayerful and universally conscientious.—If our times would have obliged a puritan christian to live thus, they oblige us also, and where is our personal christianity if we do not meet the obligation?

Brethren, the spirit of the millennium is breathed forth upon us in some measure by the times which are passing over us; let us not ask how others felt and what others did; let us imbibe and exemplify the spirit of the millennium. O what a mercy to live in this period of the world's duration! Better to live now than to have seen Christ or the apostles. Better to live now than to live in the millennium itself.—Something may now be done to hasten the millennium. God has put into our hands the golden skirts of the millennium, and by exerting our strength we may draw it upon the world sooner than it could otherwise come. Happy is he who, having prayers to offer, substance to contribute, a life to devote for the advance of the gospel, discerns the signs of the times, and doeth with his might what his hand findeth to do.

Suffer then, beloved brethren, a brief word of exhortation. Behold the spirit and manner of life which become all christians now dwelling on the earth: behold that spirit, and imbibe it; that manner of life, and pursue it. At all times, indeed, christians should have nothing else to care for in this world, but the glorious cause of Him who redeemed them to God by his blood. Their own true happiness, and the true happiness of man, temporal and eternal, is bound up in that cause; and moreover, their high vocation, their solemn profession, their openly avowed principles, hopes, and ends of life; and their holy covenant with God and His church so often renewed; most urgently demand always, that they propose to themselves but this one grand pursuit on earth, **THE FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL, THE CONVERSION OF THE WORLD**: but lay it to your hearts, dear brethren—as you would not deny that the Heavens do rule in the affairs of mankind—we beseech you lay it well to your hearts and ponder it deeply—that this constant demand has, with respect to you, a most peculiar and most strenuous enforcement in the very remarkable signs of these times—those wondrous works of the Lord, those high operations of His hands, by which this age is so strikingly distinguished. Give yourselves soberly to this meditation, and let it stir you up to **HIGH AND SINGULAR EXEMPLIFICATIONS OF THE POWER OF GODLINESS**. It will have this effect if you let it have free course in your thoughts. Such exemplifications, and nothing else, will satisfy that call which the Lord of Hosts is at this day addressing to the church out

of the bright cloud of his wonderful providence. And knew you not, brethren, that such exemplifications of christianity are of all things most needed? They, after all, are the "light of the world;" and all our plans and enterprises for diffusing light on the earth, will in the absence of these be but as a candle substituted for sunbeams. Light dwells in the Book of God in infinite fulness, and in some measure in its expositions by the ministry; but bible light must fill the hearts, and then shine out pure and bright in the example of living christians, or the mass of mankind will still keep themselves in darkness. Let the world be fully occupied with bibles; and then let there be also some genuine specimens of what the bible can do; of its power to exalt, and refine, and sanctify men; and let such specimens be multiplied as they were in the first days of the gospel, and the work of the world's conversion will cease to linger. But it will linger while christians content themselves with such small and stunted measures of personal holiness as are now general among them. It will linger while christians generally do not love Christ more, and love His church more, and love the souls of men more, and pray more, and move more holily and unblameably in all the walks of life, and show a sincerer faith in that great saying of their Lord, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It will linger, and our bright prospects of approaching millennial glory will grow no brighter, and perhaps be presently overcast. Wherefore, brethren, beloved in Christ, practise we beseech you the just lesson of our subject; come out and be separate from the ranks of careless and customary professors; be not the servants of men; have no fear of singularity; look not around you for examples of spirituality; look not to former generations; but look to Christ, His claims, and His commands; and let your whole heart be open and bare to the influence of the signs of the times; and take the world henceforth to record that you count not your lives dear unto yourselves, so that you may finish your course with joy, and do the very utmost that by you may be done, to have the gospel of the grace of God preached and established among all nations.