Robert Townley

“The Second Advent of The Lord Jesus Christ: A Past Event”

Author of the Earliest Known Full Preterist Book

(1845)
THE SECOND ADVENT
OF
THE LORD JESUS CHRIST
A PAST EVENT.

Τί ἔστιν ἄλληνα.
Pilate.

BY

ROBERT TOWNLEY, A.B.,
LATE MINISTER OF ST. MATTHEW'S, LIVERPOOL.
Townley Influenced by Samuel Lee

- "would that Professor Lee's works formed part of a prescribed course of reading for ordination candidates."
- "I will take the liberty of transcribing one or two passages respecting the fall of Jerusalem, in order to show the correspondence between his views of the fulfillment of prophecy and my own"
- We prove, and Dr. Lee admits, that "the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ;" consequently the prediction must have been fulfilled."
Full Preterist Quotes From Townley

(1845) The Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ, A Past Event.

"there is not a shadow of a shade of error in the conclusion at which I have arrived."

• "we conceive to be the scriptural doctrine of the Millennium, as confined to the period of the Apostolic ministry."

• Now the resurrection, being part and parcel of that preaching of the gospel to which this promise was made, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the consummation of the age;" therefore the resurrection must be limited by the same consummation of the age, and must consequently be past, the Apostolic age and ministry being now no longer visible, and the promise of Christ being now of none effect.

• "The Lord God, at the destruction of Jerusalem, made his foes his footstool; he completely abolished death, of whom it is said, in 1 Cor. 15, "Death, the last enemy, is disabled" he took away entirely the first covenant, which was "the ministration of death," that he might establish supremely the second, which was the ministration of life; he removed the things which, in Paul's day, "were shaken, that the things which could not be shaken might remain." (Heb. 9:27) "The heavens (of the Jewish church) passed away with a great noise; the elements (beggarly) melted with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that were therein, (all that attached to the Mosaic economy, see Heb. 9:1-11,) were burned up, and the new heavens and new earth appeared," (2 Peter 3.)
Townley Attacks Universalism

Target: Dr. David Thom of Liverpool – Universalism and Calvinism

from the 11th chapter, “Even so then, at this present time, there is a remnant according to the election of grace.” This remnant contained “all Israel,” as Israel then denoted Abraham’s true seed, but according to the common interpretation, there is to be a time when there shall not be one unbeliever in the family of Jacob; a conclusion as preposterous as the universalism which rests for support on passages like that out of Corinthians, wherein the Apostle is discoursing of none but the church, viz., “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

“If I am to be a believer in Universalism, I must have a widely different statement from any which Mr. T. propounds. “

I respect Mr. Thom as a man of very superior mental attainments, and have pleasure in conversing with him, or hearing him converse, on any subject save and except his imaginary Biblical conclusion.
Robert Townley
Author of the Earliest Known Full Preterist Book

Converted to Universalism Shortly After the Publication of his book in 1845.
Thom was "a man of no ordinary character. He is settled as pastor of an Independent Congregation in Liverpool, and is widely known by his published writings, as well as respected for his learning, ability, and piety".

New York Tribune, April 8, 1843
A View of “The Law” As Mosaic Order

“This was the originating cause of trouble then, from the man of sin, Antichrist, flesh, (the law, see Romans viii. 8,) the carnal mind, which was attached to the law, whose strength was sin, which was the sting of death, the wages of sin, of which death the devil had the power.”

“If sin, Satan, death, and hell have their true and scriptural meaning in reference only to the two covenants of Sinai and Sion, as consequent upon the Adamic transgression... then are we warranted in concluding that the time when the covenant of Sinai was 'everlastingly banished from the presence of God, and from the glory of his power,' being the destruction of Jerusalem, and every thing opposed to God being comprehended in that covenant, and having no meaning out of that covenant - that at the same destruction of Jerusalem all these the enemies were put under Christ's feet.... On the other hand, the common opinion of the day is, that so far from sin, Satan, death and hell being destroyed in the finished work of Christ, these several enemies are stronger than ever...” Townley, p. 17
A Developed "Consistent Cessationism"

- We object to the entire constitution of the various religious establishments of the day, because we believe that they all maintain the great foundation principle of Judaism, viz., an outward and visible church.

- This was the originating cause of trouble then, from the man of sin, Antichrist, flesh, (the law, see Romans viii. 8,) the carnal mind, which was attached to the law, whose strength was sin, which was the sting of death, the wages of sin, of which death the devil had the power.

- At the same destruction of Jerusalem all these the enemies were put under Christ's feet, the fall of Jerusalem being, if his own words are authority, most indisputably his second coming to "reward every man according to his works."
American Preterist Universalism

Townley was sent to Boston, Massachusetts, the apparent birthplace of Preterist Universalism, dating back to at least the beginning of the 19th Century

Dr. David Thom

“By some, the (Apocalypse) is considered to have received its accomplishment and at the period of Jerusalem’s destruction. Among the American Universalists, this view is very prevalent.”

(The number and names of the apocalyptic beasts: with an explanation and application)
Robert Townley was the minister of the Charlestown Universalist Church from June 1849 to Sept. 1852. He is listed in the Universalist Companion (the almanac/year book for Universalists) as a "former partialist" (meaning he had former pastorates in non-Universalist churches).

His arrival in the US in 1848 is described in the Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate for Nov. 10, 1848, p. 354, which I've attached as a pdf. The second half of the article is not displaying very well in the pdf. I'll be happy to transcribe whatever you can't make out, although it's largely more about his character.

The book that got him into so much trouble in England is in Google books at http://books.google.com/books?vid=OCLC05272423 (that's our copy, by the way).

His farewell sermon to the church in Charlestown, preached Sept. 26, 1852, was printed as "Christianity in the Nineteenth Century."

We have the records of the Charlestown Church off site. I will request them and look through to see if there is any additional information I can get to you.

The only additional piece of information I could find is his marriage to Mary Wilkinson of Exeter, England, on Aug. 24, 1848, in Charlestown. This from the Massachusetts Ploughman and New England Journal of Agriculture, Aug 18, 1849, p. 2.

I hope this helps.

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THE UNIVERSALIST QUARTERLY

AND

GENERAL REVIEW.

VOLUME VII.

BOSTON: PUBLISHED BY A. TOMPKINS. 1850.

I may here mention the fact of my having heard from the pulpit of St. Matthew's Church, in the autumns of 1823 and 1824 respectively, two most logically composed and impressive discourses addressed to the Jews, by the reverend and celebrated Charles Simeon, M.A., Fellow of King's College, Cambridge.

The Rev. Henry B. W. Hillocoat, D.D., who for many years was incumbent of a chapel in Bath, had long been proprietor of St. Matthew's, as well as the party by whom its officiating ministers had been appointed. By him the church was disposed of to a Railway Company: its site, as already stated, having been required for the Liverpool terminus. Having received in exchange,

3.—St. Matthew's, (present),

he removed to, and took possession of it about three years ago, with his congregation.

The particulars connected with the origin, building, and early history of this religious structure, which stands in Scotland Road, are so remarkable, that I shall not merely be excused, but probably thanked by the members of the Society for bringing them under their notice. They may be relied on as authentic. Joseph Robinson, Esq., of Falkner Square, in this town, who had no small share in the transactions which I am about to mention, and was one of the original Trustees, is, by the high respectability of his character, a sufficient guarantee for the truth of the facts with which, from documents in his possession, he has been polite enough to furnish me.

Contrary in 1840, and 1841. A retiring pension of £60 a year was allowed him by the Corporation, in the spring of the year last-named. It will, no doubt, be in the recollection of several members of the Society, that Dr. Buck did duty, in a very zealous, and efficient manner, as Curate at Trinity Church here, during the autumn, winter, and spring of 1848 and 1849.

* Mr. Townley published in 1845, a work, entitled, "The Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ a Past Event," in which are contained many startling positions.
American Preterist Universalism

- Many, many other examples of American Preterist Universalism.
- APU Predates Townley By At Least Fifty Years.
- Preterist Principles are used as Fundamental Proofs of Universalism.
- Apparently Popularized by “Father of American Universalism” Ballou.
"I have proved beyond all doubt, that my friend does not believe that sinners of our day will ever be judged or punished in any way for sin, not even by the lashing of conscience, for the coming of Christ to judge the world, was all fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem, and since that time there has been no hell, judgment, or punishment of any kind for the ungodly, and never will be"
John H. Noyes
Historical Preterist

“The Berean” (1847)

“In relation to the judgment, we agree with the Universalists that the second coming of Christ took place in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem”
"This theory limits the prophecy under consideration (the second coming) to the overthrow of the Jewish capital, and the downfall of Judaism. Consequently, when Jerusalem was destroyed some thirty or forty years after the prediction, it was then fulfilled in the sense in which the Lord intended it. This is the way that those who call themselves Unitarians and Universalists commonly interpret this passage."
Ephraim Currier - 1841

"About the year 1824, some books from Universalist authors, fell my way, which I read with much pleasure; and by comparing the sentiments therein contained, with the Bible, I was rejoiced to find that the sentiments of that sect appeared much more scriptural, as well as reasonable, than the sentiments of limitarians."

"I soon became a confirmed Universalist."

(Skowhegan, Maine)
"Having shown that the coming of Christ took place as he had stated during "that generation" it must have been at that time that the wicked, those on "the left hand" the goats" or the unbelieving Jews went away into this punishment."

"By consulting the prophets, it may be seen that great temporal judgments and national calamities and punishments are spoken of under the figure of a "fire that shall not be quenched" as becoming an "everlasting reproach."

Our blessed Lord, it would seem, attached more importance to the fact that his coming in his kingdom was to take place during that generation, while some of his hearers would be living witnesses of it, than he did to any other circumstance connected with this event."

LETTERS

TO

REV. E. F. HATFIELD,

IN REVIEW OF TWO

LECTURES AGAINST UNIVERSALISM,

DELIVERED BY HIM IN THE SEVENTH PRESBYTERIAN

CHURCH, BROOME STREET, ON SUNDAY EVENINGS, JANUARY 5TH AND 12TH.
“The judgment, and of course the punishment of the wicked, are connected with a second coming of Christ. The universalists maintain was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, while anti-universalists consider it descriptive of a future and general judgment.”

Universalists explain (Matt 25) by the preceding chapter which treats of the destruction of Jerusalem, and where Christ says, verse 34, “This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” (p. 176)
“If Christ is to be understood as he said, if his words explain his meaning, it is clear, that his coming in his glory.. was some time in the life-time of those to whom he spake.

If this be true, which my opponent with his eyes open, will not dispute, then no objection can be stated, from this parable, against the final holiness and happiness of all men.

“We are informed, that Christ came once in the end of the world, to put away sin. The world, of which Christ came in the end, was undoubtedly the dispensation of the legal priesthood.
"In Matt 12:31, 32 (neither in this world nor in that which is to come), "world" means dispensation; "this" world, the legal priestly dispensation; and "that which is to come," the gospel."

Nothing can be more evident than that what Jesus and his disciples meant by the end of the world was the end of the Jewish polity and their destruction by the Romans.

“The wrath to come,” of which John spake, when he said ‘who hath warned you,…’ is speaking of the destruction of the Jews and their city, he said ‘For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.” (1805 Notes on the Parables)
Other Preterist-Universalist Works

- J.T. Flanders: *A Review of Universalism Against Itself*
- Thomas Brown: *A History of the Origin and Progress of the Doctrine of Universal Salvation: Also the Final.* 1826
- Various Cited – *A Defence of Orthodoxy Against the Heresy of Universalism* (1825 Wm. Latta McCalla)
- Ephraim Currier: "About the year 1824, some books from Universalist authors, fell my way."
- Numerous Cited by Stevens in "What Happened in AD70" Bibliography
Townley's Ultimate Answer to Universalism

Futurist to Partial Preterist to Full Preterist to Universalist to Preterist-Idealist

Personification of Preterist History?
"In a late number of the Universalist Quarterly Review (October 1851) there is a paper which emphatically approves of the modern miserable theory of a local and partial deluge, as being the inspired teaching of the Word of God." (p. 25)