TREATISE
ON
THE SECOND COMING
OF
CHRIST.

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THE SECOND COMING

SECTION I.

DEFINITION OF THE SECOND COMING.

What is meant by the Second Coming of Christ? We may answer this question by referring to one of those parables in which Christ presents a miniature of the whole dispensation, introduced by his first coming. “A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, we will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, [and he reckoned with them, and rewarded them according to their several merits, both good and bad, and then said]. —‘But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.” Luke xix. 12.

This illustration represents the first coming of Christ, as the period when he delivered the treasures of the gospel to his servants, and went away; and his second coming as the period when he returned and reckoned with them, rewarding the faithful, and taking vengeance on his enemies. The parable may also be understood as intimating that Christ in his first coming was comparatively powerless, but when he came the second time, he had “received a kingdom” and was clothed with full power to judge, reward and execute vengeance. By the Second Coming of Christ then, we mean his coming in the power of judgment, to reckon with, reward, and punish those to whom he delivered the gospel at his first coming—we mean the day of judgment for the primitive church, the Jewish nation, and all other subjects of the first gospel.

We do not mean by the Second Coming of Christ, the final and general judgment. The popular notion concerning the judgment of mankind is, that it is to be a single transaction, occupying a single period of time. Joining this notion to the discovery, which
every reader of the New Testament must ultimately make, that the judgment of the Second Coming is clearly predicted in the New Testament as immediately to follow the destruction of Jerusalem, many have believed and taught that "the judgment (meaning the whole or final judgment) is past." These views, whether held by Universalists or Perfectionists, we disclaim, and instead of them insist that the judgment of mankind, according to Scripture, is divided into two acts, occupying two periods of time, separated from each other by an interval of more than a thousand years.---

In the twentieth chapter of Revelations this division of the judgment is unequivocally described. John saw, when Satan was first bound and cast into the pit, thrones and judgment given to the martyrs of Christ, and they lived and reigned with him a thousand years, but the rest of the dead lived not—"This (says the apostle) is the first resurrection," and we may properly add, this is the first judgment. (Rev. xx. 5.) Afterwards Satan is loosed again, gathers Gog and Magog to the great battle, is defeated and cast into the lake of fire forever. Then again appears a throne, and a second resurrection and a second judgment. Rev. xx. 12.

The same division of the judgment into two acts, separated by a long interval, is very conspicuous in the vision of the seals and trumpets. (Rev. vi. vii. &c.) When the sixth seal opens, the Lamb appears on the throne of judgment and the tribes of the earth wail because of him, saying, "the great day of his wrath has come." Afterwards the seventh seal is opened and seven angels with trumpets are introduced. As they sound their trumpets successively, a variety of events transpire necessarily occupying a long period of time. At length, after the sounding of the seventh trumpet, Christ is proclaimed sovereign of the world, and a second and final day of judgment is announced. Rev. xi. 15—18. Unless the sixth seal covers the same period with the seventh trumpet, (which cannot be maintained with any show of reason,) it is manifest to mere inspection that there are two acts of judgment—two periods of wrath and recompence.

That we may therefore speak of the judgment scripturally and intelligently we will distinctly recognise the division of it which is made in scripture, by calling one of the acts the first judgment, and the other the final judgment. With this explanation, we shall be understood when we say, that, in speaking of the Second Coming of Christ, we refer to the first and not to the final judgment. It is not our object in this treatise to discuss the subject of the second or final judgment. The simple confession here that we believe it to be future, will sufficiently preclude any honest inference from the doctrine we are about to present, that we believe, or wish to believe that the day of our judgment is past.
In the twenty fourth chapter of Matthew, after predicting the unexampled tribulations of the destruction of Jerusalem, Christ says, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days, shall the sun be darkened . . . . and then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Mat. xxiv. 29, 30. The nature of the coming here described is fully determined, not only by the attendant “gathering of the elect,” but also by the parallel description in Rev, vi. The language of John concerning the “great day of the wrath of the Lamb,” ushered in by the opening of the sixth seal, is so perfectly identical with the language of Christ in the passage quoted, that we may reasonably believe he copied it, and we cannot doubt that he used it with reference to the same events. As little can we doubt that both describe a day of judgment. Understanding then that our enquiry relates to the first great judgment spoken of in the sixth and twentieth of Revelations, as well as in the twenty fourth of Matthew, we ask what must we conclude is the true meaning of Christ’s prediction concerning the time? He says that the time of that judgment was to be “immediately after the tribulation” of the days of Jerusalem’s overthrow—but since prejudice must for the present have the privilege of crowding out common sense, we are still obliged to ask—does he mean what he says? In answering this question we shall appeal to several statements in the subsequent context, and in other discourses of Christ.

1. After the above introduction of his Second Coming, Christ goes on to say. “Now learn a parable of the fig-tree. When his branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh. So likewise ye, when ye see all these things [viz. the visible signs which he had foretold in the former part of his discourse] know that it [i.e. his coming] is near, even at the doors.” Matt. xxiv. 32, 33. We perceive in this that Christ had it directly in view to so instruct his disciples concerning the time that they should be in no danger of mistake; and therein we have a pledge of the simplicity of his language. So that there is no conceivable reason for doubting that he intended to convey the idea which lies on the face of his words; viz. that his Second Coming should follow the visible signs he foretold, as closely as summer follows the budding of the fig-tree. The last of those signs was the destruction of Jerusalem, and of course his statement here is precisely what it was before, viz. that the Son of Man should come ‘immediately after the tribulation of those days.’ Moreover,
it should be observed that his language plainly implies, that the persons he addressed would have an opportunity of observing the whole series of tokens that were to precede the Second Coming. On any other supposition the parable is impertinent.

2. But the context furnishes another and still more indisputable index of the real meaning of Christ. As though he were determined to accumulate emphasis to the uttermost, upon the truth he was uttering, he proceeds in the usual form of his most important affirmations, and with all the solemnity of a tremendous oath, to state once more the limitation of the time within which his coming should take place. *Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.* v. 34, 35.

It is fashionable with those who have theories to maintain, that are inconsistent with this statement, to work out each for himself—ingenious expositions of the word generation. One refers it to the Jews, another to the righteous, a third to the sort that persecuted Christ, and a fourth to the generation that will be living when Christ appears! * These expositions are confidently if not plausibly supported, in most cases, by quotations of examples from the Psalms, and prophets, in which the word generation means not the mass of men living at one time, but a peculiar race or sort of persons; as for instance, 'God is in the generation of the righteous.' Psalms xiv. 6. Now the only fair way of arguing from usage, when the case admits of it, is by appealing to the usage of the writer himself, whose language is in question. Instead of going to David and Isaiah, in another age and another language, we will let Christ himself determine what Christ means by the word generation. And indeed we need not go out of the book of Matthew. Christ uses not only the word, but the very phrase in question, *this generation,* at least five times in the previous discourses recorded by Matthew, and we need only quote the passages to make manifest his meaning. "Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But Wisdom is justified of her children." Matt. xi. 16—19. "The men of Nin eveh shall rise in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it. . . . The queen of the south shall rise in judgment with this generation." c. xii. 41, 42. [As the unclean spirit returning

* See Clarke's Commentary, Miller's Lectures, 'Signs of the Times,' T. R. Gates's writings, &c.
with seven other spirits worse than himself, makes the last state of the wicked man worse than the first,] "even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation." 43–45. "Behold I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city; that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation." xxiii. 34—36. Now who would think of going to the Old Testament for help to determine the meaning of the word generation in these passages? And who can imagine that the same word loses its plain meaning and becomes figurative, in passing from almost the last verse of the 23d chapter into the 24th? The passage in dispute (Matt. xxiv. 34,) is the last of a series of instances in which the phrase this generation, occurs with evident uniformity of meaning, and it is almost a literal repetition of the instance which immediately precedes it—Matt. xxiii. 36. Viewing all these passages in their connection with each other, we discover most clearly that the people concerning whom Christ habitually used the phrase "this generation," were they who, as a mass, had heard and rejected John the Baptist and himself, and were thus rapidly becoming ripe in wickedness. Foreseeing that this same generation would crucify himself, persecute the apostles, and persist in their unbelief and malice, till the measure of their iniquities would be full; he justly threatened them with the gathered vengeance due to all the murders of the righteous from the beginning of the world. As they by their preeminent wickedness were becoming the representatives of the sinners of all past generations, it was meet that the debt of wrath due to the whole world should be paid to them, and that it should be paid without delay, before the generation had left the earth, that their sin and punishment might be seen together. Accordingly after saying in the 23d chapter, "Verily I say unto you all these things" [i. e. the punishment due to all previous persecutors] shall "shall come upon this generation," he goes on in the 24th chapter to specify the items of that punishment. He speaks of wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, a most terrific and swelling series of outward calamities, ending with the destruction of the holy city; and then continuing the series by passing into the spiritual world, he predicts as immediately to follow this climax of outward ruin, the appearance of the Son of Man in the majesty of eternal judgment, the wailing of his crucifiers, and the glorious gathering of his elect. In perfect keeping then, with his former sayings, and with the demands of the case, he adds "Verily I say unto you this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled."
3. The meaning of Christ’s statement in the 24th of Matthew is, if possible, still more clearly determined and manifested by the three following equivalent statements, which occur in his other discourses. (1.) “Verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come.” Matt. x. 23. (2.) “Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” xvi. 28. (3.) “If I will that he (John) tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” John xxi. 22. Here we have three separate forms of the same prediction, all terminating in the same point—all affirming directly, or by obvious implication, precisely the truth which we have found in three other forms before.

Some of those who are determined not to receive the simple meaning of these texts, dispose of them by referring them, especially the two former, either to the transfiguration of Christ on the Mount, or to the day of Pentecost. But we ask where is the proof that either of these events is ever called the Coming of Christ elsewhere in the Evangelists? If we suppose Christ to have used in these three instances, with reference to those events, an expression, which every where else in his discourses refers to the day of judgment, and that too without any explanation, we impute to him the most outrageous duplicity. These time-serving interpretations trample not only on usage, but on common sense; for at the transfiguration, Christ had not gone away; so that it would have been nonsense to have called that event his Coming; and the effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, was the coming not of Christ, (for he had gone away only forty days before,) but of that “other Comforter” which he promised to send his disciples in his absence.

We shall perhaps be referred to 2 Peter i. 16, as an instance in which the transfiguration is called the ‘coming’ of Christ. But a slight examination of the passage will show the fallacy of the reference. Says the apostle, “We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—When and where had he made known to them this power and coming? Obviously, in his previous epistle and preaching. Turning to the first chapter of that epistle, we find his first and favorite theme was, “the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, at the appearing of Jesus Christ”—the grace that was to be brought unto the saints at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” We find him also in other records of his preaching, like the other apostles, prominently presenting the Second Coming of Christ as the great hope of the church. e. g. Acts iii. 20. To assure his readers more fully of that glorious hope, he refers them in his second epistle to the transfiguration: “We were” says he, “eye-witnesses of his majesty on the holy Mount,” i. e. we have seen his spiritual glory, and we therefore know what will be his
power at his promised coming.' Observe the apostle does not say he was an eye-witness of Christ's coming, but only of his majesty. The transfiguration was an anticipative glimpse of the power and glory of the Second Coming; and as such, Peter very properly referred to it for confirmation of the hopes of those who were waiting for the Lord.

But, supposing it were possible for those who wish to evade the testimony in question, to bring some plausible proof that the first two of the three passages quoted, refer to the transfiguration or to the day of Pentecost—what will they say to the third? Christ had predicted Peter's death. Thereupon Peter asked him what should be the lot of John. He answered, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me." Here is a plain intimation, first, that John should outlive Peter, secondly, that he should live till the Second Coming, and of course, thirdly, that the Second Coming took place after the death of Peter, and before the death of John. Now Peter was crucified long after the transfiguration and the day of Pentecost. Of course, 'till I come' cannot refer to either of those events. But John certainly departed soon after the destruction of Jerusalem. Of course, "till I come," must refer to an event which took place near the period of that destruction.

We may sum up and concentrate the testimony we have examined in this section, thus—Christ designated the time of his Second Coming in six different ways. 1. He placed it immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem. 2. He instructed his disciples to expect it, when they should see the fearful signs, that should precede and accompany the destruction of Jerusalem, as they would look for summer after the budding of the fig-tree. 3. He most solemnly declared it would take place, before the generation cotemporary with himself would pass away. 4. He assured his disciples that it would happen before their ministry to the Jews would be finished. 5. He said there were some standing with him who should live till the event. 6. He plainly intimated that John should tarry till his coming.

SECTION III.

THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

There is abundant proof in the New Testament that the primitive believers understood the foregoing predictions of Christ in their most obvious sense; and accordingly expected the Second Coming within the life-time of some of their own number. We will notice a few specimens of their customary manner of speech concerning the Second Coming. "Ye come behind in no gift,
waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. i. 7. "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Phil. iii. 20. "Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven." 1 Thess. i. 10. "The grace of God ... hath appeared ... teaching us ... that we should live soberly, etc., looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." Tit. ii. 11—13. Such language as this is perfectly natural on the supposition that they understood Christ's predictions as setting the period of the Second Coming nigh at hand, and perfectly unnatural on any other supposition, as is proved by the fact that such language at the present day, when the churches believe the Second Coming to be afar off, is altogether obsolete. Men do not wait and look for a far distant event. Such language implies that the event expected is supposed to be impending.

The following may be taken as examples of another class of passages, which occur on almost every page of the Epistles. "Being confident of this very thing that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ ... that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ."—Phil. i. 6, 10. "I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Thess. v. 23. "I give thee charge ... that thou keep this commandment without spot and blameless, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." i Tim. vi. 13, 14. Nothing can be plainer than that the Second Coming of Christ, in the minds of those who used such language as this, was the event which stood at the end of their trial of obedience. They manifestly waited for it as though it were no nigh that their temporal probation would reach "unto" it.

In the following instances the expectations of primitive believers are expressed in the most explicit terms: 'Let your moderation be known unto all men: The Lord is at hand.' Phil. iv. 5. 'Let us consider one another &c., exhorting one another: and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.' Heb. x. 24, 25. 'Ye have need of patience &c., for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.' Heb. x. 38, 37. 'Be patient therefore brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.—Establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.—The Judge standeth at the door.' James v. 7—9. 'The end of all things is at hand.—The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God.' 1 Pet. iv. 7, 17.

In those remarkable passages of Paul which relate to the resurrection, it is impossible not to discover clear evidence of the same confident expectation of the speedy coming of the Lord. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." In a mo-
ment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trump:
set shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we
shall be changed." 1 Cor. xv. 51; 52. "For this we say unto you
by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive, and remain un-
to the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent [i. e. anticipate]—
them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from
heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the
trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we
which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them
in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." 1 Thess. iv. 15—17.
If Paul had believed the resurrection to be a far distant event, he
would have said "we who will then be dead shall be raised incor-
ruptible, and they that remain asleep shall be changed." But in
both the instances, where such language might have been expec-
ted, he transposes the pronouns we and they, as though he studi-
ously sought to make it manifest, that he expected to be himself
among the number of the living at the coming of the Lord.

We will not further multiply citations showing the expectations
of primitive believers, but refer the reader, if he needs further evi-
dence on the subject, to an examination of the whole New Tes-
tament. The position which we think the evidence already pre-
presented abundantly sustains, is that, as Christ predicted so the
primitive church expected, his Second Coming within the life
time of their own generation.*

* It might be proved by the testimony of secular historians, that the
primitive church believed the Second Coming to be nigh at hand. The
following extract from Gibbon is a specimen of such testimony—
"In the primitive church, the influence of truth was very powerfully
strengthened by an opinion, which, however it may deserve respect for
its usefulness and antiquity, has not been found agreeable to experience.
It was universally believed, that the end of the world and the kingdom
of heaven, were at hand. The near approach of this wonderful event had
been predicted by the apostles; the tradition of it was preserved by their
earliest disciples, and those who understood in their literal sense the dis-
courses of Christ himself, were obliged to expect the second and glorious
coming of the Son of Man in the clouds, before that generation was
totally extinguished, which had beheld his humble condition upon earth,
and which might still be witness of the calamities of the Jews under
Vespasian and Hadrian. The revolution of seventeen centuries has in-
structed us not to press too closely the mysterious language of prophecy
and revelation; but as long as, for wise purposes, this error was per-
mitted to subsist in the church, it was productive of the most salutary
effects on the faith and practice of Christians, who lived in the awful ex-
pectation of that moment when the globe itself, and all the various race
of mankind, should tremble at the presence of their divine Judge.—This
expectation was countenanced by the twenty fourth chapter of St. Mat-
thew, and by the first epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonians. Eras-
mus removes the difficulty by the help of allegory and metaphor; and
the learned Graeco ventures to insinuate, that, for wise purposes, the
pious deception was permitted to take place."

SECTION IV.

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE SIGNS PREDICTED

Several of the prophets of the Old Testament, foretold events that should go before the "great day of the Lord," and should be signs of its approach. Thus Malachi says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." Mal. iv. 5. We have it on Christ's authority, that this prediction was fulfilled in his day. He says of John the Baptist, "If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come." Matt. xi. 14. Again, Joel says—"I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days I will pour out my Spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come." Joel ii. 28–31. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, announced that this prophecy was then in course of fulfillment. When the people were amazed at the works of the Spirit, and said of them that spake with tongues, "These men are full of new wine," Peter said, "These are not drunken as ye suppose,... but this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel."—and then he proceeds to recite the passage above quoted.

In the twenty-fourth of Matthew, Christ takes up the series of signs where Malachi and Joel leave it, and predicts with much minuteness the principal events of the period between the day of Pentecost and the destruction of Jerusalem. It should be noticed that these predictions, though mingled together, are of two distinct sorts; 1. those which relate to events in the history of the Christian church—such as persecutions, the appearance of Anti-Christ, the universal publication of the gospel, &c.; 2. those which relate to events in the history of the Jews, and other nations—such as wars, pestilences, earthquakes, &c. We naturally look to external history for a record of these last events, and as the history of the downfall of the Jewish nation, is generally familiar, and no one denies that the fearful physical calamities which Christ predicted in the 24th of Matthew, actually came to pass in that generation, we need not offer any proof in relation to the second class of predictions. It is of more importance to direct the reader's attention to the evidence we have of the fulfillment of the first class of tokens—those, which by their connection with the history of the Church, and by their spiritual nature, were more emphatically the precursors of the Coming of Christ. It is not generally supposed that those tokens—especially the appearance
of Antichrist, and the universal publication of the gospel—did actually come to pass in that age; so that it is the more necessary that we should present our proof in relation to them. We find proof in the New Testament, that Antichrist was revealed, and that the gospel was published to all nations, before the destruction of Jerusalem. The following synopsis presents Christ's predi-
citions relative to those events, with the record of their fulfilment in the opposite column.

**Predictions:**

- Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. Mat. xxiv. 11.
- Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. Mat. xxiv. 12.
- There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets. Mat. xxiv. 24. [Paul repeats this and the preceding prediction in 2 Thess. ii. 3.]
- That day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed.

**The Fulfilment:**

- Many false prophets are gone out into the world. 1 John iv. 1.
- I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. Rev. iii. 15.
- Little children, it is the last time; and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. 1 John ii. 18.
- They went forth, and preached every where. Mark xvi. 20. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world. Rom. x. 18. The gospel is come unto you, as it is in all the world. 'The gospel... which was preached to every creature which is under heaven.' Col. i. 6, 23.

It may be noticed that while Paul, as the chief preacher of the primitive church announces the universal publication of the gospel, John the disciple who outlived most of his cotemporaries, is the principal reporter of the facts which fulfilled Christ's predictions concerning Antichrist. When Paul wrote to the Thessale-
mians, Antichrist was not revealed, but he said the "mystery of iniquity" was already working. In the later record of John, its manifestation is announced.

Now what is there in the nature of things to obstruct our belief of the plain testimony before us? Forty years was surely time enough for such workmen as Paul and his fellow apostles, to announce to the whole world the approach of the kingdom of God. The "testimony" which they had to bear to all nations, was not a system of theology, or a long series of discourses on morality, but simply the message of a king, sent before him to forewarn his subjects of his approach. Forty years was long enough too for the development and ripening of the elements of evil within the
church. The miracles, which abounded during the ministry of Christ and his apostles, while on the one hand they furnished occasion and food for faith, on the other, naturally excited a morbid craving for the marvellous. Thus while the work of salvation was going on in the inner church, a market was opened, and a strong demand created, among the crowd of the outer court, for signs and wonders; and as demand always attracts supply, a long a host of false prophets, false Christs, deceitful wonder-workers—in a word, speculators on the credulity awakened by the miracles of Christ, appeared as might be expected, and as Christ predicted; and we might infer with strong probability, from the nature of things alone, without the predictions of Christ or the testimony of history, that the 'mystery of iniquity' within the church, kept pace in its growth, with the ripening corruption of the Jewish nation; and that the judgment of Antichrist followed hard upon the destruction of the Holy City.

If it should be said of the signs we have particularly noticed, as well as of the others, that, admitting them to have been fulfilled in the apostolic age, they are still to be regarded as signs not of the Second Coming, but merely of the destruction of Jerusalem, we reply, Christ certainly predicted one sign, and that the most notable of all, of which this cannot be said, and that sign was the destruction of Jerusalem itself. It is a very great mistake to suppose that that event occupied the chief place in Christ's mind when he uttered the predictions of the 24th of Matthew. His language plainly shows that it was in his mind only the last and greatest sign of his invisible coming. The principal question of the disciples was, "what shall be the sign of thy coming?" His answer was—"Jerusalem shall be destroyed; the tribulation of its people shall be such as never was, and never shall be, and immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the sign of the Son of Man appear." The tribulation then, of the destruction of Jerusalem was the true sign of his coming.

This accords with the prophecy of Daniel. "There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time; and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book; and many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." Dan. xii. 1, 2. Here is a resurrection of many, a redemption of the righteous, and a destruction of the wicked—in a word, a judgment, immediately following the tribulation that is without example. Christ quotes Daniel in his description of the tribulation, (Matt. xxiv. 15.) so that there can be no doubt that he followed and repeated the above prophecy of Daniel when he said "Immediately after the tribulation of those days, shall the sun be darkened," etc.
The chief and last sign, then, of Christ's Second Coming, did actually and confessedly take place, about forty years after his crucifixion, and of course within the lifetime of his own generation, and if, according to his prediction, his coming immediately followed that sign, his word, "Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled," and the expectations of his followers, founded on that word, were found true...

SECTION V.

The nature of the Second Coming.

It can be proved by many examples, that popular anticipations, and even the calculations of the learned, are not safe guides to an understanding of the nature of events predicted in the Bible. Take a case already referred to, that of the mission of John the Baptist. The prediction concerning him was, "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of that great and dreadful day of the Lord." This was written some hundreds of years before the appearance of John, and doubtless had been a subject of much meditation and calculation among the Jews, both learned and unlearned; and yet, after John had finished his ministry with great notoriety, and with the credit of being "a prophet indeed," even Christ's own disciples asked, "Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? a question that shows they had not yet recognized John as the Elias. Christ's answer, while it unequivocally settles the question as to the true application of the prophecy, holds up to view the blindness of the "scribes," in terms that are fitted to humble and warn the students of prophecy in all generations. "I say unto you that Elias is already come, and they knew him not, and have done unto him whatsoever they listed," Matt. xvii. 12. Christ also himself, in the mode of his first coming, wholly disappointed the expectations which the Jews had formed concerning him, from the prophecies of the Old Testament.

It would not therefore be a strange thing, if it should be found that the Second Coming was an event very different from the conceptions of it, whether popular or learned, which men have gained by private interpretations of prophecy. Christ may have come at the time appointed, though the scribes 'knew him not.' Taking the caution of past examples, we will not assume that he did not come, because popular anticipations were not fulfilled; but rather that those anticipations are false, and wholly unworthy to be placed in the balance against the credit of those plain predictions which as we have seen, appointed the time. At the outset of our inquiry concerning the nature of the Second Coming, we are bound to take for granted that it was an event...
though it may not have been recognised by external historians, was not inconsistent with the true history of the external events which followed the destruction of Jerusalem.

This assumption leads us at once to the general conclusion,—that the Second Coming was an event in the spiritual, and not in the natural world. Let us see then if Christ's own language does not warrant and require this conclusion.—Before his description of his coming in the 24th of Matthew, he speaks particularly of the mode of it, and cautions his disciples against delusion in relation to it, thus:—If they shall say to you, Behold he is in the desert; go not forth: Behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.' Matt. xxiv. 26, 27. The contrast here presented, is evidently that between the limited presence of the impostors that were to be sought for in the desert and secret chambers, and the extended presence of the Son of Man in his coming. He was to be looked for not as a material and circumscribed body, but as an all-pervading essence; not to be found by searching here or there, but to be seen everywhere. And this is the very distinction between bodily and spiritual presence. Says Paul, "Though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order." Col. ii. 5. Here we have the omnipresence of the spirit, in contrast with the limited presence of the material form. Christ's caution then amounts to this:—"My coming will be in that world where I can be like the lightning, omnipresent,—the world of souls."

This exposition of Matt. xxiv. 26, 27, is fully confirmed by a parallel passage in Luke xvii. 20—24. This same comparison of Christ's coming to the lightning, is there introduced thus—"When he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them, and said, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, [i. e. in such a manner as to be observed with the eyes] neither shall they say, Lo here, or Lo there; for behold the kingdom of heaven is within you."" Putting these passages together, (and they clearly belong together,) we see that Christ did not teach that his coming would be like the lightning in respect to outward visibility, but simply in respect to its extended presence. That presence was to be looked for in the kingdom that is within. It is manifest then that Christ's predictions in the 24th of Matthew, figurative and mystical as they are, are accompanied by such explanations and cautions as leave no reasonable excuse for the error of those who understand them in a literal and material sense, and look for his coming in the outward world.

If we bear in mind the theory with which we commenced, viz. that the judgment of the Second Coming was for the subjects of the
first gospel, we shall see there was a necessity that the principal sphere of its manifestation should be in the spiritual world. That evil generation, which grew ripe in iniquity, under the ministry of John, and of Christ, and on which Christ declared should come all the righteous blood, shed from the foundation of the world, the crucifiers of Christ and the persecutors of the church at Jerusalem, had doubtless chiefly passed away, before the destruction of Jerusalem. So also, had by far the greater part of the righteous followers of Christ. Moreover there is evidence that a large proportion of the subjects of the first gospel, were the spirits of the previous dead. 1 Peter iv. 6. So that nearly all the principal actors in the drama which terminated in the Second Coming, were already within the veil, and there, of course, was the fitting place for the denouement. A remnant, it is true, both of the believers, and the rejecters of Christ in his first coming, remained on earth, and also a whole generation of their descendants, to whom in a secondary manner the judgment of the Second Coming pertained. But as the spiritual world was nevertheless the main scene of action, the appropriate commencement of the judgment to this secondary remnant, was a summons to that scene; and that summons, to the righteous was the instantaneous change from a mortal to an immortal state, by which they were introduced to the personal presence of the Lord; to the wicked, it was death, by the sword, pestilence and famine.

But here let it be observed by way of caution, that in placing the Second Coming in the spiritual and not in the natural world, we give no place to that foolish unbelief which conceives of nothing but unsubstantial and shadowy existences and events, as pertaining to that world. To some minds, we may seem to belittle the glorious appearing of Christ, by referring it to the world of souls instead of the world of bodies; for it is fashionable to regard things spiritual and invisible, as little more than things visionary and poetical. But in our philosophy, mind is more truly a substantial entity than matter, and there is less of poetical nothingness in the spiritual than in the natural world. With these views, if we would magnify the coming of the Lord, we must refer it to a spiritual sphere. We measure the greatness of the event thus—

As the body is to the soul, so was the awful overthrow of Jerusalem, to the Second Coming of Christ. The slaughter of eleven hundred thousand Jews, was the bodily representative, the visible and inferior index of that spiritual judgment in which “the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains and the mighty men, and every bondman and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens and rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of his wrath is come.”
It will be objected to these views of the spirituality of Christ's Second Coming, that the prediction was, "every eye shall see him."

Rev. i. 7. We may answer this objection in three ways—

1. By referring to the circumstances and context of the prediction:—John is addressing the churches, and after speaking of the grace and glory which Christ had conferred on them, he says,—

"Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him." This is naturally to be interpreted as a glorious promise to those whom he addressed; as if he had said, "Christ has washed us from our sins, and has made us kings and priests,—now he is coming personally, and we shall all see him." He adds, "and they also which pierced him;" which implies that the wicked were not included in the preceding statement.

2. The language of John is necessarily limited by the nature of the subject, concerning which he speaks, and since Christ was a spiritual and not a material being, his meaning must be, "every spiritual eye shall see him," for the natural eye cannot see a spirit. The nature even of Christ's body, after his resurrection, was such that his appearance to his disciples, is in all cases described in the very terms that are used in relation to appearances of angels. When they were assembled together, and the "doors were shut" suddenly he "stood in their midst," and in like manner he "vanished out of their sight." When he walked with them, "their eyes were holden, and they knew him not." In several instances he is said to have "appeared to them," and when he ascended up, "behold two men stood by the disciples in white apparel." (See Mark xvi. 9–14. Luke xxiv. 16, 31, 32. John xx. 19, 20, xxi. 1. Acts i. 10.) In all this it is evident that Christ, after his resurrection, had the nature of angels; and the perceptions of those who saw him were not natural, but spiritual. His appearance was, in proper language, a vision, and none saw him but those whose spiritual eyes were opened.* Stephen, "being full of the

* There are one or two facts in the account of Christ's intercourse with his disciples after his resurrection, which seem to militate with, or at least to perplex, these views. It is recorded that the disciples handled him as though his body was material; that he said himself, "A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have;" and that he ate material food. But these facts must not be suffered to countervail the positive evidence we have that his body was spiritual. They certainly handled no other body than that which entered a room when the door was shut, and afterwards vanished out of their sight. These acts are inconsistent with the nature of a material body. Whereas the act of eating material food is not necessarily inconsistent with the nature of a spiritual body. Nor does the fact that he had flesh and bones imply that his body was material; but simply that he had a body, and was not, as they supposed, an unsubstantial ghost. That body was the same in form as it was before his crucifixion, as was proved by the disciples handling him; but it certainly was not the same in nature. Mortal had put on immortality, and that change, as Paul describes it in the fifteenth of I Corinthians,
Holy Ghost, saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God," (Acts vii. 55.) and he saw him because he was full of the Holy Ghost, and not with his natural eyes, for the others saw nothing. So Paul saw Jesus Christ and talked with him, when those that were with him saw no man, and heard not the voice. (See and compare Acts ix. 7. xxvii. 9. 1 Cor. ix. 1.) John also on the isle of Patmos was "in the spirit" when he saw the Lord. (See Rev. i. 10.) There is no evidence that Jesus Christ has ever been seen by any natural eye since his resurrection. Indeed he expressly declared on the eve of his crucifixion, "The world seeth me no more." When therefore John asserted that every eye should see him, he must have had in his mind, the limitation which the nature of Christ, and this declaration required.

3. There is a sense, in which it may truly be said that every eye did see Christ, after the destruction of Jerusalem. He came at the beginning, preaching the approach of the reign of God—-that kingdom of heaven which had been predicted as about to break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms. Of that kingdom he claimed to be the sovereign. Before Pontius Pilate he confessed himself a king; and to the high priest of Israel, he declared, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power." Yet his title to the throne of the world was not practically asserted and manifested in his first coming. He came to preach and heal and suffer—not to reign. After his resurrection, he said to his disciples, "All power in heaven and on earth is given unto me," and they thereafter proclaimed him the royal Son of God. Still through the whole period of the apostolic age, his sovereignty was not manifested to the world. Stephen saw him on the throne, and believers knew that he was king; but the world still denied and despised his claim. It was reserved for the awful period of his Second Coming, to make the world know its master. The testimony of his claim had gone "into all the world for a witness unto all nations." He had proclaimed that within the age of one generation, he would come and prove that claim by destroying Jerusalem and dashing in pieces the Jewish nation. The report of that proclamation had gone with the gospel into all the world. Thus the destruction of Jerusalem was the appointed sign and proof of his sovereignty. It was as if he had said in his first coming, "For the present imagine if you will, that I am a boasting impostor—but when you see this temple, city, and nation swept with the besom of destruction, then know that I am King." That tremendous event came to pass at the time appointed; the makes the very difference between the natural and spiritual body. Now we insist that a spiritual body is not perceivable by the natural senses, or at any rate, by the natural action of the natural senses; and therefore that the disciples sight and handling of Jesus was supernatural, or spiritual.
sign he gave the world appeared; and all nations were compelled to see "the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power."—Thus, it may be said that every eye saw him, and every heart knew by a sure token, that to him it was given, to rule the nations with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. The destruction of Jerusalem was the most public event that ever happened, and in that, all the tribes of the earth saw and trembled at the majesty of the Son of God.*

The word of the angels at the ascension of Christ, "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven," (Acts i. 11.) is sometimes urged as an objection to the theory of the Second Coming, which we have presented. But it may more properly be regarded as a decisive objection to the popular expectation of a public personal advent, visible to the world. For as we have seen, his nature was that of angels after his resurrection, and his ascension was in the angelic world, as was shown by the presence of the angels who uttered the above declaration. Moreover he ascended, not in the view of assembled nations, but in the presence of a few of his disciples. The event was of a very private nature, and, according to the word of the angels, his subsequent coming was to be equally private.

It must not be supposed, that in maintaining that the Second Coming took place in the spiritual, and not in the natural world, we deny an actual personal appearing to believers on earth. We hold, that together with that spiritual presence, which was like the lightning, and that presence of power by which he startled the nations, there was also a personal appearing, on the one hand to

* If any one objects that these views are not sustained by the testimony of history; it may be answered, in the first place, that the light of history on the remarkable period immediately following the destruction of Jerusalem, is little better than total darkness. The predictions of the Bible are a safer guide through the confusion of that period than any external history. Secondly, it is hardly to be expected that the world's historians, should confess the world's convictions, in such a case. All nations might have watched the issue that was made up between Jesus and the Jews, in respect to his title to their throne; and might have seen the decision with a shuddering conviction of the truth and righteousness of his claim: and yet that conviction might have been so repressed and concealed, that unbelief, like a returning wave, immediately rolled over the world's heart again, and swept from its memory and its history every trace of its momentary pang of faith. Thirdly, There is evidence in history, of some of the effects produced by the conviction which was wrought by the destruction of Jerusalem. Adam Clarke says,—"It is worth serious observation, that the Christian religion spread and prevailed mightily after this period; and nothing contributed more to the success of the Gospel, than the destruction of Jerusalem happening in the very time and manner, and with the very circumstances as particularly foretold by our Lord." Clarke's Commentary, Matt. xxiv. 31.
the whole spiritual world; and on the other, to the few believers who remained on earth. As he ascended, so he descended. As he ascended only in the presence of his friends, so he descended only in the presence of his friends. As he ascended in the angelic world, so he descended in the angelic world. As unbelievers knew nothing of his ascension, so unbelievers knew nothing of his descent. He entered the house of this world 'like a thief,’ unseen by the world, and took the goods he sought, viz. the few believers that remained looking for him, and departed, leaving the world asleep. The abduction of a few despised individuals was not likely to excite much attention in that time of turbulence and slaughter. The silence of history, only proves that Christ came as he ascended, and as he predicted, "like a thief in the night."

SECTION VI.

THE PRINCIPAL EVENTS OF THE SECOND COMING.

That we may have a full view of the great transaction under consideration, we will now briefly notice the series of events, which together, constituted the Second Coming of Christ, or the first judgment. We include in that series, all the events described by John under the sixth seal, or (which is the same thing,) all the events described by Christ in the twenty fourth of Matthew in the passage following the words "immediately after the tribulation of those days," v. 29. As the only clue we have to the interpretation of the evidently symbolic language in which those events are described, is a conjecture of common sense, guided by reference to the nature of the subject, we propose the following views, not dogmatically, but with the modesty which befits conjecture; and chiefly because so many foolish conjectures are abroad in relation to the language in question, that we would gladly offer the reader something more rational, as a point of rest, for the present at least.

1. "There was a great earthquake," Rev. vi. 12. In the two other instances where an earthquake is spoken of in Revelations, (xi. 13, and xvi. 18,) it is accompanied by the overthrow of cities; and hence we may conclude, it is intended to represent a commotion and explosion of spiritual elements, causing the destruction of great human combinations, either political, or religious, or both. It would not be difficult to find in the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish nation, even a visible counterpart of this representation. But in accordance with our previous theory, we choose rather to refer it principally to events that took place in the invisible world, of which the dissolution of the outward Jewish Theocracy, was but an index.
2. "The sun became black—the moon became as blood—the stars fell from heaven." Referring this language to the spiritual, and not to the natural world, we take for granted, that the sun, moon, and stars are the sources of light in that world. What are the great sources of spiritual light? We answer: 1. The Holy Ghost or spirit of prophecy, which may be taken for the sun. 2. The written word, which, as being a reflection of the testimony of the Spirit, may be taken for the moon. 3. The word spoken by human teachers which may be taken for the stars. We understand then by the sun and moon's being darkened, and the stars' falling, the extinction of all spiritual light—an eclipse of the testimony of the Spirit and of the scriptures, and a nullification of the testimony of human teachers. Observe, the sun and moon are only darkened—not cast down; while the stars fall from heaven: an appropriate distinction between the fate of the word of God, both spiritual and written...and that of the teachings of men.

But is there any evidence that such an extinction of spiritual light did take place immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem? We can speak in this case, only as we have spoken before, not of the main event, which we believe to have been invisible, but of its visible index. The Jewish nation, after rejecting Christ, and the gospel, still looked for the speedy coming of their Messiah; and as the clouds of their impending ruin gathered thicker and blacker over their heads, they clung with a closer and closer grasp to the hope of that coming. At last, by a natural process, their entire confidence in God, in their Scriptures, and in the teachings of their scribes, was staked on the issue of that hope. The language of the nation's heart was—"If the Messiah comes not to deliver us, in this fearful extremity, there will be an end of all trust in the oracles of God." Their temple and city and nation were destroyed, and their expected Deliverer came not. Then surely, for a moment at least, the despair of infidelity blackened their whole heavens. Then was the sun darkened, the moon gave not her light, and the stars fell from heaven.

3. "The heaven departed as a scroll." As the expanse in which the sun moon and stars are seen, is the heaven of the natural world, so we naturally judge, that the sacred institutions and hierarchical system established by Moses, which to the Jews, was the residence and medium of spiritual light, was their spiritual heaven. When the temple was destroyed, and the daily sacrifice ceased, this "heaven departed as a scroll." This however is to be regarded, as in the other cases, only as a token, of greater corresponding events within the veil.

4. The Son of Man appeared in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. We have already seen that in an important sense when Jerusalem was destroyed, the whole outward world saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom, with power and great
glory, and trembled at his presence. But this is by no means the whole or even the principal sense which we attach to the above declaration. Pursuing still the same method of conjecture which we have applied to the previous imagery, we now inquire what are the "clouds of heaven?" As the sun, moon and stars, are the sources of light, and the heaven is the expanse in which they are seen, so the clouds are moveable substances, floating between heaven and earth, scarcely belonging to either, gross enough to obscure, yet luminous enough to partially transmit the light of the sun and moon. In many respects corresponding to this description, was the nature and position of the whole spiritual church of Christ both visible and invisible. The terrestrial part of it certainly, was a mixture of good and evil spirits, earthly in part, and in part heavenly, at once transmitting and obscuring the light of God. We might produce evidence also, that the whole church within the veil, was till the Second Coming only semi-redeemed. There is no image that so graphically describes such a church, as that of clouds.*

If a shrewd inspector of our theory, should object that the clouds of this semi-redeemed church, ought not to be represented as floating below, and partially bearing the nature of the Jewish heaven, of which we have previously spoken; we answer, in scriptural imagery, there is a plurality of heavens; and these clouds are to be regarded as intermediate substances, not between the earth and the lowest heaven, i.e. the Jewish hierarchy, but between the earth and the highest heaven, i.e. the heaven of God's immediate presence. The reader will notice, that after the heaven had departed as a scroll, still, the sign of the Son of Man appeared in heaven: (Compare Rev. vi. 14, with Matt. xxiv. 29, 30:) from which it appears that while one heaven departed as a scroll, another heaven remained; and to this last we refer the clouds. Our conjecture then is, that the appearing of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven, was his appearance in the semi-redeemed church.*

5. The dead were raised. By this we do not mean that they whose material bodies had died, were restored to them, and to their life in this world; but that mortals, whether in this world, or in the world of spirits, received spiritual bodies—became immortal—exchanged an earthly for an eternal state. The platform on which they were placed by the resurrection, was not this outward world.

*We would not be understood as teaching here, that Christ did not come in a cloud literally, "in like manner" as he ascended in a cloud. (Acts i. 9.) We believe he did; though, as was before maintained, not in a cloud belonging to the outward, but to the angelic world—and in the presence, not of the assembled nations, but of a few believers. But we must insist that the passage under consideration, (Matt. xxiv. 30,) does not refer to this literal and private coming. The sun, moon, stars, and heaven, there spoken of, are evidently spiritual symbols, and of course, so also are the clouds.
Christ was the firstborn from the dead and a sample of the whole resurrection; and we have seen, his state was like that of angels. We are told also, that "many bodies of the saints which slept, arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." Matt. xxvii. 52, 53.

It is plain from the fact that these first followers of Christ in the resurrection, were never heard of afterwards, as residents of this world, as well as from the intimation contained in the expression, 'appeared unto many,' that they, like Christ, were raised in spiritual bodies to the invisible state of angels. Moreover, the promise concerning those who should remain alive unto the coming of the Lord, was, that they should be changed and caught away. The resurrection took men not to this world, but from it, into the invisible world. 1 Thess. iv. 17. As to the number of those who were brought up into immortality in this first resurrection, we have no direct statement, except that very indefinite one in Daniel:—"Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake." Dan. xii. 2. Our theory however, of the nature and object of the Second Coming, as stated under the first head of this discourse, directs to the conclusion, that the first resurrection included all, whether in the visible or invisible world, who were the subjects of the first gospel.

6. Those who were raised, were judged and rewarded according to their works. Some awoke "to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." To undertake a description of the judgment, would be a work of supererogation, since Jesus Christ himself, has illustrated the subject in every necessary, and in almost every possible way. See Matt. vii. 22—27, xiii. 37—50, xxv. 11—14, xxv. 14—46, Luke xii. 47, 48, &c. His explanation of one of his inimitable parables, may be presented as an epitome of the great facts of the transaction. He said to his disciples, when they asked an exposition of the parable of the tares and the wheat—"He that soweth the good seed, is the Son of Man. The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one. The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world." [age, in the original,] and the reapers are the angels.

* The mere English reader, perhaps never suspects that the word translated world in this place, is not the same as that translated world in the former part of the quotation. But in fact, not only the words are not the same, but there is an essential difference in their meaning. In the first case Christ says, 'the field is the world,' (kosmos in the Greek.) In the last case he says, 'the harvest is the end of the age,' (aion in the Greek.) Putting the two sayings together, if we adopt the common translation, Christ is made to say, 'the harvest is the end of the field,' which is ridiculous. The harvest, literally speaking is the end of summer, not the end of a man's farm; so the harvest of the Son of Man was the end of the Mosaic age, not the end of the earth's existence.
As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this age. The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom, all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father.” Matt. xiii. 37–43.

SECTION VII.

PRACTICAL BEARINGS OF THE PRECEDING VIEWS.

A mere theory however magnificent, is not to be accounted of much value, unless it is available for the increase of godliness, and the furtherance of salvation; and it would be unworthy of a wise and benevolent man, to broach and insist upon doctrines, tending to unsettle the foundations of ancient opinions, unless he was persuaded that those doctrines were not only true, but practically profitable and necessary. Under such a persuasion, the preceding views have been presented; and we are prepared to answer those who may be disposed to ask concerning them—What good purpose will be effectual by entertaining and promulgating them?

1. Faith in the word of God will be increased. Many facts might be presented, showing that the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, flatly contradicted, perverted and suppressed, as it is by the tradition of the elders, has made many infidels, and greatly embarrassed and weakened the faith of many believers. Common sense will see and murmur at the contradiction between popular belief and the plain declarations of Christ, concerning the time of his Second Coming, in spite of all the ingenuity of commentators; and such murmurings make way for infidelity. The views we have presented, harmonize those plain declarations with the facts of history; and so convert common sense from an enemy to an ally of faith. So far as the Bible is concerned, simplicity of interpretation is essential to that simplicity of heart, which is the “good ground” for the “good seed.” Faith withers and dies in the shade of artificial and laboured explanations. The common belief concerning the Second Coming, makes such explanations absolutely necessary, not only in the 24th of Matthew, but throughout the New Testament. Three or four different “Second Comings” must be conjured up, without a pretence of authority, to meet and dispose of the inconvenient texts which are constantly occurring in the Evangelists and the Epistles; and even then, some passages are found that are utterly unmanageable. Now all this trouble, with its evil tendencies and consequences, is saved by believing the testimony of God in its most simple and obvious sense—
keeping both eyes on that testimony, instead of looking that way with one eye, and toward human history and tradition with the other.

2. A clear view will be obtained of our own true position. So long as the first and second judgments are confounded, and the Second Coming of Christ is regarded as future, all our calculations concerning things to come, are involved in inextricable confusion. Like the first discoverers of the New World, who imagined the land they had found was the coast of Asia, we are sailing toward things unknown, mistaking them for things well known. Or rather like a misguided navigator, who in sailing from the Old, to the New World, should pass by Cape Horn, and continue his voyage toward Asia, thinking America still before him, we are fancying a judgment future, that is past, and approaching a judgment that we know nothing of. If true charts, and a correct knowledge of the earth, are practically valuable to the navigator, so a true interpretation of prophecies, at least in regard to the great subject of the day of judgment, is practically valuable to the believer. The first step toward an intelligent view of the last and now impending judgment, is a correct knowledge of the first judgment; and no man can rightly anticipate the nature of the "dispensation of the fulness of times," whose mind is embarrassed, by confounding it with the dispensation of the primitive church.

3. A knowledge of our position will modify in many respects our views of duty, and our hopes. We will propose one or two examples. Of the ordinance of the Lord's supper it is said, "As oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death, till he come." 1 Cor. xi. 26. Now since Christ in his first coming was a suffering victim, but Christ in his second coming was a conquering king, it is evident that an ordinance commemorating his humiliation may have been appropriate before his Second Coming, and inappropriate afterwards. If we imagine Christ has not yet come, we shall judge, and that with Paul's authority, that the eucharist is still an appropriate, and an enjoined ordinance. But if we believe that Christ's humiliation ceased at the destruction of Jerusalem, that he was vindicated and proclaimed king of the world by that event, we may conceive that some other ordinance, more expressive of victory, would be more appropriate to the present time. At all events, Paul's injunction of the ordinance cannot be quoted as applicable to us, for the expression "till he come," limits that injunction to a time long ago past; and if we continue the observance of it, we must derive our warrant for the practice simply from its expediency, not from its authority. Again, "the last enemy to be overcome is death," and that enemy was to be overcome at Christ's coming. See 1 Cor. xv. 26. 54. Christ came "to destroy him that hath the power of death," and he commenced the war by sacrificing himself. His
followers entered the breach after him, and like him, laid down their lives for the future victory. But the sure word of promise was, that within that generation, at his coming, the final triumph should be won; and they who remained alive till that time should not die,—nay, should not ‘sleep,’—but should put on their immortal nature, by instantaneous change. Now if we believe that the Second Coming of Christ is yet future, in our minds the last enemy is not destroyed—death is yet an unconquered antagonist of the Son of God. But if we believe the Second Coming is past, we see Jesus a perfect conqueror, with death under his feet; and our faith and hope, according to the grace given us, lay hold on his perfect victory. This last example may be taken as a specimen of a general revolution of mind—producing great enlargement of hope—which will take place in any one who intelligently exchanges the common views of the Second Coming, for those which we have presented. The progress of God’s general war with Satan is not to be measured by the progress of that war in individuals. Victories may have been won, which we as individuals have not entered into. A spiritual and vigorous believer will look for encouragement and strength more to the general victories that are already won, than to any particular victories that are won in himself. Hence, when he finds that the Second Coming of Christ, with all its train of promised triumphs, instead of being yet far in the future, is eighteen hundred years in the past, he will lift up his head with joyful hope, and gird himself for the battle that is yet before him as an individual, with the exulting faith of one who is fighting on the distant wing of an army which has already routed the enemy at the centre.

4. The views we have presented give important information of the present state of the primitive church, and of our relation to it. As the church of Jesus Christ is and forever will be one, every spiritual believer will refer his membership to that original church which was built on the “foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone”—making little account of the carnal distinction between the “church militant,” and the “church triumphant,” and altogether disallowing the Antichristian notion of a plurality of discordant, and yet accepted churches. “Our citizenship” and our church-membership “is in heaven.” Our general assembly holds its sessions on Mount Zion. It is therefore highly important that we should acquaint ourselves as far as possible, with the present condition of the “church of the first-born.” If we believe that the Second Coming of Christ is yet future, we must regard that church as yet “sleeping”—yet awaiting the trump of the resurrection—yet only expectants of their promised thrones. But believing the Second Coming past, we see that church advanced eighteen hundred years beyond the resurrection and the judgment. A hundred and forty-four thou-
sand from the tribes of Israel, and an innumerable company out of all nations, have lived and reigned with Christ, through the “dark ages” which this world has seen since the destruction of Jerusalem, without division or apostacy; and whether we regard their numbers or their glory, we have no occasion to join the mourning of those, who by “looking on the outward appearance,” are almost ready to confess Christianity a failure. Our church—the oldest in Christendom—has been neither dead nor asleep; and is now neither few nor feeble. We may illustrate its present condition, and our relation to it, thus:—Suppose it to be a stream commencing with Christ in his first coming, enlarging as it runs on its troubled way through the apostolic age, and at the Second Coming reaching the tranquil level of eternity. Still it flows onward, deepening and widening as it goes, and at the distance of eighteen hundred years, it has become a broad and mighty river. Now shall we, as tributary streams seeking a junction with this river, take a long backward circuit, and try to enter somewhere before the Second Coming, or shall we make our way toward it by the shortest course, and enter where it is broadest and deepest? We leave the answer to common sense, and to the faith of God’s elect.

5. These views afford the most effectual means for suppressing many forms of pernicious error.—One stronghold of Universalists, in fact the most indispensable, is the denial of a future and eternal judgment. By demonstrating, as they easily can, to common sense, (not perhaps to Calvinistic bigotry) that the judgment most frequently predicted and alluded to in the New Testament, was to come within the life-time of the generation contemporary with Christ, they stop the mouths of those who preach a future judgment, and then, following up their advantage, they virtually nullify the whole testimony of the Bible concerning the judgment, with its rewards and punishments, by referring it to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the subsequent temporal curses of the Jews, and blessings of the Gentiles. Our theory meets and answers them, on both these points. First, we concede them the truth of their primary position, viz. that the judgment expected by the primitive church, came to pass at the time appointed, within that generation. But then we prove to them that that was only a judgment of the subjects of the first gospel, the judgment of the Jews, terminating the Mosaic dispensation; and we point them to predictions of another and final judgment, to come after the times of the Gentiles. By developing the scriptural division of the judgment into two acts, we can grant all they claim, and yet prove a future judgment. Secondly, we show, in relation to the first judgment, that the outward events which they say fulfilled the predictions of that transaction, were only visible signs, bearing no greater proportion of importance to the actual judgment of the
Second Coming, which followed them in the invisible world, than
the body bears to the soul. — Again, our doctrine, strikes a fatal
blow at all those forms of modern fanaticism which have for their
basis a testimony, that Christ has lately come, or is now coming the
other time. Paul says, "Though an angel from heaven preach
any gospel unto you than that we have preached unto you,
let him be accursed." Paul's gospel was that which Christ preach-
ced before him, and one main item of its tidings was, "the king-
dom of heaven is at hand;" "this generation shall see the Second
Coming of the Son of Man, in the power and glory of eternal
judgment." Now Swedenborg preached that the Second Coming
of Christ took place in 1757—(1680 years after the time appoin-
ted,) and that he was himself an eye-witness of the transaction.*
Ann Lee, the Mother of the Shakers, preached that the Second
Coming took place in 1770, and that Christ made his appearance
in her person.† Many similar proclamations have been made
from time to time, along the whole period of Christian history,
and especially since the Reformation. The latest follower of this
fashion that has come to our notice, is Professor Andreas Bernar-
dus Smolnikar, who teaches that Christ appeared in 1830, and ap-
pointed him "Ambassador extraordinary."‡ Of all these we may
say fearlessly, as Paul says, "though they be angels from heaven,
let them be accursed"—they have denied the word of God.—To:
gather together with these, another class of visionaries and impostors, less
presumptuous, but equally foolish, may be noticed. We refer to
those who either by pretended revelation, or by interpretation,
have undertaken from time to time within the last few centuries,
to prophesy of the near approach of the Second Advent. The la-
test and most notable specimen of this class, is William Miller,
who, at this time, is confidently proclaiming that 1843 is the ap-
pointed year of the Second Coming. The intelligent believer will
not seek protection for himself, or for the church of God, from
the subtleties and snares of these deceivers, in ignorance and con-
tempt of their doctrines, but in correct and clear views of the
great subject which they mystify and abuse. The protectors of
the orthodoxy of the church will surely spend their strength for
nought, in their labours to repel and quench heresies on the sub-
ject of the Second Coming, so long as they shrink from a man-
ly and thorough investigation of that subject, and a bold confess-
ion of the truth to which such an investigation leads. We believe
the views presented in this tract, open a summary and sure way
to an utter extinction of those heresies. As Christ declared that
the day of his appearing should "come as a snare upon all them that

† See "Summary View of the Millennial Church," p. 5.
‡ See "Signs of the Times," No. 12, p. 96.
dwell upon the face of the whole earth," so we believe the true doctrine concerning that appearing, will finally be found a snare, in which nearly all the heresies of Christendom will be taken and destroyed.

6. These views throw much light on the history of what is commonly called the Christian Church. They prove at the outset, that that church has been at the very heart of its system of faith, ever since the destruction of Jerusalem, an enormous error—nothing less than a palpable denial of the plainest word that Christ ever spoke—and that word relating to the greatest of all the subjects of faith, viz. the day of judgment. It is commonly believed that the church of the first century after the apostles, was nearly so pure as the primitive church; and that its damnable degeneracy did not commence until the fourth or fifth century. But we see that a "strong delusion," to say the least, commenced its work in the very first successors of the primitive church; and we are led at once, to draw a very broad line of distinction between the church that lived before, and that which lived after the destruction of Jerusalem. How broad that line ought to be, we shall best learn by appealing "to the word and to the testimony." Let it be remembered that Christ and Paul repeatedly predicted a "great falling away," as one of the last signs of the Coming of Christ—that the later writings of John record the fulfillment of those predictions—that Peter specially characterizes the apostates, as doubting and forsaking the promise of the Second Coming, (2 Pet. iii. 4)—and that on the other hand, the faithful in Christ are constantly characterized as "watching" for the Lord. In the last hour then, of the apostolic age, there were co-existing, a true church, and an apostate church; and the prime difference between them, was, that one of them was "looking" for the coming of Christ, and the other was not.* Now the promise was, that "to them that looked for him," he would appear and take them away. So then they that were left after his appearing, were the apostates who looked not for him; and they therefore evidently constitute the first link of the chain which connects the Christianity of subse-

* The reader will observe that this is the very distinction between true believers and apostates, which Christ predicted in Matt. xxiv. 45–51. That parable was framed for the very purpose of forewarning the disciples of the danger of unbelief in relation to his Second Coming. The faithful servant is represented as watching and ready, while the evil servant says, "My Lord delayeth his coming." The moral consequences of "looking" for the coming of the Lord on the one hand, and of forsaking the promise on the other—might easily be traced out, and shown to be such as would make the wide difference between the faithful and reprobates. Gibbon, in the note on our 11th page, suggests an idea that is undoubtedly true; and not the less valuable for the sneering sarcasm with which it is accompanied. The great secret of the vigorous faith and daring enterprise of the primitive church, unquestionably is to be found in their expectation of a speedy judgment.
quent ages, with the Christianity of the age of the apostles. Indeed this might be inferred from the likeness of their faith to that of their successors. As they desired, and practically to the promise of the coming of the Lord, so has the church, commonly called Christian, done in all ages since. We see that church is the successor, not of the true primitive church, but of that apostolic moiety, which forsook the promise of the Second Coming, and was rejected of the Lord; and its pretense of authority inherited from Christ and his apostles, is proved to be an imposition. Thus, instead of impotently attempting to hew away such branches as Popery, Episcopacy, &c., we lay the axe at the root of that accursed offspring of spurious Christianity, which has overshadowed and blasted the earth through these eighteen hundred years; thus too, we break the arrows of the infidels, who have ever sought to pierce Christ by shooting at the church of the first centuries. Christ is in no way responsible for the church that has assumed his name, since his Second Coming. The primitive and now heavenly church, has never laid aside or transferred its authority, and it never has had and never will have a successor.

* In these remarks we would not be understood as denying that there have been genuine believers in the world since the destruction of Jerusalem. But we bear in mind that "the two witnesses" of Christ have been "clothed in sackcloth," not in priestly robes; and we look for the "remnant of the seed" of the primitive church, not among those who claim authority inherited from the apostles, but among the heretics whom they have persecuted. Our axe is laid only at the root of that ostensible organized Christianity which pretends to be the lineal descendant of the primitive church, which in the 5th century took the name of Popery, and since the Reformation has branched off into Episcopacy, Methodism, &c. This kind of Christianity claims inheritance from the Apostles, under a will which is said to be recorded in Church history. We dispute the will, first, on the ground that the party which is supposed to have made the will, is yet alive, and fully competent to manage its own property. And secondly, on the ground that even if it were dead, we find on the only record that is admissible in the case, viz. the Bible, another will, excluding the claimants in question from all inheritance.

We might moreover deny the existence even of the will, said to be recorded in Church History; for the only warrant we find for the common belief that the first generation of the Fathers were the commissioned or the commissioned successors of the apostles, is the conjecture of interested historians, founded on very obscure and suspicious traditions. Our conjecture, founded on the testimony of Scripture, is that these men had "no oil in their lamps" when the bridegroom came; and being left in outer darkness, became blind leaders of the blind. We find no trace of their commissions in the Bible. On the contrary, it is manifest, that all the provisions of Christ and of the apostles, for the earthly organization of the church, and appointment of its officers, terminated in the Second Coming. Christ's commission of his disciples, with the attendant promise, "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the [age," in consequence of a mistranslation of the last word, has come to be regarded as a general commission for all who choose to preach, even to the end of the world. But it evidently extends no farther than the Second Coming.
... that is such a staff onward, it will be well for the potentates and
... into the dim and distant future for yestery which shall ultimately super-
... ok backward, and behold the shadow of the Promised Sovereign, already planted on the earth to be completed, and waving in triumph over its first and the vast field of battle. The "coming of the Son of Man in
... king," like the gospel, was "to the Jew first," but it will be "also to the Gentile." The same issue which, eighteen hun-
dred years ago, was made between Jesus Christ and the Jews, on
his title to their throne, and which was decided by the destruc-
tion of their capital city, and the extinction of their national ex-
istence, will, in due time, be made between him and every other
nation under heaven. As the period appointed for the trial of
that issue hastens onward, it will be well for the potentates and
politicians of the world to look into the history of the trial that is
already past, and "count the cost" of a war with the kingdom of
God. The destruction of Jerusalem, viewed as the sign of the com-
ing of the Son of Man, to assume the government of the world,
gives an awful emphasis to the admonition—"Be wise now, there-
fore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the
Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he
be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled
but a little. Blessed are all they who put their trust in him."
A treatise on the second coming of Christ /