Papers on Prophecy

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The Prospects of the World according to the Scriptures

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

I have previously shown the hope and calling of the Christian in the parable of the virgins. We shall now see what the word of God reveals as to the future of those not born of God, who may bear the Christian name for the present, but who will abandon it, as we learn from the very portion of Scripture just read. No doubt the world comprehends more than those who outwardly profess the name of the Lord. Besides Christendom, it embraces the Gentiles or heathen, and the Jews. Scripture is silent about none of these; and the light of God is as bright on the future as on the past.

God Only Can Foretell The Future

This is an immense principle to hold fast in reading the written word. Men are apt to judge of God by themselves. To speak with certainty of the future being to us impossible, man forthwith imagines that, if God speaks about it, even then it must be somewhat uncertain. If we only reflect a moment, we cannot but see that this idea is the principle of infidelity. What difference does it make to God whether He is speaking about the past, the present, or the future? He assuredly does not think in the sense of having to reflect, nor does He merely give an opinion. On the contrary; He knows all things. The only question is whether God communicates what He knows, or how far He has been pleased to do so. Does not the prophetic word profess that He has done so? Is it a true profession? If God has

communicated His mind about the future, as evidently the Scriptures assume and even assert, it is simply faith to accept it; and the moment our faith rests upon His word, the light shines. What seemed confusion, when we did not believe, turns to order before our minds when we do. The light was really there always. It was our unbelief that made confusion.

The word of God is the perfect revelation of His mind, no matter what He speaks, or when; and God has been pleased to speak about the future. To do so is the special mark of His confidence. He tells Abraham what He was going to do what concerned not merely himself, but others, even the cities of the plain. Abraham had nothing directly to do with them though Lot had; yet it was not Lot but Abraham who was told of the imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot only learned it just in time to be saved, as he was, by fire. But Abraham knew in peace beforehand, and interceded with God. Our portion ought to be that of Abraham rather than of Lot. There are those who in the future will be saved just in time to escape destruction. There are those yet to be in the sphere of judgment, who will pass through it in a measure, who will be preserved only at the last moment. Some will be destroyed. Remember Lot’s wife. Others will be rescued, as the angels rescued Lot and his daughters. But theirs was not the happier portion, like that of Abraham.

God has “provided some better thing for us” in every respect. He has given us the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Accordingly, says Paul, writing, not to the Ephesians or the Philippians, but even to the Corinthians, “We have the mind of Christ”, the intelligence of Christ, the capacity of spiritual

understanding (1 Cor. 2:16). Not, of course, that we have the same measure as the Lord, Who had and was Himself the wisdom of God, and this absolutely. We have nothing save in and by Him, and hence only in dependence on Him. However, as Christians having the Holy Ghost, we have not the mere mind of man only but of Christ. The intelligence of Christ is ours; and this shows why what was true in principle of Abraham is increasingly — so to speak — true of the Christian, for it could not be said, in the full force of the term, that Abraham had the mind of Christ. The Holy Ghost had not yet come, for Jesus was not yet glorified. Now that the Lord Jesus has accomplished the redemption, and has gone up on high, He has sent down the Holy Spirit to dwell in His saints, to make them the temple of God, and even the body of each believer the temple of the Holy Ghost, just as His own body was, He on earth having His body perfectly holy, and ever fit for the Spirit without redemption, we only in virtue of His blood. Hence, never till the blood of Christ was shed could any other here below be the temple of the Holy Ghost. Jesus was the temple of the Spirit; we, I repeat, are only so because our sin is judged in His cross, our guilt blotted out by His blood. Therefore the Spirit of God comes down to dwell in us, putting honour on the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; and because of this we have a divine power opening into all that God communicates.

This, though a digression, is of immense importance on the particular subject which we are examining, for there is nothing that more clearly proves divine intelligence than the communication of the future. The Old Testament makes, in the main, this challenge to the false gods, a challenge which — and we need not wonder at it

— could only strike them with dumbness, even if they had pretended ever so loudly before to give out oracles. As long as it was merely a question of baffling inquirers, they might deceive by equivocal answers; but Isaiah, in the most trenchant and severe style, shows their utter impotence to disclose the future.

The Future Of The World Has Been Foretold

Now a very large part of the Old Testament consists of revelations of the future, and not only of what was future then, but of what is future still. The Old Testament prophets expand largely, and in the most blessed terms, on the bright future that yet awaits this world. Isaiah depicts the day of Jehovah, when all that now obstructs the light of glory shall be removed; when all that rises up against the honour of the only true God shall fall; when Satan will lose his delusive power; when the nations of the earth, long groaning under oppression' shall be set free; and when the Jews themselves, who truly ought to have been the leaders of all that is good and true, but alas! abound with teachers of the infidelity that now poisons the world, shall be delivered from every bitter thraldom, and will come forth to the place that God's promise assigns them as the head and priest of the world. They are destined to fill the foremost place when the earth itself is raised out of its actual and long degradation. The Lord has spoken it, and His hand will accomplish all in due time.

These are parts of the prospects of the world on which the Old Testament prophets descant at great length, and with graphic minuteness. When the Lord Jesus came, on Whom the accomplishment of prophecy depends for the realisation of the kingdom of God — for in truth He was

the King Who brought in the kingdom personally, and presented it with final responsibility to Israel — He was rejected. Then came a mighty change of all consequence to the world, when every bright hope seemed blasted, when all expectation of glory for Israel set in clouds and a deeper darkness than before. God made use of that moment of fallen hopes for the earth and the earthly people, and the nations of the world, for “some better thing”. He used the cross of Christ to bring in a wholly new state, when Israel vanished for a season — a state distinct from that which prophets prepared the minds of men of old to expect. The reason is simple, and the ground plain. The rejected Christ is raised from the dead, and, having ascended to heaven, takes His seat there to bring in a new and heavenly order of blessing. He is seated there until a future moment, unknown and undisclosed during which God brings in altogether new things. This present interval is Christianity, which is therefore essentially of heaven. The prophets did not speak of heaven, save incidentally. Prophecy refers to the earth. No doubt there are here and there allusions to heaven; but-by no prophet and in no prophecy is there an opening out of what the Lord Jesus is doing now at the right hand of God.

The Lamp And The Day-Star

It was not the object of prophecy to do so. Prophecy, the prophetic word, is a lamp, and very useful, to which those who heed the Lord will do well to pay attention, for that lamp shines in a dark or squalid place (2 Peter 1:19). Such is the revealed use of prophecy for Christianity. But then there is a brighter light, even the light of day, as the apostle says “Till the day dawn, and

the day-star arise in your hearts.” What does he mean by this? The accomplishment of prophecy? Not at all. Till the day of Jehovah comes for the world? In no wise. He speaks of day dawning, and the star arising in the heart, not of that day arising upon the world. This would be the accomplishment of prophecy; but he is intimating what the Spirit of God can bring into the heart of the Christian now. The Jewish believer was encouraged still to value his prophetic lamp. The word of prophecy derived confirmation from what was seen on the Holy Mount. Yet there was to be a far clearer light — the light of day, the brightness of heaven, not of the lamp. Further, the person of our Lord Jesus is our hope, the day-star, not merely the general light of heaven, but the day-star arising in the heart. This is, as I understand it, the dawning of heavenly hope in the heart, of which Peter spoke.

The actual arrival of the day of the Lord is another matter, and this will be in its own time. It is, however, a good thing to hold fast the prophetic lamp until we get a better light. There are far brighter associations into which the Christian is introduced now through Christ Jesus; but of these things prophecy does not treat. The prophetic word does not contemplate the arising of the day-star in the heart. There it is the very reverse of Christ. The day-star of prophecy is the name of the Lord’s enemy, as you may see in Isaiah 14:12. The day-star that the Christian knows is Christ, while He is outside of the world in heaven, before He comes to earth. Day dawns, and the day-star arises in the Christian’s heart while he is here.

In consequence of this present privilege we stand in a wondrous position. Believing in the Lord Jesus, we have

a Saviour Who is already come, and has accomplished the redemption of our souls, and given us remission of sins. We have life eternal, and the knowledge of our absolute cleansing in the sight of God through the Holy Ghost. Yet the condition of the world is no better, but rather worse. The world has been led on by its prince to reject its only true King — I mean the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, the Supreme. We are in the secret of its declension; we know that the King of kings has been refused; and our hearts are with Him. We can afford to wait for the great day; but meanwhile we have the light of day before the day comes. The light cannot yet shine on the world, but in our hearts; so that it is evident we have more than the lamp of prophecy, even the light of day.

We are children of the light and of the day ourselves. Hence therefore it is the part of the Christian to be able to read all that is passing around, as well as the communications of God as to the future. According to God it is a part of our proper heritage. We ought to be able to understand the signs of the times. We ought to be able to read not only what is before us according to God, but also to speak of the future because we believe the word of God. With all that God has communicated we may and should interest ourselves. We have the family interests; for, if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; and it would be a poor thing that the heirs should not make themselves acquainted with the inheritance; and how strange if Christians should not understand by the Spirit of God! For this reason then, if we only knew our own privileges, we are led into an immense field of blessedness entirely outside the natural ken of man. This is what I shall endeavour a

little to expound and apply, in looking at a few of the principal passages that bear upon the prospects of the world according to the Scriptures.

Rooting Out Tares A Mistake

Now the Lord, when He was here below, showed clearly what was to befall the world (Matt. 13). He says, “The field is the world”, and He has told us what will become of the world, where men would be Christianised — that is, He has shown us clearly what would be the result. Good seed was sown; but there was an enemy who sowed bad seed. Now He does not give us the smallest idea that the bad seed would be ameliorated. He shows us that the servants were zealous enough to remove the bad seed, but He reproves them. He shows that the effort to correct the evil that is in the world, the attempt to use the name of the Lord for reforming the world, always ends in rooting up the good as well as the bad.

We see this habitually in Popery. It is the principle of the reproved servants; but, instead of making the world better, in effect it ends on the contrary by destroying the wheat, not the tares. Babylon, above all that ever were, has killed the saints, and made herself drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus (Rev. 17:6). This is a matter of divine revelation to every one, and history verifies it as a fact of Rome, not pagan only but papal yet more. Scripture had said so long ago: he would be a bold man who would dare to deny it. Yet, as of old so now, there are men who talk of making the world better! This delusion goes along with another fundamental error which is found in Popery (and far beyond it too), and that is the notion of men getting better themselves. The two delusions go together. The fact is, that Christianity

denies both; one's very baptism indeed denies it, particularly as to man (Rom. 6). To be saved one must take the ground of death with Christ, not of improving the first man; and he who sees and knows what man is ought never to be drawn into the delusion of the world's improvement. Further, the Lord Jesus sets aside the latter error when He tells us the nature of the harvest that is coming; and the harvest is the end of the age, this present evil age, not of the world (Matt. 13:38, 39).

When the consummation of this age then comes, there will be a process of discrimination and judgment. The wheat will be removed on high, the tares dealt with here below. Consequently then will be the harvest; but evil will abound up to the end of the age. Never will there be a time in this age when the preaching of the gospel or the zeal of the children of God will root out the evil that has been sown by Satan from the beginning under the Christian name. The new age, the millennial kingdom, will be characterised by righteous rule over the earth in power.

In short therefore those who expect the gradual extirpation of evil are in antagonism with the distinct teaching of the Lord Jesus. I am as far as possible from saying this to repress efforts towards winning and edifying souls; and I fear those who yield to such thoughts, or at least to such words, are guilty of slander. It is one thing to work in faith, and another to expect the general blessing of the world as the result. I grant you the latter will surely come, but its introduction is reserved for the Son of man. Should the bride of the Lamb be jealous? Such a work and result is not for the church, which has been very guilty from early days, dragged down into the snares of the world, into its

activity, its honours, its gold and silver, and what not. If Christendom is now suffering the buffets of the world, the world, once eagerly sought by Christians for its own things, is now turning against those who gave the poorest testimony to what a Christian should be. So it will be more and more with the world. Ungrateful for whatever of God has been shed around by Christianity, it will turn again and rend her who abused the name of the Lord for her own selfish and earthly interests. Evil was planted in Christendom under the pretext of Christ's name, and that evil can never be rooted out until the judgment which is to be executed at the end of the age. It is presumptuous unbelief to expect or attempt it. The angels dealing judicially are quite distinct from and contrasted with the servants who sow and watch (alas, how poorly!) the good seed. It is astonishing how men continue to confound the two.

End Of The Age But Not Of The World

I repeat also that the end of the age is not the end of the world. The phrase "end of the world" in Matthew 13:39 is an unequivocal error of translation. There is no scholar who ought not to be ashamed of such a blunder. Far from being the end of the world, the very context proves the contrary. The Lord sends His angels and purges from the field or world what is offensive to Him. The evil is judged, the scandals removed; the bad crops or bad fish destroyed. In short, the living wicked are punished, and the righteous shine in the kingdom of their Father. The kingdom of the Son of man is the earthly part of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the Father is its heavenly part, as will appear to any attentive reader. The heavenly things and the earthly

things of the kingdom of God (compare John 3:12) will be found then in unsullied brightness and harmony. In the Father's kingdom, according to His own counsels, the glorified saints shine to His own praise. The field or world which had been spoiled by Satan's wiles will be cleared of all its corruptions and lawlessness. Thus, far from being the end of the "world", the harvest which closes this age will be the beginning of the world's going onward in blessedness under the displayed kingdom of the Son of man and Son of God, the Head of the church which will then be exalted and reigning with Him.

It is the end of the age, the present age, during which Christ does not appear in glory and reign over the earth. There will follow another age, when Christ, instead of being hidden, will be manifested, and will expel Satan, removing all that contaminates men and dishonours God. This judicial purging connects itself with the Old Testament prophets They all refer to the times of restitution of all things, the kingdom of Messiah over the earth. The mistake is applying them to the church now. The principle often does apply in the New Testament, as we all see. I do not mean to contest this, but there are limits. The fulfilment is another thing.

In the future kingdom there will be not only Jews blessed but Gentiles too. Of this the apostle Paul avails himself, pointing to the fact of both enjoying the present blessings of grace; and this fact amply suffices to stop the mouth of the Jew. Thus we find the Old Testament applied in Romans 15:10 — "Rejoice ye Gentiles with His people." How then could the Jews consistently object to the apostle's preaching to all men? Was it right of them to fly in the face of their own prophets? Did they not affirm God's blessing on both to be contrary to the

Bible? But the Gentiles are certainly blessed no less than the Jew by the gospel; and this the proud Jew could not endure. Still the apostle never says that the prophecy was therefore accomplished to the letter now. The principle of it is true under the gospel; the fulfilment of it awaits another day and a different state of things when Christ Himself appears.

In the prophecies we find intimations not merely of the coming blessedness, but of the Jews treated as a rebellious gainsaying people; and of God calling in those who were “not a people”. Take the beginning of Isaiah 65. The Gentiles are there called as those who knew not the Lord, while His own are treated as disobedient. Compare again Hosea 1:10 with Rom. 9:24-26. Thus the Spirit of God gives here and there hints, dim enough once but now clearly interpreted by Himself, which were to have a special bearing on the present time. But none of these Old Testament Scriptures discloses to us the heavenly glory of Christ at the right hand of God, or of Christians united with their Head in heaven. These things compose “the mystery”; none of them is ever developed by the prophets.

We have the fact of the Lord sitting at the right hand of God in Psalm 110; but the only use the psalm makes of it is to show that He sits there till His enemies are made His footstool. There is not a word about what is done with His friends. The revelation of the counsels and ways of God with the latter now is Christianity. The psalm only speaks of His sitting there till judgment is executed on His enemies. We see what the apostle calls the revelation of the mystery is now verified. It is a secret which the Old Testament never brought out, though giving certain intimations that are now

accomplished — for instance, in calling the Gentiles. For as Moses told Israel, “The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the works of this law” (Deut. 29:29). But the great central truth of St. Paul is that the mystery or secret of God concerning Christ and the church is now revealed by His holy apostles and prophets through the Spirit (Rom. 16:25, 26).

It would be easy to furnish further proofs, were this the fitting time. The character of the church supposes that God abolishes at present the difference between the Jew and the Gentile. The grand fact of the future is that then the Jew is exalted to the first place, and the Gentile blessed, but subordinately.

In the kingdom they will each be recognised and blessed, but in a different position, not equally as now both are. It is quite evident that the future millennial kingdom supposes the reinstatement of Israel in more than former favour., and the nations will rejoice, but in a place secondary to that of Israel.

In the church of God all this disappears, the church being heavenly, as Christ is, and according to the nature of things in heaven. People are not known by their nationality on high: on earth they are, according to God’s providence. But the Christian being essentially called on high, all these earthly distinctions entirely disappear. Hence after Pentecost there was a new state of things and a fresh testimony, for God has now revealed that which comes in between the first and second advent of Christ.

When the Lord comes again, the Old Testament prophecies will resume their course, with the additional confirmation of a small portion of the New Testament which refers to that time in order to give a harmonious testimony.

One may now see clearly what has been shown already, that the Lord Jesus prepared His disciples from the very first not to expect that the Christian economy would, so far as the world was concerned, end in joy and light and blessing. On the contrary, evil must take root from early days by the crafty power of Satan, and never be corrected till the end of this age. This then is the first great lesson that we are taught in the Gospels.

Again, in Luke 21 is a statement to which we may refer as giving a further view of the prospects of the world according to the Scriptures. It is said, “When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.” This distinctly points to the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, when it was invested with armies more completely than at any point of its most eventful history. But there is not a word here about seeing “the abomination of desolation.” Nor does this chapter say “then shall be great tribulation,” such as never had been, nor shall be: “these,” it only tells us, “be the days of vengeance” — two very different things. Here again we read, “But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days, for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people.” This was fulfilled to the veriest tittle in what befell the Jews when Titus took the city, and the Jews passed into captivity for the second time. “And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden

down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." So it was, in fact. Jerusalem was trodden down of the Gentiles. One national power after another was to have possession of the holy city. So it is now; that treading down still goes on, for the times of the Gentiles are not yet fulfilled.

But much more follows: "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars, and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring," etc. Some people have made the mistake that these scenes took place when Titus took Jerusalem. There is no authority for such a supposition. We have had the capture of Jerusalem long ago; then that Jerusalem is trodden down after the siege, while "the times of the Gentiles" flow onward; thence we are transported into the final scenes. "Then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory; and when these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." It is clear that destruction is not intended, but the blessedness that is coming in at the end, when God terminates the time of misery and sorrow and trouble and suffering. The coming of the Son of man is never made to be the annihilation of the world, or the end of it in that sense, but the end of Satan's misrule, and the shining forth of the kingdom of God. For the world there can be no real permanent general blessing till the Son of man comes in power and glory.

The Fig Tree And All The Trees

In this chapter (ver. 29), we find the parable in an enlarged form compared with Matthew: "Behold the fig tree, and all the trees." As being of Luke, it speaks about

the Gentiles explicitly. Therefore “all the trees” are in the scene. When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that “summer is nigh.” “The kingdom of God is nigh at hand.” Is it not evident, therefore, that the kingdom of God is coming in a sense different from what men look for and say? Its approach is true now to faith; but we do not see it. Then it will be manifest, and it will put down all that opposes itself against God. The yoke of evil will be broken then, which it is not now. Satan is still the prince of this world. We have to fight against the world-rulers of this darkness, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places (Eph. 6:12). The term “high places” is an error of the translators, which falsifies the sense. It has led persons to oppose the higher authorities; for instance it led the Roundheads to oppose the government of their day. Such an interpretation is as false as the translation. The rendering and the doctrine are both wrong. The doctrine of the New Testament is that we have to do with the most serious fight that ever can be carried on by man here below; we have to combat Satan, not only to hold our own, but to hold the Lord’s own against all the power of the enemy. But in no case is the Christian to wage carnal warfare, only against Satan.

This spiritual conflict is what is going on now, but it will not be the case when the kingdom of God comes. Satan, animating the empire in its last uprising, and the nations in general, against the Lamb, will be put down: then the stream will steadily flow on for God’s glory. Now we have to swim against the current. Now it is a question of life and faith, where Satan reigns, and only the power of the Spirit sustains. There will be no power of death then against which the saints of God will have, as now, to

make good His will in the name of Jesus. There are, no doubt, those who will tell you that the kingdom is gradually winning its way among men; but this is a grievous mistake, a short-sightedness not without danger as to the word of God. It ignores the utter ruin of man and the world, the incurable evil of flesh, the power of Satan, the honour reserved and due to Christ. It overlooks the heavenly calling and the future reward and the present rejection of the Christian. It is manifest that, if this present advance were the fact, a very great part of the New Testament would cease to be applicable directly the power of Satan was broken. The doctrine and exhortations which suppose we have now to fight against Satan would be no longer true. There is a plain contrast between the character and circumstances of the millennium and those of the present day.

Romans 11 will tell us a little more of the world's prospects as God teaches us in His word. We read there that the Gentile, who is now the object of God's calling and of His dealings under the gospel, is warned to take heed from the fate of the Jew: "Because of unbelief they were broken off; and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee" (vers. 20, 21). It is impossible to apply this to the believer as such. The apostle is speaking of the general professing body. It is the danger of what is commonly called Christendom, of those baptized to the name of the Trinity, who are here warned of excision if they continue not in the goodness of God which He is now displaying. If the Gentiles do not stand by faith, they will be cut off, just as the Jew was before.

This judicial act has nothing to do with the believer's security. But God deprived His chosen nation of their place of privilege and testimony. He always guarded His own people, Israel, as He cares for His own people now. God always is faithful to His saints; how could He be otherwise to those who, renouncing themselves, confide in Him, that is, in His Son? As the Lord Himself told the disciples, they were in His hand and in His Father's hand (John 10:28, 29). But He is here speaking, not of individual saints, but of the professing body. As the people which had the law were cut off because of their infidelity, so those who are now unfaithful to the gospel will be cut off because of their infidelity. He is speaking of the olive tree, that is, the line of those who profess the name and testimony of God in the world.

The Olive Tree Of Promise

The Jews were the beginning of the olive tree. The olive tree being founded on the promises given to Abraham, it does not take account of persons before God's dealings with him. The olive tree begins with the first soul called out as a public witness for God in the world; Abraham's seed, the Jews, followed as a nation; and Christendom is now the public witness for God. But, as the Jew had been false to his calling, so Christendom has been faithless to theirs. The fact is certain, not so much from our own thoughts or from secular history, but from the unerring word of God.

They are told, if they do not abide in the faith, they must be cut off; also, if they (the Jews) do not abide in unbelief, God will graft them in again. The tree was Jewish; then some branches, not all, but some, are brought in under the name of the Lord. Meanwhile the

Gentile was Christianised; but when they become unfaithful, the Jews will be grafted in again. This will be when the kingdom of God comes upon the earth.

In Romans 11:25 we read, “I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits.”

This is exactly what Christians have become. They dream that things are always to get better and better. Is not this one way of becoming “wise in their own conceits?” He says again, so “blindness in part is happened unto Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” You err if you suppose that Christ will be always at the right hand of God, as He now is. When He returns to the earth, when He espouses Zion, there will be a place given to Israel, the old promised place, on the ground of divine mercy; as God has said, “For this is My covenant unto them when I shall take away their sins” (Romans 11:27).

What is going on now? The Jews are the enemies of the gospel. And one great cause of their enmity is that they first rejected Jesus Himself; then they became furious when redemption through the blood of Jesus was preached to the Gentiles; they could not bear such grace to the world, they were the adversaries who dogged the steps of the apostles wherever they went to preach to the nations; they tried to get hold of the chief women and men, and stir them up against the apostles. So they have been antagonists of Christ ever since. Men wonder what is going on in the infidelity of the day. The Jews are mainly at the bottom of this wickedness. Satan has set

up their famous men as objectors to the truth; Spinoza was one of them. But latterly this opposition has taken a new and more apostate shape. It is the old error with a fresh burnish, but with aggravated guilt given to it.

The unbelieving Jews, I am grieved to say, are the mainspring of the world's opposition to the truth of God. They have lost the earth, and they gnash their teeth at heaven. They cannot bear that the Christian should get a blessing which they do not want themselves. The same thing was found wherever the heralds of the divine mercy of God went forth in early days with the message; and so it is now, with the sorrowful addition that the Gentiles were to be unfaithful like the Jews, and foes of the truth also. What an awful thing it is that those who bear the Christian name, shepherds in chief perhaps, are pioneers of the most abominable infidelity! This is the case not merely in Protestant countries, but equally so in Catholic countries. The Protestants are more open and plain-spoken; the others pay their priests if they do not go to mass, or are priests themselves, believing as little as they like. A little hush-money suffices to keep up the delusion.

There is infidelity everywhere in Christendom, and not less but more, I believe, in the lands of Popery, than even in Germany and Holland. Nor do the priests care much about it; so long as men or even women only keep up outward forms, it is all right, and they are "the faithful"!

In Protestant countries, as we know, the Bible is too much read and known for such a vain show. People too are more honest about God and His word; if they do not believe, they say so. Some, it is true, have been learning

a novel lesson at Oxford lately: it is to profess the truth, but to insinuate, preach, and print the contrary. This is almost the lowest form of infidelity that has been seen yet. In former days infidelity went outside the profession of faith; this had at least an appearance of low and rude integrity about it. If a clergyman became an infidel, he gave up his profession; but the characteristic of modern free-thinking is that you find men of amiable habits and character who adhere to forms of Christianity which they do not accept as divine and ultimate truths, but only as a step in human progress; and thus they try to destroy the faith of the truth. The influence of this immoral, easy-going scepticism extends, as does the equally unbelieving system of Ritualism; and what will be the result? There will come an uprising of public indignation against Babylon; there will be a revolution in religious things as well as political. This I shall show by the word of God.

The general truth, however, as we have seen before coming to details, is that the Gentiles are warned that they must be cut off, while Israel will be brought in again. The prophets, and yet more, the apostles, are clear enough about it. We go farther, however; and in the Scripture which we have read tonight the statement of the Spirit of God is most explicit. He encourages the saints by their hope of the return of the Lord Jesus, Who will instantly gather them up to heaven, not to be troubled with the false rumour that the day of the earth’s judgment had already come.

The Thessalonian Error About The Day Of The Lord

I must particularly call your attention to this passage, though it has been often done of late. The phrase in question should be, “The day of the Lord is present.” There is an error in the common English version, as also in the commonly received text. This is conceded by almost all competent scholars and intelligent Christians. The meaning of the last verb in 2 Thess. 2:2 is not “at hand,” but “is present.” I am not aware of a single case where this form of word could have any other meaning. Nor does it occur seldom in the New Testament: see Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 3:22; 1 Cor. 7:26; Gal. 1:4; Heb. 9:9, in all which it unequivocally means present, repeatedly in express contrast with what is at hand or future. In 2 Timothy 3:1, is a different form of the word; but there too it means that difficult times shall be there, not merely imminent. These are all the occurrences in the New Testament. Without exception, they are every one clear and explicit in their sense as to this. “The day of the Lord is at hand” would be a different phrase. When the apostle means “at hand” he says so, using quite another word. Further, this erroneous version, as in the English Bible, makes the apostle contradict himself, for the Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 13:12) tells the Romans that “the day is at hand.” How then could the misleaders at Thessalonica be consistently charged with error if they only taught that the day of the Lord is at hand — the same thing as Paul afterwards teaches himself? But no; these false teachers had given out that the day was (not coming ever so soon, but) actually arrived; and this was filling the saints with panic, especially as they

pretended to a revelation for it, and even more, as we shall see.

There is an indubitable sign of false teachers that I must here commend to the notice of all Christians, for we need it in these days, and may need it yet more if the Lord tarry. Observe then that the false teacher ordinarily does one of two things, sometimes both: either he lulls asleep those who ought to be roused, keeping them entranced in the deadly slumber of fallen nature, or he tries to alarm true believers by endeavouring to shake their confidence in the grace and truth of God, filling their minds with groundless alarm. Not possessing peace himself, he is often deceived as well as a deceiver; for he knows not in his own experience peace and joy in believing. The false teacher then either injures the children of God by weakening their confidence in God, or, at the same time with this, he lulls with opiates those whom God would have to be awakened from their dangerous insensibility. In short, false teachers either flatter the world or try to alarm the true children of God.

The truth does exactly the contrary; it always has for its effect to rouse men from their state of guilty indifference or of self-confidence, setting before them their fearful danger for eternity. But it tells them of a divine Saviour and of a present salvation. Along with this there is the comforting, establishing, and leading on of the believers. into all their privileges and responsibilities, their proper joys in communion with the Lord and one another, and their growth in the knowledge of His mind and ways for worship and service. For all these things are the portion of the believer.

What then were those about who misled the Thessalonians? They pretended to the word and Spirit for their cry that the day of the Lord was come; false teachers often do as much. But they did more; they grew bolder in their iniquity; they pretended to have a letter of the apostle Paul affirming that “the day of the Lord was present.” I am aware that some learned men have thought they alluded to the former Epistle. Thus Paley1 says that the apostle writes in the Second Epistle, among other purposes, to quiet this alarm and to rectify the misconstruction that had been put on his words; in that the passage in the Second Epistle relates to the passage in the First. But this is an oversight. It is certain and evident that the epistle alluded to here was not his; for he says “that ye be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us.” He does not say the letter that we wrote, but a letter as from us, or purporting to be from us. It was a suppositious letter, not his First Epistle.

The pretended letter of the apostle was to the effect that the day of the Lord was already come; but the day of the Lord, according to the Bible, will in general be one of trouble and anguish, a day of clouds and darkness for the world. You may read this abundantly in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, and many of the prophets. On what pretext then was the cry raised at Thessalonica? The Thessalonians were suffering great trouble and persecution for the truth’s sake. The false teachers seem to have converted this into that day, alleging that the day of the Lord had come. All indeed knew it to be a day of fearful trial, and that all meanwhile goes on worse and worse till the evil is then put down and the power of God is victorious. Hence the saints that did look for that

day, according to the First Epistle, became troubled by this cry and were shaken in mind. For, as we have seen, false teachers naturally shake the righteous, instead of seeking to comfort and stablish them. On this occasion they contrived to excite no little panic and anxiety as if the day of the Lord had actually come.

Not at all, says the apostle: do you not know that the Lord is coming to gather you to Himself? “We beseech you, brethren, by the coming (or presence) of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind nor troubled.” He first appeals to a known motive of joy and confidence in their hope and then goes on to a prophetic reason, thus giving the idea a complete refutation. But you may notice that it is never supposed that the saints wait for the day of the Lord to be taken up and meet Him in the air. It is the coming of the Lord they await for this. “The coming of the Lord” and “His day” are two quite different thoughts, often confounded by men.

The coming or presence (παρουσία) of the Lord is a much wider term, embracing the day as well as what is just before the day. But the part of His coming that is called “the day of the Lord” consists of the execution of His judgment on the earth and then of His reign. The first object is to gather home those He loves. Love would always secure the object of affection first.

The. coming of the Lord then is bound up closely with the gathering of the saints; the day of the Lord with the execution of judgment on His enemies here below. Hence we find here, “let no man deceive you by any means.” It is evident there might be a great deal of mistake on this subject; “for that day shall not come

except there come the falling away (or apostasy) first." "That day shall not come" is an insertion of our translators, marked therefore by italics, though, I believe, substantially correct. The "day" will come after the apostasy, the public abandonment of Christianity throughout Christendom.

Oh, how men deceive themselves, when they think that all is going on to progress and triumph! There will be victory when Christ comes, not before. What is revealed is a very different and more humbling prospect. The distinct intimation is that ["that day shall not come"] except there come the falling away first, the apostasy. And what is the character of modern infidelity but a preparation of the way for the apostasy; men bearing the Christian name, yet giving up all the Christian substance; men who still carry on the dead forms while the spirit has fled? This abandonment of the truth of God will grow and extend, and men are getting ready for it too. They are destroying everywhere on earth the outward and public recognition of the truth. There will soon be no outward homage paid to Christianity in Europe. I mean that the governments of the world are gradually stripping off all connection with the Christian name. There are those who think this is a great boon. Though I have not the smallest interest or affinity for established religion, I cannot but think the act criminal and that this will turn out more serious than the reformers expect.

I believe it was a most serious evil when the Christians accepted an alliance with the world; but it is a totally different and most solemn issue for the world when it casts off all its connection with Christianity. It was a deep loss for the Christians when they sought the

world’s recognition; it will be an awful day for the world when it is so tired of the union as to throw off Christianity entirely, Consequently, that most slender tie which binds and attaches men to the reading of the Bible or going to church will be broken when it has no longer connection with the government. You may live to see the vast change which will take place. I grant that there is no reality, no divine life, there is no true honour paid to the Lord, in carrying on a mere outward profession; but people who go to church, as it is called, hear the word of God and an acknowledgement of the name of Christ. When this is no longer publicly recognised, they will give it up as an antiquated prejudice, and go to shoot, fish, ride, or drink. They will amuse themselves in reading anything but the Bible. There will be the most rapid decay. Not so with the saints of God. The result will be, no doubt, that the real will become the more evident. They will rest only on the word of God; but as regards men of the world, the neglect of reverence for what is divine will bring about the apostasy. This is what is in prospect for the world!

The First Epistle to the Thessalonians was also the first written by the apostle; the Second, from the nature of the case, was written shortly after. Thus, from the very beginning of Christianity — from the first communications of the Spirit of God to the churches such is the solemn declension of which they were warned. Those who profess the gospel will abandon it ere the end of this age come. But that day is not to be “except there come the falling away first.” It is not merely a falling away here, and a falling away there, but the falling away, or the apostasy.

The Man Of Sin

Further, “That man of sin (will) be revealed, the son of perdition.” There was once a Man of righteousness — the Saviour; but He was rejected. There will be a man of sin — the son of perdition — “who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped.” I am aware that many people apply this to the Pope of Rome. I do not for a moment agree with them, though regarding that system as a frightful delusion, even Babylon. But I dare not say that the apostasy has arrived yet, and it is a sorrowful thing to use Scripture with a party aim, or for controversial objects; it is a sorrowful thing in the presence of growing evil, which pervades both Protestant and Catholic countries alike — a sorrowful thing to cast such a stone from one to the other. No, beloved friends, the apostasy is the result of despising the gospel, of trifling with the truth, of keeping up forms that are unreal, and then casting them off with shame.

The apostasy will be the result wherever Christendom extends. Wherever the gospel has been preached, or at any rate the Lord professed, the apostasy will be the issue, whether of Catholics or Protestants, whether of Greeks or Copts or any others; such will be the result, not outside but within Christendom. It does not mean the end of the Jews, or of the heathen. The apostle is here speaking of that broad scene wherever the name of the Lord has been professed. “The day of the Lord cannot be, except there come the falling away first and the man of sin be revealed.” The climax is that lawless one who “exalteth himself.” Jesus humbled Himself, and only exalted God. Here is a man, the man of sin pre-eminently, the personal adversary of the Lord Jesus.

And, as the Lord said to the Jews, they would not have Him Who came in His Father's name; they will receive him who comes in his own name (John 5:43). At the end of this age he will come, and accordingly he is found as Satan's winding-up, not merely of apostate Christianity, but of apostate Judaism also.

I have already shown the connection with Christendom, but now I will briefly touch on Judaism, for this personage "opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

As the true church began in Jerusalem, the great result of the apostasy will find itself conspicuously in Jerusalem. It was this city that saw Pentecost; so far as the world could behold, it beheld that which belongs to heaven on the earth. Jerusalem will see the judgment of that which, long a counterfeit, will end in a manifestation of hell — the fruit of the amalgam of Christianity with Judaism. So the apostle reminds them, "Remember ye not that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things. And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time."

The With-Holding Power

There is a withholding power. What is that power? I cannot doubt it is the Holy Ghost. It is not evil which so opposes evil, but good. That which effectually hinders the outbreak of the power of Satan is not the energy of mortal man. I am aware the ancients used to think it was the Roman empire. This being long gone led some to conceive that the papacy is meant by the beast, as well as the apostasy, the man of sin, etc. But I am not prepared to allow that the beast is come yet. The

“mystery of iniquity” is working still. It was working then, and is working now; but even now it does not show itself in its most horrible colours.

The apostle says, “The mystery of iniquity doth already work: only there is one now who letteth (or restraineth), until he be taken out of the way.” Thus you see the hindering power is to disappear. Further, it is both a principle and a person (being spoken of as neuter as well as masculine); it can therefore apply to none so well as the Spirit of God, Who still, for the sake of the children of God, and to sustain His testimony, continues to hinder the first manifestation of Satan’s power. But then that is only for a time, it will not be for ever. “Only there is one who now letteth until he be taken out of the way.” The Spirit of God will by and by cease to stand in the way of the working of the Evil One. “And then shall that lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the shining forth (or appearing) of His coming.” The Lord Jesus is the appointed destroyer of this lawless being the one who is elsewhere called the antichrist. Even now there are many antichrists, says St. John; when the antichrist comes, he will be destroyed by the Lord Jesus coming from heaven and publicly. “Then shall that lawless one be revealed whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the spirit of His mouth.” The critical addition of “ Jesus” I put in, because it is certainly genuine and gives more definiteness to the thought.

The Appearing And The Coming

Now mark the first verse of the chapter. The apostle does not say the appearing of His coming when Christ gathers the saints. “We beseech you, brethren, by the

coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him." Here, when the destruction of the man of sin is in question, he speaks not merely of His coming but of the appearing — the epiphany or brightness — of His coming. If when the Lord comes to gather His saints He appears, why should not His appearing be brought in there? Is it not manifest that the coming of the Lord does not of necessity mean His appearing? How else the phrasing of verse 8? It was necessary, when His appearing was meant, to say so; and this is when He judges. When it is the dealing of His grace in translating us to heaven, His coming or presence is named, but not a word about His appearing. When the lawless one shall be destroyed, it is not merely His presence or coming, but the shining forth of it. For He might come without being seen beyond what He pleased; but here we have the manifestation of His advent. When He comes to take up His saints, what will the world have to do with it? It was His own love which saved them; they belonged to Him, not to the world. He comes to claim His own. He does not make the world a spectator before He appears in glory for the destruction of the antichrist.

The world will have bowed down to the antichrist. Gentiles as well as Jews will have accepted him. Just as the blessed Lord Jesus is both the true Messiah and the God of Israel, so this false personage, the man of sin, will set up to be both the Messiah and Jehovah of Israel, and the mass will be led away by the fatal delusion. The same unbelief which rejects the true will bow down to the false.

These are the dismal prospects of the world according to the Scriptures. A very different future fills the

imagination of men generally. Why wonder at this? How can they truly prognosticate what is to be? No man can discern the future unless he believes the prophecies of God.

I am aware many will tell you how dangerous it is to predict. But the study of prophecy is calculated and meant to keep us from predicting. Those who study prophecy should be humble enough to be content with prophecy. If you despise the prophecies of God, you may set up to be a prophet; but, if so, you must always be a false one. It is only God Who knows and can tell the future. But God has revealed it: we have the responsibility of believing. A man cannot believe these things without their leaving their impress upon his heart. If you have truth in your heart, show it in your hand and on your forehead, seeking to prove true to what you believe.

The Lord Jesus is coming; but He is going to appear also, not merely coming to receive His own, when His coming will be in the twinkling of an eye. That the world should see the change and translation of the saints is not at all necessary, for the Lord has many ways of taking His own to Himself without death. Suppose the Lord were to cause a tremendous earthquake to happen, would not the wise men of the world say that the Christians had been swallowed up in the earthquake? It is easy enough to conceive a way in which the Lord could conceal the matter; but He does not conceal from us, nor will He from men, what He will do to the misleader of the world. This, at least, will be manifest to every eye. Hence we find that, whenever judgment is in question, manifestation characterises it. When the Lord Jesus called Saul of Tarsus, his companions felt the

tokens of some extraordinary action going on, though they knew nothing about itself. There were not a few men in the throng going to Damascus, yet only one man saw the Lord Jesus; all the rest only heard an inarticulate sound. They did not hear the words of His mouth; Saul of Tarsus did. Then, again, we find Philip caught up and carried to another place; but what did the world know of all that? There was a subsequent occasion when the apostle Paul was caught up into the third heaven. But was this divulged for the good of the world?

Nothing, then, is easier than for the Lord to show things in a partial way on these occasions; but He will do them on a grand comprehensive scale when the judgment of the world comes, after taking on high His people previously.

Manifestation is always connected with the world's portion. The Lord, when He comes for the saints, will manifest Himself to them, of course; but that He will manifest Himself to the world is nowhere said in the Bible. There is a positive intimation that it will not be so at the end. "When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear, then shall we [be not caught up but] appear with Him in glory." Consequently, the world cannot have seen Christ when He came to take His people. The very same moment that the world sees Christ appearing in glory they will see the saints appearing in glory along with Him. If Christ could appear before the saints were caught up the Scriptures would be contradicted.

Babylon And The Beast

I will refer to one Scripture more before I close; and it is a very solemn one. It is from Revelation 17. There are two great objects of judgment brought before us there.

One is called the great harlot, the other is the beast. The first object is seen sitting upon many waters (vers. 1-6). She is a corrupt woman, seated also upon a most remarkably characterised beast, a beast with seven heads and ten horns. What is the meaning of these two symbols? You may easily gather it by comparing the 1st verse with the 9th and 10th verses of Rev. 21, which refer to “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”

It is plain that the one is the counterpart of the other; that Babylon, the harlot, is Satan’s sad contrast to the bride, the Lamb’s wife. As the one is the holy city, the bride of the Lamb, the other corrupts herself with the kings of the earth, and corrupts them. This explains why she is styled “harlot.” She is the great ruling city of the world, which has her kingdom over the kings. The church glorified, the body of Christ, the Lamb’s wife, is said to be “the holy city, Jerusalem,” that comes down out of heaven from God. This, then, is the holy (not the great) city. “He showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem”; the word “great” ought to be expunged, and the word “holy” transposed to take its place — “the holy city, Jerusalem” (ver. 10).

But still, the very fact that the holy city, Jerusalem, is the church glorified, gives the greatest possible help towards understanding what Babylon means. What is the religious body which, under the shelter of Christ’s name, pretends to be the mother of all the churches? Can one hesitate?

I grant you that much evil has been done by what is called established churches, the national body of this country, and the national body of that; but what is this coalition in comparison with the pretensions of her that

claims all countries and tongues, kings as well as subjects? Can there be any question who and what she is? Has there ever been any but one?

There can be no reasonable doubt about the meaning of Babylon; but as if to preclude the possibility, we have several marks. First, she is a persecuting power,2 the greatest of all persecutors, drunk with the blood of the saints. Have you not heard of an ecclesiastical body which thinks it her duty, for the love of God and the good of men's souls, to exterminate heretics? She is herself as innocent as Pilate! She kills none; she only hands them over to the civil power to be punished! Alas! there never was a Pagan power, there never was a Jewish frenzy, which so tortured the saints of God as Babylon has done. So clear is her identification that I do not require to point her out. Surely the truth must be evident when it is unnecessary to name who she is.

Nor is this nearly all we are told here. The last verse says, "The woman is the great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth." There is a distinction of importance. This chapter does not confound the harlot and the woman. For the woman is here declared to be the symbol of the ruling city. This is unquestionable. Now there never was one that ruled as this city did. The better you know history the more you will feel that Rome only it can be. There was but one city. which ruled more and longer than any empire since the world began; and everybody in St. John's day would know where that city lay and what was its name.

It was not Athens — for Athens could never for any considerable time rule even Greece. It was not Jerusalem before nor Constantinople since. Some think

that this chapter refers to the literal Babylon of Chaldea; but this was a city built on the plain of Shinar. How could such a city be truly said to be built on seven hills! The Chaldean capital had been a great city; it passed away, and only remained to occupy the curiosity of the learned men. Here was one then ruling over the kings of the earth. There was but one city that could be said so to reign in the days of John, and no one ever has so reigned since.

This city was to become the harlot, and so to exercise power over the Roman beast or empire, the beast of seven heads and of ten horns. But at first sight there is a difficulty here; for the Roman empire has disappeared. It existed and has fallen. How then are we to understand the chapter? The historian tells us that the Roman empire long ago declined and fell. There he stops; he cannot lift the veil. Not history explains prophecy, but prophecy explains history. Prophecy is the true and divine key to the prospects of the world. Accordingly here is the explanation:- the beast that then was, the Roman beast, would cease to exist. “The beast that thou sawest was, and is not.” Its vast power was to perish; and the infidel historian chronicles the fact.

But you have another thing which history could not divine. If God’s word is true and sure, the Roman beast is to revive. It is well known that its revival has been essayed. Charlemagne tried; Napoleon the First tried; Napoleon the Third would have liked well to have tried. Not that I have sympathy with those who pretend to point out the person. There were many that fixed on the last-named fallen potentate and a few cling to their notion still [1873]. They are premature: better leave guess-work to such as do not search into prophecy.

The Revival Of The Roman Empire

Here is the word of God. Why should you predict? You had better not pretend to it; the word of God has spoken already; be you content with its predictions. Now the word of God has said nothing of the sort it speaks of the beast that should ascend out of the bottomless pit, or abyss, and go into perdition. Why add to this? Why speculate? Let us only believe. Diabolical power will revive the Roman empire. “And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.” The common reading “and yet is” (χαίπερ ἐστίν) is incorrect. “And shall be present” (χαὶ πάρεσται) is the true sense. Here, then, we have the clearest intimation that the Roman empire is to be reconstructed under the worst influence before the age ends and the Lord returns in judgment.

Let us look back for a moment at the history of the world-empire, and compare it with the present and the future.

In the time of John the Roman empire ruled the known world. That empire had then but one governor or chief. Gradually the power began to weaken and wane. First came the division into east and west. Then some time afterwards the Germanic barbarians broke up the Western empire and founded those separate kingdoms of Europe, which, after feudalism, passed into the constitutional monarchies of modern times. Such has been the result of the breaking up of the Roman empire. Here we find the two conditions: the beast that was, the beast that is not. But it “shall ascend out of the

bottomless pit." This will be a new trait in the world's history. The worst of powers is better than anarchy; the most grinding tyrannies are safer than no authority at all! So, it is evident that, whatever changes may have occurred in the world's affairs, there has never been a power without the sanction of God, bad as its exercise of authority may have been. The letting loose of the power of Satan is not yet, because there is One Who withholds (2 Thess. 2); but when He withdraws the hindrance, the beast ascends out of the bottomless pit. St. John of course speaks symbolically of the Roman empire in its last Satanic uprising and state. In the end of this age Satan will be allowed by God to re-establish that great object of human ambition. Men are even now yearning after an energetic central authority in the West. It is the plain fact that the ten horns, or kingdoms (supposing for the moment that the kingdoms of Western Europe comprised just ten) have no political coherence. One of their marked features has been that they are constantly in danger of war with each other. They have sought by what they term "the balance of power," to maintain a measure of mutual understanding, peace, and order. But in consequence of this very arrangement no one power has been allowed to get the upper hand.

Many have desired it; but the result of their desires, when action has followed before the time, is that such perish. But by and by it will be accomplished. Then the beast will be reconstituted. There will be unity, one central authority, without extinguishing the separate kingdoms, save that the little horn acquires three. Thus there will be the revived Roman empire, with distinct kingdoms. The future state will consist of the imperial headship, along with the subordinate kingdoms of the

once united western empire. The balance of power will then be required no longer. The day is coming when Satan will deceive the world. God has accomplished His own purpose of gathering out His saints to Himself. And then the world is allowed to have its little moment when Satan has consummated his power on earth. (See verses 12 and 13.)

The state here described is perfectly unexampled before or since the fall of the Roman empire. One knows the independence of even the least of the kingdoms. They do not like people to interfere, if they be ever so little. Several too join — some for and some against. Such is the way things have long gone on in the political world of the west.

Here the principle of national independence has disappeared. Separate or party action is all gone. The time is come for a vast change in the world. This will be the character of it: a great imperial power, called the beast, not absorbing but wielding the separate powers of the west. The beast is a type of strength, no doubt, but without reference to God So it will be then at the close. The western imperial system will have thrown off all care for God or thought of Him. Apostasy will have prepared the way. This imperial power will have the direction of the western nationalities of Europe. The separate kings will be flattered with the idea that they have each a separate existence and will. But they are only the sinews of the strong man who wields them all. What will they do then? “These shall make war with the Lamb.”

What a difference from the blessed reign of peace and righteousness, no less than from what men dream as the

gradually coming future! On the other hand, the saints come from heaven, being with the Lamb when the conflict arrives. (Compare Rev. 19:14). Being changed, they are for ever with the Lord, and they follow Him. So, when the final contest arises between the Lord Jesus and Satan represented by the leader of the west, the Lord is accompanied by His saints. They are here (Rev. 17:14) styled “called, and chosen and faithful.” Some have thought they must be angels. But they are not. For angels are never called “faithful.” And, again, they are said to be not merely chosen, but “called.” How could an angel be “called”? Calling is an appeal of grace, which comes to one who has gone astray in order to bring him back again. But this is never true of an angel. The gospel is God’s calling fallen and guilty man to give him, through faith and by means of redemption, a place with Christ in heaven. Those who believe on Him are here shown to be with Him; and they are “called, and chosen and faithful.”

The Destruction Of Babylon By The Beast

But there is more. What becomes of the woman?

We hear about her too in the 15th verse, and here discern vast religious influence. It is not a national church, but an idolatrous, persecuting, religious system claiming to be the spouse of Christ, but really an unclean harlot that extends its influence over all the world. It is easily seen what, and what only, such a system can be. There is but one such in Christendom, though she has daughters. Further (as in verse 16), what a change takes place!3 Instead of these horns, or kings of the west, being any longer subjected to Babylon, they turn furiously with the beast against her. Would it not be

a very strange thing if the Pope turned against his own church or city? The Pope is not the beast, and has nothing directly to do with Babylon's destruction. It is the symbol of the empire in its last phase, it is the beast from the abyss which joins with the various leaders of the different kingdoms of the west against that ecclesiastical system.

Babylon had long intoxicated man, persecuted saints, and dallied with the kings of the earth. Now the turn of the tide comes: Babylon was not of God, but a corrupt idolatrous imposture. But there is nothing of Christ in her destroyers. It is Satan against Satan. The end of the proud world-church is come, and, soon after, of her destroyers. The beast and the ten horns, throughout the Roman empire, have risen up. The ten kingdoms of western Europe turn against the Roman harlot, and strip, eat, and burn her.

There are solemn premonitory signs even now. Let me mention only one fact noticed by both Romanists and Protestants. You are aware of the Ecumenical Council lately held in Rome (in 1869). Its distinctive character is remarkable, and emphatically indicative of the change that has taken place even among the Western powers. For the first time the Pope could not ask one Catholic sovereign to sit in this council. It was composed simply and exclusively of priests. Not a single ambassador or representative of the crowned heads was there. There never was such a state of things before in mediaeval or modern Europe.

I grant you that infidelity lies under the change. It is overflowing even now everywhere, as by and by the beast will be steeped up to the eyes in blasphemy. He

and the horns will be given over to the hatred of God, while, at the same time, they hate the harlot which had deceived them so long. It is a violent reaction against the lies of Babylon, but no less a rejection of the truth. You see its spirit in our own country and day. Men take pleasure in spoiling the religious dignitaries and their earthly goods. This is going on in all lands; but the end of it will have a deeper dye.

Let me repeat that I do not mean that we are yet come to the beast or the ten horns of Rev. 17. I am only showing the tendency of the present times — the way in which the wind is blowing in the west. Men prepare to turn violently against what they had been so long enslaved to.

As the end approaches, the word of God asserts its majesty and power, as fresh as at the beginning; for we are verging towards the close of the profession of Christianity on the earth, when the Lord is leading His own to expect their removal to heaven to meet the Bridegroom. We have these admonitory symptoms that the world gets weary of false religion, and becomes ashamed of forms which are themselves superstitions. And no wonder, for there is scarcely an outward ordinance remaining, scarcely even a form, which has not been utterly perverted, as well as the truth itself ignored or denied by it.

W. K. [AN ADDRESS DELIVERED IN 1873]

1 Works (Horae Paulinae), vol. v., p. 284 (ed. 7).

2 Mr. J. A. Froude has too much reason to say, “The so-called horrors of the French Revolution were a mere bagatelle, a mere summer shower, by the side of the atrocities committed in the name of religion and with

the sanction of the Catholic Church. The Jacobin Convention of 1793-4 may serve as a measure to show how mild are the most ferocious of mere human beings when compared to an exasperated priesthood. By the September massacre, by the guillotine, by the fusillade at Lyons, and by the drownings on the Loire, five thousand men and women, at the utmost, suffered a comparatively easy death. Multiply the five thousand by ten, and you do not reach the number of those who were murdered in France alone in the two months of August and September, 1572. Fifty thousand Flemings and Germans are said to have been hanged, burnt, or buried alive under Charles V. Add to this the long agony of the Netherlands in the revolt from Philip, the Thirty Years' War in Germany, the ever-recurring massacres of the Huguenots, and remember that the Catholic religion alone was at the bottom of all these horrors; that the crusades against the Huguenots especially were solemnly sanctioned by successive popes, and that no word of censure ever issued from the Vatican, except in the brief intervals when statesmen and soldiers grew weary of bloodshed, and looked for means to admit the heretics to grace."

3 In verse 16 observe that the true reading is not the ten horns "upon" the beast, but the "ten horns which thou sawest and the beast, these shall hate the whore... "

The Schools of the Prophets

It was on the failure of the law, that the value of the priesthood as ordained of God became known to Israel; but, in the days of Eli, the priesthood itself became corrupted, — the priest's sons, themselves priests, being the leaders in the most flagitious practices. They ground down the people by their exactions, and men "abhorred the offering of the Lord; wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord." The feeble remonstrances of Eli himself were not the sharp rebuke which the occasion needed. And solemn warning — Eli himself, as the one responsible for the maintenance of the honour of God in the priesthood, is made to hear the grievous burden that awaited all his family, and at the same time to know that, although man had profaned the ordinance of God in priesthood, and that God would for this set aside His own order: yet He said, "I will raise up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind, and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever." How refreshing to the weary soul thus constantly to see mercy rejoicing against judgment, and the sure establishment of all that had failed in man's responsibility in the hands of One Who alone is "the faithful and true Witness." But God raised up in Samuel a most distinct witness of the failure of the priesthood, and then it may be said that the ministry of the Prophets commenced (Acts 3:24). And from this time the heart of faith turned from the priest to the prophet, and it was not that which was in existence which sustained it, but that which was in prospect. The thing announced by Samuel was the execution of summary vengeance on the

house of Eli, “because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not.” And now Israel was sustained by an extraordinary energy from God in the person of His prophet. He sacrifices as well as judges, taking as it were the place of both Moses and Aaron. “And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-Sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.”

In all this we find God teaching Israel that their alone power of standing was in that energy which was immediately from Him. Samuel raised the stone of Ebenezer; but they understood it not, and vainly thought they could stand in their own strength under another arrangement, and they desired a king. Thus was God’s prophet set aside as the priesthood had been corrupted, and surely too with the same end to show that there was only one perfect prophet (Deut. 18), as well as only one faithful priest and righteous king. But we find not only the wilfulness of the people in the rejection of God by rejecting His prophet (1 Sam. 8:7), but their willingness also to have the ministry of the Prophets in having a king. It was too valuable a blessing to do without; and accordingly we find, throughout the history of the kings of Judah and Israel, a class of men known by the name of “sons of the Prophets” or “Prophets”, apart from those immediately raised up by God Himself. Among them there were many whom God owned and used, but in later times they became the great instruments in fostering rebellion against God and causing the rejection of His word. The origin of this class so conspicuous in later times, we are not able scripturally to determine. But doubtless at first it arose from piety and the fear of God. In the days of Samuel those who feared God would have looked to him more than to Saul; and we find a

company gathered round the aged seer, either placed there for instruction by their parents or led by the fear of God themselves, who are distinctly called Prophets (1 Sam. 19:20). “And Saul sent messengers to take David, and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as appointed over them, the Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul and they also prophesied.” It is from this that the term “Schools of the Prophets” appears to have so generally obtained. That there were institutions of this character appears clear, but the question is, Were they of divine or human origin! We have no scriptural authority for believing them to be of God, but that these men of God, Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha, should have gladly given themselves to the instruction of the young committed to their charge, teaching them those things which God had revealed to them, and bringing them up to reverence God in all His institutions, is by no means improbable. God was now with the prophet and not with the priest, and therefore real godliness could only be secured through the prophet. It appears also that these young men were used by the prophets, who were raised up by the special energy of the Spirit of God, on any service or errand they might be pleased to send them. Thus we read, “Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins and take this box of oil in thine hand and go to Ramoth-Gilead: and when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi, and go in and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber; then take the box of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not. So the young man, even the

young man the prophet, went to Ramoth-Gilead" (2 Kings 9:1-4).

There can be little doubt that young men so educated would by degrees have a character attached to them, not according to the actual energy of the Spirit of God in them, but according to the education they had received. And although God from among them might raise up instruments fitted to be employed in His service, yet that is not the thing which would have been regarded so much as their official training. And the influence which they had with the people would not have been that which flowed directly from God, but from that which men had instituted, to perpetuate a class among them, which might be useful to them as expositors of the mind of God. This has been one way of man's waywardness — to seek to secure God's blessings by his own wisdom and prudence. If God gave a prophet, man would desire to have this blessing in his own way; and accordingly he contrives an institution for the supply of prophets. God may bless such an institution, and doubtless did under the instruction of Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha, who appear in their respective times to have been looked on as the heads of these institutions. It was thus that Elijah was looked upon, "and the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off and they two stood by Jordan. And

when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The Spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha" (2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15).

So we have seen Samuel regarded and subsequently Elisha (2 Kings 9). But the attribute of "jealous" belongs to God; and it is in this that He is especially jealous, that He will not allow any human institution to supply the place of His own prerogative grace. And it was not in the power of any of these illustrious men of God to impart to another the energy of the Spirit in which alone they could act efficiently. Doubtless these schools of the prophets were a means of spreading the fear and knowledge of God. The priest's lips which should have kept knowledge had become corrupted and testified against by the prophets. But when the master-spirit of these men of God had departed with them, the institutions which had been under their superintendence survived; but instead of ensuring the end for which piety had set them up, they became the greatest means of producing corruption and aiding apostasy. These institutions had the same moral power after the death of Elijah and Elisha as when presided over by them. And those who issued from them came to the people with a claim of authority which usage had rendered venerable. And thus, by the very means of perpetuating the prophets, was this ordinance of God corrupted, not that He gave it up, but raised up not in these schools, but in the energy of His own Spirit, His prophets to prophesy not only against the priests but against "the prophets of Israel." And real discernment then stood in distinguishing between the Lord's and the people's prophets. It does not appear that any one of the authenticated prophets of the Lord was raised up from

out of these schools. 1But from hence it came to pass that in process of time there was an accredited class of persons, consulted on special occasions and exercising an immense moral influence, the value of which must have depended on their individual piety and simple subjection to what God had revealed.

But the weight of that influence was speedily turned against God. It was more popular to prophesy smooth things and deceits, and nothing is so dear to the human heart as to have God's sanction to its own lusts. And hence the popularity of the prophets who would say, "Thus saith the Lord," when the Lord had not spoken. It is not to be supposed that these prophets were always inventing lies, but they corrupted the word of God and rendered it suitable to man's taste (2 Cor. 2:17). They must imitate the real prophets in many of their expressions, and yet after all only produce their own vain speculations.

"I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? Yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams, which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal my words every one from his neighbour. Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that

use their tongues and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord. And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, what is the burden of the Lord? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the Lord. And as for the prophet and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of the Lord, I will even punish that man and his house" (Jer. 23:25-34). And the misery and wretchedness of the people was, that they had not the ability to discern between the real prophet of God, and the educated prophet of man.

Man had taken God's ordinance into his own keeping — he had an institution of his own for supplying that which God could only efficiently supply. Accordingly we find the prophets as much testified against by the special witnesses of God in the midst of apostasy, as the priests. They are both classed together. But the prophets appear to have been more actively engaged in helping forward the apostasy, and therefore to be more frequently addressed by the real prophets of the Lord. This testimony of the Lord against the prophets increased as the apostasy set in. The nearer the ruin approached (such is the way of His grace), the more testimony He raised concerning it. But in proportion as God multiplied His witnesses, we find the prophets of the people multiplied also.

We have a remarkable early instance of the influence which these prophets exercised, recorded in 1 Kings 22. We find Jehoshaphat in league with Ahab, and persuaded

to go against Ramoth-Gilead. “And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up, for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might enquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me but evil.” So Micaiah “came to the king, and the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go up against Ramoth-Gilead to battle or shall we forbear?” Thus was the case of Israel according to the prophet — “a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord: which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits” (Isa. 30:9, 10).

But it is more especially in the prophets contemporary with the apostasy, that we find the powerful influence exercised by these prophets: Jeremiah at Jerusalem, and Ezekiel at Chebar, each found in them the greatest hindrance to the effectual reception of the word of the Lord. In Jeremiah we have three distinct features, — first, God’s testimony against the prophets. “And the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder” (Jer. 4:9). “A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so” (Jer. 5:30, 31). “And from the prophet

even unto the priest, every one dealeth falsely" (Jer. 6:13). "Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place. Then the Lord said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not; yet they say, sword and famine shall not be in this land; by sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed" (Jer. 14:13-15). "I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing... for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land" (Jer. 23:14, 15).

A second feature was the influence that these prophets exerted among the people. "The priests ruled by their means." "Then said they, Come, let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words" (Jer. 18:18). "Hananiah, the son of Azur the prophet, which was of Gibeon, spake unto me in the house of the Lord, in the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the Lord's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried them to Babylon: and I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the

captives of Judah, that went into Babylon, saith the Lord; for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Then the prophet Jeremiah said unto the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests, and in the presence of all the people that stood in the house of the Lord, even the prophet Jeremiah said, Amen: the Lord do so: the Lord perform thy words which thou hast prophesied. Nevertheless hear thou now this word that I speak in shine ears, and in the ears of all the people; the prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence. The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him" (Jer. 28:1-9). These prophets prophesied of peace and present establishment, according to the word in Micah 2:11, "If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink, he shall even be the prophet of this people." It was thus that man's own institution became a snare unto him, for God taketh the wise in their own craftiness. The very means they had taken of perpetuating a blessing among them became, by their own wilfulness, the means of blinding them; as in a subsequent period, the scribes and Pharisees and doctors of the law, in man's estimate so many supports of religion, were the great means of hindering the people confessing Jesus as the Christ.

As a third feature, we notice the virulent opposition of the prophets to God's prophets. "Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears" (Jer.

26:11, compare Acts 6). “Why hast thou not reproved Jeremiah of Anathoth which maketh himself a prophet to you?” (Jer. 29:27).

The whole of Ezekiel 13 applies to the point in question, but is too long to be quoted. It is painful but profitable to trace the progress of religious corruption; it arises not from without, but from within. No means of outward temptation could apparently have brought the people of Judah to rebel with so bold a front, as corrupt prophets and a corrupt priesthood. It was the blinding power of holding certain ordinances of God, not in the power of God, but in the form which human wisdom had substituted for them, that made the people reply, “Then all the men which knew that their wives had burned incense unto other gods, and all the women that stood by, a great multitude, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying, As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil” (Jer. 44:15-17).

Now these things are recorded for our admonition, and we have the most substantial authority for asserting, that the declension and apostasy of the church would arise from those who are accredited as teachers within the church.

“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1). They very early showed themselves, as in the church of Corinth. “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:13). And at Galatia, “I would they were even cut off which trouble you” (Gal. 5:12). St. John alludes to them, “They went out from us, but they were not of us” (1 John 2:19). “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not Jesus Christ come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist” (2 John 7).

This early attempt of Satan to undermine the church from within was that which the apostles were constantly guarding against, and formed a considerable portion of the afflictions of the gospel. Trying indeed must it have been to the soul of the apostle, to find all in Asia turned away from him to listen perhaps to those who would set before them doctrines more suited to their tastes. It was thus too at Corinth, where although they had ten thousand instructors, yet not many fathers. Here was the germ of the evil: why not a class of men or a profession of men to be accredited as instructors and teachers, the same as prevailed in their schools of philosophy? This was the readiest way in man’s thought to provide for the instruction of the church; to keep to themselves teachers; and it was thus early in the church that we see its ruin provided for, and the dawning of that season which is not yet fully matured, when they would not endure sound doctrine. The secret is, that we can never be taught except in obedience. “He that hath an

ear, let him hear." Now a recognised class of teachers, as such, relieves from the responsibility laid upon us by the Lord. "Take heed how ye hear." Men hear what they like to hear — hear after their own lusts, instead of proving what they hear, and holding fast that which is good. Instruction to the church never assumes the ground of ignorance, but that of competent understanding. "I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it"… "and ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (1 John 2:20, 21). And the Second and Third Epistles throw the responsibility on Christians, not of receiving teachers as teachers, — let them bear what name they might — but of testing their doctrine. In St. Paul's discourse to the elders of Ephesus, the Spirit leads him to point out the corruption of the church as arising from within.

"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29, 30). And the solemn charge of the apostle to Timothy, points out the result of that which he had noticed to the elders of Ephesus. "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom, preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure

afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

Now in all these instances, there was no guard against these teachers by having recourse to another authorized and accredited class — for the teachers marked as characterising the apostasy, would be authorized and accredited in the eyes of men; but the only way to meet the difficulty and escape the snare, would be individual faithfulness. He alone in Israel who followed Jehovah fully, would have had moral ability to discern between the wheat and chaff — the prophet of the Lord and the prophet of his own heart. Even so at this present time, a single eye to Jesus, subjection to the word of His grace, and regard to the unction — the common possession of the church, will enable us to discern between the teacher, the gift of the ascended Jesus, and the teacher of man's institution. The provision the Lord has made for the church, are the abiding presence of the Comforter, and the word of His grace, and ministry. He presents Himself to the church not only as having the seven spirits of God, the fulness of all spiritual life, but as holding in His hand the seven stars, the perfectness of all ministry. Now the error of the church has been analogous to the sin of Israel. She has not denied to the Lord the possession of all spiritual power; but, ministry as distinctly flowing from Him (Eph. 4), and therefore, only exercised responsibly unto Him as the Lord ("there are diversities of ministries, but the same Lord"), was very early set aside by human institutions; arising doubtlessly from real piety, and from the desire originally to perpetuate teachers in the church.

As in the case of the prophets, Jehovah had His servants among those brought up in the schools of the prophets

— so surely the Holy Ghost as the sovereign dispenser of gifts of ministry has raised up many from universities and academies to bear witness to Jesus; but always with the grand characteristic of His teaching, the setting aside, and in the background, of all advantages derived from such sources, on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, which He teaches. We may smile at the disputations and subtilties of the schoolmen of a former day, but the principle is the same. It is not whether better instruction is afforded in the schools now, but whether the schools themselves are not institutions of man, for the provision of that which the Lord Jesus most jealously keeps in His own hand. It is not to the purpose to say that many of the most faithful ministers have been raised up out of these schools; this is not denied; because the Holy Spirit will not allow human arrangements to interfere with His own sovereignty. But if these schools furnish a supply of men accredited as ministers, they must necessarily exert a powerful human influence, much more so than perhaps we are disposed to allow. We have seen the Lord raising up prophets, and men having prophets of their own; and the prophet of the Lord brought into instant collision with the prophets of the people. Jesus, as ascended, gives teachers to the church, and men have provided for teachers in the church. May we not then most reasonably expect that the teachers the Lord has given will find the greatest hindrance from those whom man has provided for himself?

The prophet was not an integral part of the former dispensation, but only came in on the failure of the priesthood; but ministry is the very power of this dispensation (Eph. 4); “pastors, teachers, for the work of

the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Now if God has provided this in one way, even by distinct gift of the Spirit, and man has substituted another way, we see what necessarily must be the result, even the most fearful form of apostasy. "The beast and the false prophet" go together, the former could not prevail without the help of the other. Professing Christians could not easily be persuaded to tell a lie, unless they had found those who would teach them after human tradition, instead of the plain word of God. And nothing could be devised more effectually to stifle enquiry and to lull the conscience, than a humanly accredited ministry, teaching things only which the hearers expect to hear. When this is the case, the solemn responsibility of speaking and hearing are alike forgotten. And the very means provided for blessing is by Satan's craft turned into a hindrance. We hear constantly of a young man intending to go into the ministry. Now fully granting the honesty of the intention, the very expression shows the popular feeling in the matter. Let such a well-intentioned young man be sent to a university, or academy, or institution, and after a few years he comes forth as an accredited minister. Now all this appears a direct taking of ministry out of the hands of the Lord Jesus into our own hands. We should see the folly of a pious Israelite sending his son to be educated for a prophet, as if God needed human preparation for the instrument He would use. And surely to educate for the ministry is equally more preposterous in a dispensation in which the Holy Spirit, as sovereign divider of His own gifts, is especially manifested.

We read of Samuel being "established as a prophet of the Lord," but all his education under the aged and

indulgent Eli could never have furnished him with what he was commissioned to reveal. We find Paul thanking the Lord for “putting him into the ministry,” and unto this his education under Gamaliel profited not. It is not whether one whom the Lord has put into the ministry may use the aids within his reach to enable him more efficiently to work, for we find Paul not only exhorting Timothy to stir up the gift he had received but likewise telling him “till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine;” but, whether the most vigilant and wise training can make a minister of Christ. If it be allowed that the various ministries in the church are distinct gifts, then the recognition of the gift must precede the education, if indeed that be needed. And it would be no longer saying, “I think of entering into the ministry,” but, “woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel! ‘‘ The very worst evil of human institutions for supplying ministers is the effect they have of weakening the sense of responsibility to the Lord in the exercise of ministry. And if ministry be not exercised responsibly unto Him, it is not received in responsibility to Him. “Take heed how ye hear.” And the result is, that instead of ministry being regarded as that which is for the health of the church, ministers are regarded for their own sake. And trivial as it may be, the practical difference between regarding ministers or ministry is very great. We have seen in two former instances, the accredited organs of religious instruction — the prophets before the captivity, and the scribes and lawyers during the time of our Lord’s ministry, all arrayed against the truth. We have solemn warning as to the parallel to be exhibited at the close of this dispensation. And surely it is not too much to say, that the virtual rejection of the Lordship of Jesus and of the

sovereignty of the Spirit in the gift of ministry, has prepared the way for a most unhealthy state of mind in the great majority of Christians, who are prepared to receive no more truth than that which human institutions have thought fit to supply. And it may be safely affirmed, that ignorance of scripture does very generally prevail, and so much insubjection of mind to the word of God, that a plain declaration of scripture is set aside by its supposed contrariety to some received dogma.

The priesthood of Israel stood in order, and we find an early departure from the present order in Nadab and Abihu — awaiting the completeness of its corruption in the sons of Eli. But prophecy stood in power — holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and the corruption was the attempt to establish it in form. Now the whole character of this dispensation is power; we have a priest constituted after the power of an endless life — the word of God is powerful — we have received not the spirit of fear but of love, and of power, and of a sound mind. And the preaching of the apostle was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. The apostasy then is characterized as having the form, but denying the power of godliness. Formal ministry or humanly accredited ministers, must necessarily therefore be the greatest hindrance to the truth. The minds even of professing Christians are not in a moment prepared to believe a lie, and a certain previous training by being taught those things which they ought not, must necessarily bring about that result so fearfully marked in the scriptures: — "with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in those that perish, because they

received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; and for this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

The apostasy of natural religion was, reasoning about God, and therefore He "gave them up to their own hearts' lusts" (Rom. 1:19-26). But now it is the departure from the truth by means of human teaching. The real question is often effectually obscured in disputes about office and order — it is, where is the power of either? Can man's institution at all provide for the presence of the Holy Ghost? Does He still abide according to the Lord's promise, in the church? Let it be granted that human arrangement had secured the exact apostolic order, and that every office in the church was arranged after the apostolic model — what then? there might be the form without the power still. Now spiritual wisdom has ever been exercised in the discernment of where God is present in the midst of man's corruptions. There were holy priests after Eli — there were true prophets amidst Israel's prophets. There are many most valued ministers among those who are accredited by human institutions, but true wisdom will be to acknowledge that which is of God, and to discern that which is of man. Many are not content to be acknowledged as ministers of Christ — they rest on something besides that "grace given to them according to the measure of the gift of Christ," and demand to be received on credentials simply human. Now the recognizing this would be the same as to recognize Israel's prophets. And would lead us, which is in fact the apostasy of the dispensation, to recognize human credentials, where the Spirit of God

was not. It is a much readier way to come authenticated by man than to make “full proof of our ministry.” And nothing is more unhealthy than for a believer to be seeking the authentication of his ministry, and demanding to be received as a minister, because he has been educated for the ministry. The receiving any is on infinitely higher grounds than any gift of ministry, and that is, as “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling,” — “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.” Our highest privileges are our common privileges, and no ministry not even that of an apostle could ever put one so high as the fact of being a child has already put him. It is indeed a most blessed thing to minister to the body of Christ, but a more blessed thing to be of the body. And wherever we see the tendency to exalt ministers into a privileged class or order, of nearer access to God than others, instead of recognizing them as those having a distinct gift of the Spirit, we are in danger of having ministers in name, and not in the “sufficiency of God” in the church (2 Cor. 3:5).

Let the solemn warning in the case of Israel’s prophets be looked to by us, and while we seek to honour the Holy Ghost in the thankful acknowledgement of any of His gifts, may we be kept from the sin of acknowledging any office in the church where He is not. “Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth on teaching, or he that exhorteth on exhortation; he that giveth let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth with diligence; he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness. “May the Spirit be manifested in the church in all His varied gifts for its

present need, and in all His manifold grace, that the name of the Lord may be magnified! Amen.

1 Elisha may seem an exception, but he stood as the servant of Elijah, as Gehazi subsequently to him, to pour water on his hands.

The Day Star - 2 Peter 1:19

(Pub. Weston, Chapter Two Archive.)

Many Christians are averse to God's revelation of the future. This is to be sadly prejudiced. Having known countless theories made and explained away, they consider it wiser to seek simply the blessing of their own souls. They may be right, if they have not yet peace and liberty, as Christians are entitled to by grace. But if they are Christians, they have Christ; and all things are theirs. It is not wise or well to turn away from Him that speaks concerning the future, because men have often made mistakes. If I am to give up all that has been perverted, I am in danger of turning away from almost all the Bible.

Beyond controversy, on the other hand, not a few, being really unestablished in Christ, are apt to be taken up with prophecy in a light manner. They seem on the alert for things to suit their preconceptions. They start in quest of the Buonapartes, of the "last" Pope in their own day, of their country's destiny, etc. They are thus liable to deceive themselves as well as others. But, if we have confidence in God, and Christ be before our hearts, we shall not fail of the Spirit's guidance, through Whom, bowing to the word, we shall get the truth of things. When we have Christ as our object, the truth shines; for He is the true Light which makes all things manifest. Self only darkens everything. The love of God and of his neighbour was put clearly before the man that asked the Lord who his neighbour was. Our neighbour is whoever wants us and our help. If our eye be single, we shall soon know; then too we have a heart for God's will.

There is a great difficulty in becoming a fool in order to be wise; and this we must learn if we would go on in the things of God. No small quantity of dead matter may be unjudged, which hinders the Spirit of God. Not happiness only but every other good depends on our having Christ as the object and the standard whereby to judge. How am I to know the world? and why are people's minds so diverse with regard to it? Is it not because they have not taken their place as disciples, as learners, at the feet of Jesus? There is divine light in the Bible which stretches into eternity itself; and the simple soul can see it. But we must receive the word of God to learn of Him, instead of bringing our thoughts to it.

The world is not Christ's object at present, but those who are not of it. "I pray not for the world," etc. The Lord Jesus was born King of the Jews; but, being rejected He has since risen and gone to heaven, as truly man as God, the Beginning the First born from the dead. While He is at the right hand of God, He is also the Head of the church. The so-called Apostles' creed had nothing to do with the apostles; and it is moreover vaguely and loosely enough put together, while the Athanasian is too scholastic. The Nicene bids us believe the church instead of God. We are always called as Christians to confess the Lord Jesus; which is far beyond the merely formal way when men rise to say the creed, whether they believe on Him or not.

The Bridegroom is outside the world, while His bride is being formed from out of the world, and about to meet Him in the air. What a solemn yet blessed fact was Enoch's translation! Yet Christ's coming will be immeasurably more so. For all the saints of every age and from every land and tongue will be caught up to join

the Lord Jesus. The last trump does not mean the end of the “world,” but of the “age.” The world will be outside its sound when He comes for us, as it will have nothing to do with Him. When the New Testament was written, the Roman army was familiar to every one in the civilised earth. According to their order, several trumpets were sounded; but the “last” summons they gave was for immediate departure. This illustrates “the last trump” of our subject. God is going to take all His children to be with Christ Who will come in person to receive them to Himself. It is not the dead saints only, nor merely those who may be then alive, but both.

Christ’s “shout” in 1 Thess. 4:16 is a peculiar word. It was used for a general’s call to his soldiers, an admiral’s to his seamen, or even a huntsman’s to his dog. The Lord will give this shout (κέλευσμα) to His own; and the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we, the living saints surviving, will be changed, and all caught up to meet Him. The creed of Athanasius (so-called) did not enter truly into the blessed hope, which was practically lost long before his time; indeed this creed was probably centuries after him. While the primitive Christians were hated, persecuted, and slain, the hope was bright in their souls; but truth rapidly declined till in the time of Constantine Christians were given the place of honour in the Roman empire. The world seduced them from the truth; and the desire grew to remain here and enjoy earthly things. It, was no longer the patient waiting for Christ. The world we are bound to view as rejected and guilty of the death of Christ. Although the outward sign of the cross meets us everywhere, what is it but profession and even profanity? For God still views the

world as the place from whence His Son was cast out. When delivered, a soul begins to find what a ruin all is.

A man naturally wishes to make a figure in the world and to found a place for his children; but the Christian is only to be as a pilgrim and a stranger, like a man in a passenger ship passing from one country to another. If we belong to Christ, we belong to heaven and are not of the world. John gives the character to the world all through his writings; Paul, the church according to God with a heavenly stamp from the beginning. For Christ is the Head of the church; and the saints should be ever expecting Him.

But now, as of old, clever and learned people encourage one another to say that the early Christians erred in their hope. Alas! what is the good of abilities that leave the possessor banished from the presence of God for ever? The church ought always to be singing the songs, not of grace only, but of glory. Even Christians can be deceived by the infidel expectation of the world's improvement if not perfection. A smattering of divine things is not profitable. They who fix a date for the Lord's coming are entirely wrong. It is a matter of the Father's will concerning His Son to keep the Christian always waiting, certain that He is coming soon, uncertain when. If worldly-minded, we shall dislike waiting thus. But the Bride in Rev. 22:17 says, "Come;" and again "he that heareth" is invited to say, "Come."

So the Lord in Luke 12 would have His servants on the watch, that, when He knocks, they may open to Him immediately. Figures are meant to be not loose but vivid expressions. The faithful should be as it were behind the door; that, when the Master's knock is heard, it may be

opened forthwith. If Martha served, Mary waited at His feet. Martha was energetic in her way; but the work He prizes most is to begin and go on learning of Him, and in His absence to be waiting for Him. Only love can make a good servant; so Christ came in love and will return in victory. Love is intent on the good of another without a thought of self-seeking; and we best know what that is by seeing it perfectly in Him. But next to waiting is working; for love must for Him serve others in a world of sin and misery, as He did.

But it is of the greatest moment to believe that not the church merely, but “the Spirit and the Bride say, Come.” It is the Holy Ghost Who leads the church to welcome Christ. Whatever one’s love to souls may be, Christ ought to be the first object. Can “the Spirit” ever make a mistake? Alas! those that expect progress and victory in the absence of Christ dishonour the Spirit, when He so distinctly inspires the Bride to say, “Come.” It is not enthusiastic fancy, but the true hope, to be always saying, “Come.” “The Spirit” and the Bride say so; the newly converted one also, he that hears, can and is called to join in the cry, “Come.” For he has nothing to fear from the Saviour. Again, the waiting one aught assuredly to be the most zealous in serving. Hence the invitation in the same verse to any sinner to “come and take life’s water freely.” It is a just reproach, if our hope of His speedy return does not make us more in earnest for souls than we should have been without it.

But it is not yet a question of the world. The Lord Jesus will ask the Father for the world (Ps. 2) and will then come to reign. Israel repentant shall in due time be restored to their own land. Hence, as we read in Num. 34, when He closes His present priesthood, He will

surely cause the manslayer (typifying the Jew) to come before the judge, and then be reinstated in his inheritance. No Christian should be so ignorant of scripture as to think that this earth must ever abide as it now is groaning in its ruin and misery.

Yet the apostle (2 Thess. 2) is explicit that, ere deliverance comes, all these lands which boast of their light will unite to abandon revelation and Christ in "apostasy" or open rebellion against God. Thereon shall the Lord be revealed from heaven in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that know not God and on them that obey not the gospel. The old Roman Empire is to be revived (Rev. 17:8): present changes are but preparatory to that crisis. Italy is not only to be an united kingdom, but will play a greater part than men look for who believe not the prophecies of God. Alas! the lands that have been signally favoured, ungrateful as they are, must become the darkest and most daring. Thus things will become worse and worse, as the apostle warned in 2 Tim. 3, till there is a godless and total wrench from the confession of Christianity.

Where did the church begin? Where was the central seat of empire when the Son of God was rejected and crucified? Apostasy will develop itself at Jerusalem, and the Beast at Rome will sustain the Anti-christ, or wilful king, in Jerusalem. Both will yet unite, as they did of old, against the Lord and His Christ. (See Rev. 13, Rev. 19).

The true value of prophecy is to believe, before, not after, it comes to pass. If you wait till its accomplishment, this will be your ruin. Do not occupy your mind with individual Jews returning to their own land; which is but to prepare a people for the Anti-

Christ. Give the Jews the gospel. The Russian power covets the Holy Land. But we find in Ezekiel 38, 39 that, instead of succeeding, its ruler is to perish there. The Western powers will have been destroyed by the Lord Jesus even before Gog falls.

On the other hand, our place and privilege as Christians is to look for His receiving us to Himself for the Father's house, before He appears for the destruction of His foes wherever they be. The Jewish saints ever had the "lamp" of prophecy; and it is still a good light for the squalid place of this world, warning of judgment. But there is now a better; for daylight dawns in the gospel; and the hope of Christ's coming to fetch us on high is the day-star before the day. Has that hope arisen in your heart? This was what the apostle yearned to know in the saints he addresses, leading them beyond the old into the new things.

Behold My Servant

Isa. 52:13-15, Isa. 53

The portion, of which the commencement is now entered on, does evidently assume the form of a dialogue between Jehovah and the godly Jewish remnant about the Messiah. To read it thus on the sure ground of its own clear and unforced evidence adds not a little to its interest. Nor is this confined to our prophet. We have an even greater variety in Psalm 91, among others; for there in answer to Christ's reliance on Jehovah in ver. 2, the godly remnant express their conviction of His security from all evil, and of the judgment of His wicked foes in 3-13; and Jehovah responds to His love with the assurance of love and deliverance and exaltation. The form is poetical, the truth certain and cheering to a high degree, as evincing not only honour for His Anointed but the communion between Himself and His people in that day.

“Behold, my servant shall deal wisely; he shall be exalted and extolled, and be exceedingly high. As many were astonished at thee — his visage so marred more than man, and his form more than sons of men — so shall he startle (or, sprinkle) many nations: kings shall shut their mouths at him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider (or, understand).”

It is in Isa. 42 that Messiah is first presented by Isaiah as “My servant” after Israel had been so designated in the chapter before, with help soon to come by means of Cyrus through the judgment of Babylon and its idols. But a greater than Cyrus or Israel is here, however similar

the terms employed. “Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect [in whom] my soul delighteth! I will put my Spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the nations. He shall not cry, nor lift up nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench; he shall bring forth judgment in truth. He shall not burn dimly nor be crushed, till he have set justice in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law.” Beyond a doubt it is Messiah in His blessed abnegation or rather absence of self, such as no conqueror ever displayed, and of which He only was capable to perfection, but looking onward to the day when the nations shall submit to His law superseding every false god.

After this glance at Him, the prophet speaks of Israel as Jehovah's servant till the early verses of Isa. 49. where is begun a new section; and Messiah takes the place of Israel who had failed to the uttermost, not only in abject slavery to idols but in still baser rejection of Messiah. He is not only; to deliver Israel but always the true Servant, though Israel be not gathered and the Jews to be again scattered. “And he said to me, Thou art my servant, Israel, in whom I will glorify myself. And I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain; nevertheless my judgment is with Jehovah, and my work with my God.” Hence it is said to Him, “It is a small thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I have even given thee for a light of the nations, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth. Thus saith Jehovah the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers: kings shall

see and arise; princes, and they shall worship, because of Jehovah who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who hath chosen thee" He is also given for a covenant of the people (Israel), to establish the land, restore the captives, and execute judgment on their foes.

Still more does Isa. 50 prepare the way for all that was afterward told of the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. For here we have His servant with the tongue and ear of the instructed, whatever it might cost. "The Lord Jehovah opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious I turned not away backward. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheek to those that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting. But the Lord Jehovah will help me: therefore I shall not be confounded; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me: who will contend with me? Let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him draw near to me. Behold, the Lord Jehovah will help me: who is he that shall condemn me? Behold, they all shall grow old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up. Who is among you that feareth Jehovah, that hearkeneth to the voice of His servant etc.?" This is succeeded by the triple call to hearken in Isa. 51 and to awake, awake, in 51, 52, closing with the announcement on the mountains of him that publisheth peace, good, and salvation, that saith to Zion, "Thy God reigneth.... Jehovah comforteth his people, he redeemeth Jerusalem." Therefore were those that bear His vessels to depart, to go out, to touch nothing unclean; and this not with haste or flight, for Jehovah was both front and rear guard.

On what was this deliverance based? On the suffering Messiah; and as 50 revealed His sufferings from man, so

along with them 53 reveals that which makes plain His still deeper and infinitely faithful sufferings from Jehovah. The end of 52 is thus the preface which, while connected with the foregoing chapters, is the due beginning of chap. 53.

Jehovah speaks in general terms to the godly remnant, the earnest of the generation to come. “Behold, my servant shall deal wisely; he shall be exalted and extolled, and be high exceedingly.” Christ is God's power as well as God's wisdom. Time was when many were amazed at the depth of His humiliation — “His visage so marred more than man, and his form more than the sons of men.” For He went about doing good, and healing all that were under the power of the devil, as neither Moses, nor Elijah, nor Elisha, nor any other ever did. Anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power, He was the lowliest of men and taught subjection to the powers that be. Why then the spite and contempt of men, especially of the Jews, beyond all measure?

They were utterly without excuse. For the same prophet Isaiah in his early visions had announced Him Immanuel (Isa. 7:14, Isa. 8:8), and brought together (Isa. 9:6), for “a child born to us, and a son given to us,” the many wonders of His name, “called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of the age (or, eternity), Prince of Peace.” This made His humiliation inexplicable, save to those who see by faith that only thus could God be glorified as to sin in Messiah's atoning death, in order that all who believe might be saved by grace.

Now all was changed. This finds abundant illustration in Isa. 9:1-5; Isa. 11:1-10; Isa. 35; Isa. 63; Jer. 33. 14-26; Ezek. 34. 23-31; Ezek. 37:21-28: Dan. 7:13, 14; Hosea

3:5; Micah 5:1-5; Zech. 12:9, 10; Zech. 14:3-9. The Psalms are no less plain: Ps. 2:6-12; Ps. 8:5-9; Ps. 22:27-31; Ps. 45:2-7; Ps. 72:1-10. “So shall he startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths at him,” as their menials used to do at them. “For what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard shall they consider.” The glory, to say nothing of the grace, which shows us the once despised and hated and suffering Messiah so surpassing all that nations or their kings knew, filled them with unutterable astonishment. Yet this is but the introduction to the colloquy that ensues on the deepest things for both God and man opened out in its course.

In strong contrast with the kings astounded and abashed at Messiah's glory, the godly remnant confess the incredulity even of the chosen people at their report.

“Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of Jehovah been revealed? For he grew (or, shall grow) up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. No form had he nor comeliness, and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and shunned by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their face, he was despised and we esteemed him not” (Isa. 53:1-3).

Judicial darkness overhung the people. So the prophet long before testified, according to the word of the Lord. They had eyes, but they saw not; ears they had, but they did not hear; and their unintelligent heart was hardened against Him who would have healed their desperate sickness. Hence there was no reception of what ought to have been the most welcome tidings, though the arm of

Jehovah had been revealed unmistakably, but as yet only to a very small remnant.

Messiah's humiliation was an affront to the Jew, as poor as he was proud and filled with nothing but earthly power and grandeur in his dreams of the coming king. And the root of it was the insensibility of the natural man to sin, his own sins and utter evil and ruin before God. But whatever the glorious things designed and assured to Israel, it is impossible that He could overlook iniquity. Of old they had been ready and confident to obey His law; and they made it their boast that they alone had it. But how had they kept it or honoured Him? Their history (and He wrote who knew all) was a record of continual sin and rebellion. While Moses was up the mountain to receive the tables of stone on which Jehovah wrote the Ten Words, the people broke into open revolt, and made Aaron the instrument of setting up a golden calf to fall down and worship as the deliverer from Egypt, covering yet aggravating their apostasy under the proclamation of a feast to Jehovah. Why wonder that such a generation perished in the wilderness?

Were their sons any better under Joshua in the conquest of Canaan? Jehovah failed in nothing, they in everything; and so in Joshua 24:19 he told them, “Ye cannot serve Jehovah, for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If ye forsake Jehovah and serve strange gods, then will he turn and do you evil, and consume you after he hath done you good. And the people said to Joshua, Nay, but we will serve Jehovah.” But the covenant he made in this last interview of his had no more heed than that of Moses. And the book of Judges occupies its first chapter

with the failure even of Judah to dispossess the defilers of the land, as the second declares that Israel served the Baalim, forsaking the God of their fathers who brought them out of Egypt. Though He raised up judges to restore them and to save them out of the hand of their enemies, they ungratefully, on the death of each, turned back, and behaved more corruptly than their fathers; so that His anger was kindled against (not the Amorite or the Canaanite, but) Israel, and refused to drive out their enemies, left to prove His people.

But they rebelled against the best of judges, even Samuel the prophet, and would have a king like the nations, though this meant rejecting Jehovah. They soon proved that the king of their choice brought them into dismal subjection to the Philistines. And God chose David, type of the true Beloved; and things looked bright comparatively, but not without dark blots, notwithstanding the outward show of Solomon's reign, another type of the same Messiah in a different aspect. But the ruin that impended became manifest in his son Rehoboam when ten tribes revolted out of the twelve, never to know reunion till Messiah's day of power and glory.

Meanwhile the people, the priests, and the kings, increased their transgressions (2 Chr. 36:14), though Jehovah sent to them by His messengers; but they mocked at them till His fury rose against His people. “There was no remedy”; and they were carried to Babylon. Was the remnant any better on their return? Let the Cross of Christ and the destruction under the Romans answer.

Yet the dry bones must live, and stand up an exceeding great army, before the union of Judah and his companions with Ephraim and his, to be one in Jehovah's hand (Ezek. 37). The chapter before lets us know the primary work on their souls when He sprinkles clean water upon them, gives them also a new heart, and replaces their stony heart with a heart of flesh; so that they repent and loathe themselves in their own sight for their iniquities and their abominations.

On what ground will this “regeneration” stand? On that very humiliation and the propitiation for sins which till now the blinded nation refused in Jesus with scorn. This is what the godly remnant take up and in the deepest contrition acknowledge to Jehovah on His call to behold His Servant before whose exaltation the kings are struck dumb.

Not so the converted remnant. They open their lips to tell out to Jehovah, not only the unbelief of others notwithstanding the fullest proof on Jehovah's part, but their own. They acknowledge their past folly and the people's, in misinterpreting His matchless grace in stooping so low to vindicate God's nature and word, and to be their Substitute and Saviour. “O foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke!” Why fix on Isa. 63 and ignore Isa. 53? Why rejoice in Messiah's treading down their foes, and forget their own sins, and their need of Him to be trodden down under divine judgment, that they might be saved and brought to feel their otherwise inexpiable guilt?” Ought not the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” as He Himself told the mourning pair on the resurrection day.

The Lord therefore took His place in the ruin of the people and of its royal house. How unlike Adam who fell in the midst of pristine excellence, beauty, and sinless enjoyment! He accepted the lowliest position at Nazareth and under the dominion of the last heathen empire, because of the sins of the people. And thence He emerged, without a single advantage of place, power, wealth, or human learning, to glorify His Father in His living ways, to glorify God as to sin in His death (rejected by all), yet dying for the lost as indeed for everything. For His is a twofold reconciliation, not only for all believers but for all the universe of heaven and earth, that all, save the wicked and the unbelieving, may be blessed for ever by His redemption. If man despised, how did not God joy in Him that was His fellow humbling Himself for His Father's glory from first to last here below, as He expressed it from heaven repeatedly! In Him was His own best pleasure. How immeasurably above coming in power and pomp! “For he grew up before him as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground. No form had he nor comeliness; and when (not Gentiles, but) we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.” Yet had they not this very word and many more to win and warn them? “He is despised and shunned (or, rejected) by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (yes, He alike Messiah and Jehovah), and as one from whom men hide their face, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

But the latter half of the remnant's reply is a confession, not only of their once unbelief but of their now faith as simple as it is real and deep.

“Surely our sicknesses (or, griefs) he bore and carried our sorrows, and we regarded him stricken, smitten of

God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace [was] upon him, and with his stripes was healing to us. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid (or, made to light) upon him the iniquity of us all" (vers. 4-6).

It is well that we have the divine application of ver. 4 in the Gospel of Matthew (8:17), where it is cited from the Septuagint as "Himself took our infirmities and bore our diseases." It is not meant that He suffered under them as a matter of fact; but that He took them on His spirit and was burdened by their weight, whilst He removed them by His gracious intervention. He was perfect in this respect as in all others. What a contrast with Moses in Egypt inflicting scourges on the oppressors of Israel and despisers of the "I am"! and with Elijah in the midst of apostate Israel recalling the guilty king and people from Baal to Jehovah! Here we have God in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not reckoning to them their offences, but not yet the sinless One made sin for us that we might become God's righteousness in Him. It was He who, anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and power, went throughout doing good and healing all that were under the devil's power, because God was with Him. And it appears from this remarkable word of the prophet as applied by the apostle that as He healed in divine energy, He took the infirmities and the sicknesses as a load of sorrow on Himself before God.

Do we not see the detail of this peculiar way especially in the Gospel of Mark? Take the leper in Mark 1, the paralytic of Mark 2, the demoniac of Mark 4, the raised daughter of the synagogue ruler in Mark 5, the deaf and

dumb in Mark 7, the blind man of Bethsaida in Mark 8, and the son with a dumb spirit in Mark 9. It was not only power that dispelled the evil, but His deep interest and grace in the way wherein He did it, as the perfect servant of man's need in God's power. Truly “He hath done all things well.” Thus we gain a truth through the prophet by understanding ver. 4 of His wondrous way in healing the afflicted, instead of forcing it to speak of His yet distinct work of propitiation for our sins, which required far more and different from the cure of infirmities and diseases appreciated aright before God.

It is in vers. 5 and 6 that the godly remnant express their infinite debt in His suffering for them, instead of being regarded as one stricken, smitten of God and afflicted like Job, or in another way a Gehazi or an Uzziah. “But he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed (or, healing was to us).” The figures are abundant and as strikingly differ: but these all agree in revealing Him as the expiatory sufferer and substitute: the ever present shadows throughout the Jewish ritual of His atoning for the believer's felt need and deepest want before God as a guilty sinner. “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.”

The blood of such creatures did all that was available till the Lamb of God came and suffered for us, not only made sin and become a curse on the tree, but for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet- smelling savour. For every shadow met and was more than fulfilled on our account in Him who glorified God as God in His death for sin, as He had in His life glorified Him as His Father in an equally perfect obedience. It is

unbelieving blindness to see in His cross nothing more than a martyrdom for the truth and an example of holy love. These elements were in it beyond doubt, but incomparably more: the absolute necessity on God's part as well as ours of One as truly God as man, one mediator both of God and men, Christ Jesus man, who gave Himself a ransom for all, who suffered for sins once (and once was ample), Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God, not yet to heaven (however surely this in due time) but (what was of the utmost moment for the soul now and here) “to God.”

And what can be plainer than the prophet's figures? He (none other in heaven or on earth could avail), He only, He truly, He effectually “was wounded,” not in regard of any good in us, but “for our transgressions.” When in their darkness they did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, it was governmental, and significant of God's displeasure. But now they knew by divine teaching, and state it as a certain truth that only in sovereign grace to helpless and otherwise ruined sinners was He therein wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. It was God's way to save righteously. If the Jews did not dispute that through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin death; and thus death passed upon all men for that all sinned (adding then their personal sins to Adam's transgression); much rather did the grace of God, and the free gift in the grace of the one man Jesus Christ exceed unto the many. Was it not worthy of God and due to the Saviour, that where sin abounded, grace should exceedingly surpass? Compare the unworthy first man's sin with the all-worthy Second's suffering for sins. Who but an unbeliever could fail to see the infinite contrast, that

grace should flow abundantly for the salvation of the believer, as judgment must act all the more certainly against those who despise such a God and such a Saviour?

Peace with God, for such as we were, needed an immovable foundation. And He is the foundation, righteous and holy even for us through “the blood of His cross.” “The chastisement of our peace was upon Him.” Who else could have borne it? Sinful man must have sunk under what sin deserved, irretrievably and for ever. But He whom knowing no sin God made sin for us endured to the utmost, and was raised righteously and triumphantly, Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today and for ever. “And with His stripes we are healed.” Such is the one divine and only panacea for any and every lost one who bows to the Crucified One and to the righteousness of God, abjuring his own righteousness but confessing his guilt and ruin.

This is what takes away not only guilt but guile, and stablishes him that had been dishonest and deceitful, in integrity even in God's sight. The mouth is all the freer and fuller to own its wicked folly: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned each to his own way.” There was no exception: all astray, yet each in his own evil way. Yet in the face of all wrongs, and in His own spontaneous and all-overcoming goodness Jehovah caused to light upon Him the iniquity of us all.

Did not one of our own poets sing “I lay my sins on Jesus?” Nay, friend, God's truth is far beyond thy hymn. Jehovah who knew all laid the iniquity of all that believe on Him. Is not this far greater, better, and surer? We have all had habits of sin, even those converted young;

and a sinful habit genders forgetfulness as well as heedlessness of sins. Which of us could be so confident for eternal salvation as to rely on his own memory in laying his sins on Jesus? How awful to have presumed fatally in such a case! How blessed, even apart from that danger, to have the certainty that God does perfectly for the believer what he himself could only do imperfectly! What grace on His part, and what pitiful consideration of our shortcoming! He who could not but feel abhorrent every act of self-will, every uprising of independency and rebellion, caused the vile mass of iniquity to light on His head who is here shown to be its infinitely suffering Sin-bearer, willing because Jehovah willed it in a grace which is His prerogative, to save the lost.

This is the answer of Jehovah to the remnant's confession of their past unbelief and their present faith in Messiah. The last clause of ver. 8 makes it certain that the strain in these verses is His language, beginning in 7 and ending in 9.

“He was oppressed and he humbled himself, and he opened not his mouth: as a lamb he is brought to the slaughter and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment was he taken away; and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And they made his grave with the wicked but [he was] with the rich in his death; because (or, though) he had done no violence, nor [was] deceit in his mouth” (vers. 7-9).

How precious it is to have the true God thus communicating His moral complacency in the rejected

Messiah, and in His work of sin-bearing, to those who once despised Him but now share His delight in that meek endurance of all indignity! What a sight for the heavenly host, who at the marvel of His birth of woman appreciated the sign of a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, yet praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-pleasure in men! Now it is Jehovah musing on the deepest proof the only-begotten Son could give of the Saviour's love and His own, not only to display the true nature of God where it was unknown, but to save His people from their sins, whose history had been a succession of divine favours followed by deepening departure and rebellion against Him.

When His law and His institutions were more and more despised, when His priests made His offerings abhorred by their corruption, when the kings became leaders in idolatry and its debasing consecration of vice, He sent prophets not only to reprove but to win Israel back extraordinarily. But they took His servants, beat one, killed another, stoned a third. He sent others more than the first; but they persisted instead of repenting and did even worse. Having yet therefore one beloved Son, He sent also Him to them the last, saying, They will reverence My Son. But they said one to another, This is the Heir. Come, let us kill Him, and the inheritance will be ours. Was there ever a truer sketch than the Son drew for that generation, which they recognised yet fulfilled in His cross?

The Lord of the vineyard did destroy the wicked husbandmen, and gave the vineyard to others; who if they heard the glad tidings for awhile did not abide in goodness nor stand through faith, but presumed to think

that God had cast off Israel to give Christendom an everlasting and indefeasible possession of the earth and of all nations. How utterly heedless of the solemn warning that this present evil age shall end with the apostasy and the man of sin, and that the day of the Lord shall dawn on Israel penitent, believing, and saved, after exterminating judgment of the wicked Jews and Gentiles, while the heavenly saints shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father!

Here the prophet was inspired to present the renewal of Jehovah's relations with the godly Jew under the figure of the converse we are considering. And as it began in Isa. 52:13-15 with His pointing out the amazing change from One whose visage was marred more than man's, and His form more than the sons of men, to a glory which should astound kings when established before them, and this drew out in Isa. 53:1-6 the confession of their past unbelief and their present assurance of His sufferings in atonement for them, so Jehovah takes up the strain of the meek Sufferer doing the divine will whatever it might cost in a world at enmity with God. How suited and impressive the lesson to the remnant about to become a strong nation! Messiah, The Lord of all, “was oppressed”; but, far from resenting, “He humbled Himself.” He “opened not His mouth,” though He knew well the purpose of the religious chiefs to compass His death. “As a lamb is brought to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not his mouth. he was taken away by oppression and judgment; and who shall declare his generation?” Whatever might be the form of judgment, all was unrighteous; but those who condemned Him

condemned themselves unspeakably. For He who came in perfect love “was cut off out of the land of the living.”

Where was Jehovah then? He was there in a light strange to man: God would Himself provide a lamb for a burnt-offering, and a guilt-offering too. “For the transgression of my people was he stricken.” It runs through scripture from Genesis to Revelation; but in no scripture is it declared more plainly than here by Isaiah. How then have the Jews failed to hear? Through the same unbelief as blinds the natural man. Sin unjudged makes a Saviour hateful. A God of law is reasonable; the God of sovereign grace is intolerable to self-satisfied man, who trusts in himself and distrusts God, denying alike the need and the value of the sacrifice of Christ.

Expositors generally assume that the oriental style in the Psalms and the Prophets overflows and must be allowed for in the sober facts. Certainly it is not so in Christ and His cross! The truth exceeds in His grace and His endurance; as shown in the N.T. The reality penetrated more deeply and rose far above any anticipation vouchsafed. But there is another side not to be overlooked. The cross of Christ reveals His moral glory as nothing else could. Where was Jewish righteousness and priestly grace, where Roman law, and Greek letters at that solemn hour? Did not all of man and the world with its religion conspire against the only Righteous Servant, the Lord of glory full of grace and truth? And what can be said of the disciples, of His apostles, of Peter? Where can there be an atom for boast save in Him who was made a curse upon the tree, abandoned even of God necessarily that we might never be, yet vindicating Him to the uttermost when realising it to the uttermost? Truly it was the hour which stands

alone through all eternity, and the Lord Jesus could say of it, Now was the Son of man glorified and God was glorified in Him; if God was glorified in Him God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall glorify Him immediately (i.e. before the predicted glory of the kingdom be manifested).

Yet whatever He suffered, it is touching to observe how Jehovah cared even for the dead body of His Son as here noticed. “And they made his grave with the wicked,” the natural end of a crucified malefactor, “but [he was] with the rich in his death,” the unlooked for issue under divine guidance, “because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.” The fact too of its being a new tomb where no dead body had ever lain gave occasion to make the truth of His rising the more unambiguous and undeniable.

“Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he hath put him to grief. When thou shalt make his soul a trespass-offering, he shall see seed, he shall prolong days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand” (ver. 10).

In the preceding section the last clause of ver. 8 is decisive that the speaker can be none other than Jehovah Himself meditating throughout 7-9 on the gracious sufferings of His Messiah. Here in ver. 10 it is no less certain that we hear the remnant's voice about Him in answer to Jehovah, and reckoning on the sure and blessed fruit of Jehovah's part in that momentous trespass-offering. If Jehovah viewed with delight the Holy One of God meekly bowing to all indignity and suffering at the hands of those among whom He deigned to dwell in infinite love, and with heart set on representing aright the true God who was as little

known as He is as among the heathen, the godly tell Jehovah of the wonder, once hidden from them but now their delight, that it seemed good in Jehovah's eyes to bruise Him.

Long had the bruising of Him been revealed. It was disclosed to the guilty pair in paradise forfeited by their transgression (Gen. 3:15), before the responsible man was driven out, and the cherubim were set with the flame of the flashing sword to guard the way to the tree of life. Then the enmity of the serpent was in the foreground; and the word was “He shall crush thy head, and thou shalt crush his heel”; as this was the announcement proper then, and most true in itself. The crushed Saviour should crush the Serpent's head, and at last be his utter destruction; for the God of peace shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly, howsoever long He has waited: as he is the last enemy with his power of death to be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. Nor is it here the deceived and beguiled human adversaries Jew or Gentile who are dwelt on.

Of these the Lord spoke often to His disciples when unbelief became more and more pronounced. “From that time Jesus began to show to his disciples that he must go away [being then near Caesarea-Philippi] to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief-priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised” (Matt. 16:21). Then after the transfiguration, while they abode in Galilee, He said to them, “The Son of man is about to be given up into men's hands, and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised up” (Matt. 18:22, 23). Again, in Matt. 20:17-19, He took the Twelve apart, and said, “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man will be given up to the

chief-priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; and they will give him up to the Gentiles, to mock and to scourge, and to crucify, and the third day he shall rise again." Compare Acts 2:22, 23, 36; Acts 3:13-15; Acts 4:10; Acts 5:30, 31.

But here the godly view His sufferings in the light of Jehovah's purpose and peace. Whatever man's wickedness, and it was immense every way, love still more unfathomable was behind it to bring about a work of grace beyond human thought to God's glory, beyond all love in man who might die for his friend, as He for His enemies proves it essentially divine. "Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him." What grace could compare with this? What an answer to Satan's base suggestion in paradise, that He begrudged His most favoured creature the fruit of the tree in the midst of it! For what gift in heaven or earth could approach that unspeakable free gift? What sufferings too were like His? Truly He was subjected to grief; and by whom? How divine a way to demonstrate the love and holiness and righteousness of Him that sent, and of Him who came thus put to grief!

O sinful man, O doubting believer, accept the witness God has given concerning His Son. Professing Christian, go not below what godly Jews shall yet confess. As Isaiah here predicts to be fulfilled in them for the kingdom on earth; so we ought to know still more fully according to the gospel for heaven. "Herein is love, not that we loved God [as we surely ought], but that He loved us, and sent His Son a propitiation for our sins." Indeed He loved us beyond parallel, and doubly. We were dead in sins; and God's love was manifested in sending His only- begotten Son, that we might live through Him. We were guilty sinners; and He sent His

Son as the only and the efficacious sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:9, 10).

The prophet, so many centuries before, as to this thoroughly agrees with the apostle who looked on the cross, and so many years after lived to give this witness of divine love. “When thou shalt make his soul a trespass-offering, he shall see seed, he shall prolong days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand.”

There are those bearing the Christian name who venture to question and even deny that God dealt with our Lord Jesus judicially. But here is not a debateable type, if such it be counted; here is no trope which can be deemed Oriental, as so many love to find in scripture. It is the greatest of the O.T. prophets after Moses expressing in the Spirit what the future believing remnant of Jews will respond to Jehovah's intimate communications about Messiah. None can dispute that it is a term taken from the very heart of the offerings for sin in the Jewish ritual, illuminated by the light of Christ to those so long sleeping among things dead, as all must be in unbelief. It is more than an offering for “sin,” and expresses the addition to swerving from right the guilt of offence against relationship with Jehovah, a desecration of His name in respect of Him who deigned to make them His (and, we may surely say, in every respect); for in what had Israel not failed?

But when Messiah's soul (for it was not His body alone, but Himself in the most intimate and full way) was made a trespass-offering, how efficacious the result! What was blood of bulls and goats, of rams or lambs, in comparison? The worshippers once purged have “no

more conscience of sins," as the Epistle to the Hebrews so boldly declares. Messiah has already seen a seed purged and blessed thereby; and "He shall see seed" too for His manifested kingdom here below, not of His ancient people only but "all the families of the earth blessed in Him." "Unto thee shall the nations come from the ends of the earth, and they shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited falsehood, vanity; and in these things is no profit" (Jer. 16:19). Dead for our sins, He is alive again for evermore, the best prolongation of days; and "the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand." For "the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name is called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of the age to come (or, Eternity), Prince of Peace,.. upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom to establish it, and to uphold it with righteousness and with judgment from henceforth even for ever." "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment; a man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the storm; as brooks of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land."

Not less certain is it that the two concluding verses are the answer of Jehovah. Who but He could speak of Messiah as "My righteous servant?"

"He shall see of the travail of his soul, he shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant instruct the many in righteousness, and he shall carry their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong ones; because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors; and he bore

the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

The godly remnant had said in faith, "When thou shalt make His soul a guilt- (or, trespass-) offering, He shall see a seed." Now Jehovah responds emphatically, "He shall see of the travail of His soul." It was no mere act done as a duty, though in truth out of the depths of His obedience. It was also "of the travail of his soul," if these words ever applied to any suffering accepted in love, and endured for the glory of God and the salvation of the otherwise lost. What was it for the Holy One of God to be forsaken by His God, when He cried and could not be heard? when forsaken by His disciples? when despised of men, and scorned by His people, from the high priest to the meanest of the Jews? by the very robbers deservedly crucified on either side? Yet at no time was He so efficaciously suffering for God's glory; at no time so infinitely the object of divine delight, though His God who could not regard sin with the least allowance, so far from then delivering, made Him, the sinless One, sin for us.

Here and here only was the travail of His soul without a parallel; and hence the fruit of it no less unparalleled. It was thenceforward to be God's righteousness to justify the lost if they believed on Jesus, the sole way of salvation by grace for any. Others cried to Him who inhabited the praises of Israel. The saints before He came trusted; and Jehovah delivered them. But He went down under the burden of our sins, intolerable to all but Him, yet to Him more intolerable than to any; and He crying "Thou art holy," yet the abandonment continuing till the atoning work was done, when from the horns of the buffaloes He was heard, and in departing could say,

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. Next the demonstrative answer came in raising Him from among the dead and seating Him at His own right hand on high. This was God's righteousness to Him (compare John 16:10), who has also given us who believe to become God's righteousness in Him, and declares “He shall be satisfied.” For the Father's glory and God's glory thus He secured at all cost to Himself; and hence God, as God and Father, is concerned in glorifying Him who in love and according to divine purpose shares it with us. If He is head over all, we are His body and shall be associated with Him in His exaltation over all things, the things in the heavens, and the things on the earth. Our text speaks only of the earthly people's part; but Eph. 1:10-14 is no less certain as to the church's union and glory with Him over all things heavenly and earthly.

The rest of verse 11 needs the more care, because it has been forced to speak in concert with traditional views, instead of its real and simple meaning. For the Lord's ministry is first set out, and then His sacrificial death. “Justify many” would be a singular departure from due order, before His bearing our iniquities; which if such a sense were intended would require the preceding place as the necessary ground for justification. But the verb admits where requisite of “instructing in righteousness,” no less than of “justifying,” according to the context, as is plainly demanded in Dan. 12:3. “they that turn to righteousness” goes too far, especially when we take into account that it is “the” many, who have an evil place in the prophet's usage: not “many” but “the mass” of apostate Jews in the last days, who had their prototypes in those who rejected the Messiah when He presented Himself the first time. These He patiently and zealously

instructed in righteousness as minister of circumcision; and so the wise or teachers will do in the coming days. “The many” in either case might be instructed in righteousness without being turned to it; for they appear to be in contrast with the righteous few and perish in their stubborn unbelief. Here too, as the phrase is “the many,” it would seem that the same objects are in view.

Hence too there is no need for departing from the regular force of the last clause, “and he shall carry their iniquities.” Such was the second part of Messiah's work, His death-work, as instructing in righteousness was His life-work before. “Justifying” is rather attributed to God on the ground of Christ's death. Hence the necessity for another rendering, required for the human instruments in Dan. 12:3, pleads strongly for a cognate force in Isaiah 53:11, because it falls in with the order here, which is adverse to “justifying” before propitiation. The change to “for” He shall bear (or, carry) their iniquities was to make the clause square with justifying, which would have been a harder saying with “and,” the true sense.

Jehovah ends the strain (ver. 12) with the proclamation of Messiah's earthly exaltation and all the more because of His humiliation in suffering love. “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong ones.” He is the mightiest and most enduring of conquerors; but the spring lay not in strength or wisdom or majesty or glory. It originated in infinite love, it flowed out in divine grace, of which He will be the most suited administrator in the day of glory; because He, to make all effectual both for God's glory and for man's need and blessing, had gone down into suffering unfathomable to all but Himself. So the

prophet here expresses it “Because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors; and he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” He submitted to the last degree of creature weakness; He bowed to the foulest imputation of indignity; He carried the sinful load of not a few but “many,” and made intercession not for friends but enemies, “the transgressors,” who but for Him had been lost for ever. What possibly plainer here than the sinless One suffering at God's hand sin's punishment, turning to God in bearing their evils that those who believe might be forgiven and purged, blessed and triumphant through Him? Christ is the way, the truth, and the life; but here primarily for repentant Israel. Yet as the substitute for guilty objects, He suffered at the righteous Jehovah's hand beyond all that men can conceive; and for Gentile no less than Jew as the N.T. explicitly declares.

Is it not deplorable that any one bearing the name of the Lord should allow the truth of this wondrously accurate picture which the prophet drew, but speak of “the ideal Sufferer”? The exaltation which startles the kings is not yet fulfilled, because the mystery of the heavenly work is in progress; but it will surely be when He appears in glory to take His world-kingdom (Rev. 11:15). But why evade the only answer to the sufferings already and exhaustively made good to the full? Why idealise the yet to be fulfilled picture of His earthly reign in Isa. 1:24-31, Isa. 2:2-4, Isa. 4:2-6, Isa. 9:3-7, Isa. 11, Isa. 12, Isa. 35, Isa. 65. etc.? Indeed it is where the prophets as a whole point and converge. No doubt the early fathers wrote with little intelligence; and later tradition is yet more

wide of the mark. But this idealism shirks the truth which convicts the new criticism of unbelief.

W. K.