

MAY CHRIST COME AT ANY MOMENT?

* AN EXAMINATION OF RECENTLY
REVIVED TRIBULATION THEORIES
IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE. .

“For the Lord Himself shall
descend from heaven with
a shout, with the voice of
the archangel, and with the
trump of God.”

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FOREWORD.

A THEORY is being actively propagated at the present time, that

(1) *The Lord's second coming, or rapture, cannot take place AT ANY MOMENT ; that*

(2) *The Church is to go through the Great Tribulation ; and that*

(3) *Antichrist must appear before the rapture.*

This is

Not a New Theory.

It was taught by such well-known teachers as B. W. Newton, George Müller, and S. P. Tregelles, LL.D., in the early part of last century. For many years the theory has been comparatively quiescent, but recently it has experienced a vigorous recrudescence.

In quarters least expected it is being pushed with an energy that to our mind is gravely significant of the times.

We have no doubt, but that those, who are pressing this theory, are true and sincere Christians, and it is without the smallest personal feelings we are led to pen these

lines. They would shrink, we are fully convinced, in unutterable horror at the thought of being in the smallest degree instrumental in promulgating an unscriptural theory, dishonouring to Christ, and mischievous in its results among the Lord's people.

That this theory is thoroughly unscriptural, and that its recent revival is a sign of the times, we have no doubt whatever. We solemnly believe

The Trend of the Theory

is to obscure the heavenly character and calling of the Church of God, and to wither the bridal affections the believer should cherish for the quickly coming Bridegroom.

The frank admission of more than one, who have recently imbibed this theory, is to the effect that it robs them of their zeal in the gospel; their souls are chilled as they are drawn away from warm expectation of the Lord's return *at any moment*; their hearts are depressed by their attention being fixed on earth, and happenings on the earth, instead of waiting for the moment when "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with A SHOUT, with THE VOICE of the archangel, and with THE TRUMP of God" (1 Thess. iv. 16).

The Church of God should indeed be

LISTENING FOR SOUNDS,
NOT
LOOKING FOR SIGNS,

for there is nothing revealed in Scripture to put off that wonderful event a day or an hour. We wait for the Lord Himself. How such a hope should thrill our souls with holy expectation!

But though there are no signs to be looked for in connection with the rapture—the Lord's coming *for* His people, yet there are signs in relation to His coming *with* His people to set up His millennial kingdom.

These signs are abundant on every hand. Everything speaks of the near development of events as foretold in Scripture. True believers everywhere are wakening up to the significance of the serious times in which we live. A great expectation is rising in the hearts of God's people—a yearning cry is going forth, "COME, LORD JESUS."

Is Satan aware of all this? We believe he is, and knowing his deadly hatred to our Lord Jesus Christ, we are assured he will use this theory for his own evil ends. We believe it is impossible to over-rate the seriousness of the effect of this unscriptural theory.

WESTON-SUPER-MARE,

1st January, 1913.

:: May ::
Christ Come
At Any Moment ?

**An Examination of recently
revived Tribulation Theories
in the Light of Scripture.**

WE propose in the light of Holy Scripture to examine the theory that

(1) *The Lord's second coming, or rapture, cannot take place AT ANY MOMENT ; that*

(2) *The Church is to go through the great Tribulation ; and that*

(3) *Antichrist must appear before the rapture.*

Whilst holding ourselves free to comment on all the literature on the subject available to us,* we propose to examine chiefly two or three recently published pamphlets, as well as seeking to state the positive light which Scripture sheds on the subject.

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* The Second Advent of our Lord, not secret but in manifested glory. By the late *Benjamin Wills Newton*. (Fourth edition.)

The Prophetical Signs of the last days of this Dispensation. By the late *George Müller*.

The Hope of Christ's Second Coming: how is it taught in Scripture? and why? By the late *S. P. Tregelles, LL.D.* (Second edition.)

The Fiery Trial; or, Much Tribulation, No Condemnation. By *Népho*.

The Saints' Rest and Rapture: When and for Whom? By *Frank H. White*.

The Church and the Great Tribulation. By *H. W. H.*

Will the Church Escape the Great Tribulation? (Third edition.) By the late *Edmund Shackleton*.

A Wicked Statement.

Nēpho writes :—

“ We have seen that the any-moment rapture is not Scriptural, nor according to early Christian literature. Dr. T. [Tregelles] cannot find any trace of it as Christian teaching prior to 1832. We have also seen an imminent coming of the Lord prior to the manifestation of Antichrist as a marked feature of the Irvingite heresy which flourished about 1829. The verdict is solemn, final, and inexorable, that in some way the doctrine found its way from Satan-inspired Irvingism into Christian circles, being there received and propagated as the truth of God.”

A two-paged anonymous tract states :—

“ The strange theory originally put forth by persons in connection with the Irvingite assembly under the power of evil spirits, has no support from Scripture.”

The same charge is made by others. A determined attempt is thus made to prove that the truth of the Lord's coming for His people at any moment *is of Satanic origin*.

And yet this is a truth held, as *Nēpho* admits, by “ some of our best Christian teachers and leaders ;” a truth expounded, as H. W. H. tells us, by teachers of “ high repute ;” a truth taught, as Mr. Shackleton says, by “ many whom I find it an easy matter to esteem better than myself.” It is a truth that has moved thousands of God's people to an unworldliness and a devotedness to Christ which compel our profoundest admiration—a truth that has been signally owned of God in the conversion of multitudes, especially among the children of godly parents.

If this teaching were of Satanic origin, we should not expect it to bear such blessed fruit, whereas the effect of believing the theory that the Church is to go through the Great Tribulation is confessedly sad.*

* See remarks on this point in foreword.

Now *Nēpho* and others, who make this rash and unfounded charge, do not need to be told that no heresy, such as Irvingism in its late development undoubtedly is, could succeed, if it were *all* error. If they proceeded to treat all teaching that came from Irving and his associates as emanating from Satan, they would reject the very existence of God.

The question is, Do the Holy Scriptures teach that the Lord may come *at any moment*? *Nēpho* tells us Dr. Tregelles was unable to find any trace of such teaching prior to 1832. But the question is, Do the Holy Scriptures teach it? That is the vital point.

A Matter of History.

In the early part of last century there was a great recovery and revival of truth, which has made a deep mark for blessing on the Church ever since. Wherever God is at work, the enemy is busy. The truth is feared, and Satan must neutralize its effects, if he can. Hence we are not surprised that such a blasphemous system as Irvingism in its late development* occurred at the same time as the period when God's truth was so largely and blessedly recovered to God's people.

Nēpho's verdict, he asserts, on this point is:—

“solemn, final and inexorable.”

One would expect better proof for such high-sounding words. It is neither “final” nor “inexorable”—it is, we are convinced, “solemn,” because it is false—given without proof—an *ipse dixit*, a mere parrot cry, carrying no conviction. It is as wicked as it is false.

* * * * *

1830.

In an article entitled, “*On ‘Days’ signifying ‘Years’ in Prophetical Language,*” written by one, greatly owned

* It was not so at the first.

of God in the recovery of truth—truth which had long been forgotten by the Church of God—we read :—

“ I am persuaded that this [inquiry into truth] will lead more (for such I believe to be the truth) to the deep conviction that we are within the verge of it all, *so as to be daily looking for the Lord* * i.e., to be caught up to meet Him in the air in order to His judging of the nations.”

Now,

“ Daily looking for the Lord,”

could not be if Antichrist has to appear before the coming of Christ. It is precisely the “ any-moment rapture,” which is refused by *Népho*, and other writers of this school.

Will the reader particularly notice that this article was written in 1830, or *two years BEFORE* Dr. Tregelles could find any trace of it in Christian literature, and written by one with whom Dr. Tregelles was associated in the early part of 1835 and on.

1829.

And will the reader, likewise, note that the same author wrote strongly against Mr. Irving’s views in 1829, or *three years BEFORE* he is charged with imbibing Satan-inspired teaching from that source.

Dates in Edward Irving’s Career.

Irving was excommunicated by the presbytery of London, in 1830—a discredited teacher save by his own immediate followers. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland condemned his views in 1831. The majority of his own congregation were estranged from him by his taking up with “ tongues ” and “ manifestation of gifts,” and he was refused as minister of the National Scotch Church of Regent Square, London, and deposed in March, 1833, by the presbytery of Annan, Scotland. He died in December, 1834.

Does not all this—events and dates—refute the wicked

* Italics ours.

charge that the blessed hope of the imminence of the Lord's return emanated from Satan-inspired circles?

So far as we can discover, Irving held, having received the teaching from a Spanish Jesuit, writing under the *nom de plume* Ben-Ezra, that the advent will be *pre*-millennial, not *post*-millennial, which latter view was in his day generally held. *Nēpho* and all our authors hold, with Irving, the truth of the *pre*-millennial advent. Did *they* get this teaching then from Satan-inspired circles? Surely not.

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Appeal to the Fathers.

In an early part of his book, *Nēpho* writes:—

“THE ANY-MOMENT IDEA WAS NOT KNOWN TO THOSE WHO SUCCEEDED THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS. This will be seen from the following extracts.”

Then he quotes Didache (assigned by Bishop Lightfoot to the first, or the beginning of the second century); Justin Martyr, 140 A.D.; Irenæus, 167 A.D.; Tertullian, 192 A.D.; Hippolytus, 220 A.D.

Is not an appeal to Scripture sufficient? All the authority that any opinion of the fathers is entitled to is that which it derives from being in accord with God's Word. Then why not appeal to God's Word direct? Does it not proclaim the poverty of *Nēpho's* attack on the truth, when he has recourse to such poor confirmation of his views as the Fathers?

Mr. Shackleton says:—

“More especially in the writings of the early Christian Fathers would we expect to find some notice of this doctrine, if it had been taught by the apostles.”

And yet four or five pages later he says:—

“It was by means of the allegorizing of Scripture that the Church drifted into the darkness of Popery, so that even the *pre*-millennial advent, that bright hope of the Church, became lost to view.”*

* Italics ours.

This allegorizing is attributed to Origen, who—quoting as Mr. Shackleton does the words of Mosheim, the historian—

“ maintained that the Holy Scriptures were to be interpreted in the same allegorical manner that the Platonists explained the history of their gods. . . . In this devious path he displays the most ingenious strokes of fancy, though always at the expense of Truth, whose divine simplicity is scarcely discernible through the cobweb veil of allegory.”

It is not satisfactory for an author to quote the Fathers as authoritative on one page, and deride them as utterly untrustworthy on another—to refer to their writings for teaching of truth with one stroke of his pen, and then with another to tell us *in these same writings* “ truth . . . is scarcely discernible through the cobweb veil of allegory.”

A well-known and learned writer comments on the Fathers thus :—

“ Some of them were godly men, a very few martyrs for the Lord’s name, a few more confessors in persecution—a real crown and glory for a Christian ; but as to doctrine, they (and in particular some of those who suffered) are the loosest, wildest, most absurd writers that ever wrote a book to make sober men wonder how any one could possibly read such a mass of nonsense, bad morals, and heresy . . . while for the doctrine of some of them, Christians would be apt to burn the books, and Romanists the writers.”

And yet *Nēpho* hides himself under a *nom de plume*, which means, *I am sober*. If he believes all the Fathers wrote, he will believe some very queer stuff indeed.

* * * * *

A Prophecy Fulfilled.

In Matt. xxv. 5 we are told by the Lord Himself :—

“ While the Bridegroom tarried, they all [wise and foolish virgins] slumbered and slept,”

and this has special reference to the coming of the Lord. The slumbering and sleeping went on till

“ at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh: go ye out to meet Him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.”

Sleeping saints are *NOT watching* saints. We should, therefore, have been very much surprised if *Nēpho* had found the truth of the Lord's speedy return in the writings of the Fathers. Nor are we surprised at the revival of the truth of the Lord's coming in the early part of last century, fulfilling as it did, without a doubt, the prophecy of the cry at the midnight hour,

“ Behold, the Bridegroom cometh.”

Mr. Shackleton says :—

“ There are certain reasons why this doctrine [the imminence of the Lord's coming] should be viewed with suspicion. . . . It appears to be little more than sixty years old. . . . ”

This is exactly the same ground on which a Roman Catholic would refuse to believe in *justification by faith* as being no older than that upstart monk, Martin Luther, as he would regard him. We shall seek to prove that the truth we are considering is well nigh two thousand years old.

* * * * *

A Common Objection.

Dr. Tregelles, Mr. White, Mr. Shackleton, H. W. H., and *Nēpho* unite in the following argument, but as the last-named writer states it the most fully, we shall confine ourselves to his remarks.

“ Peter was divinely warned that when he was old he would be martyred; therefore he could not look for the Lord's return, nor could any of the disciples till Peter died.”

* * * * *

“ There is not a word . . . as to the Lord's return at any moment . . . in 2 Tim. iv. 6, where Paul plainly alludes to his approaching martyrdom.”

* * * * *

“ 1 and 2 Tim. were written evidently with a view to the guidance of believers in a future time.”

* * * *

“ Peter also testifies in 2 Ep., ch. iii. rff, to a lapse of time before the promised return. It will be clear on a moment's thought that a lengthy interval must elapse before the scoff could be uttered with any show of truth.”

* * * *

The Apostle Peter's Case.

He was told by the Lord that he would glorify God by his martyrdom in old age. But Peter died in the *first* century. Is this any reason why the Lord cannot come at any moment in the *twentieth* century?

Suppose a husband left England for Canada. He informs his wife that his business may take a lengthy period, or he may settle it at once, and return by the next available steamer. On the first day of his absence she could safely say her husband could not return for a few days. But given time for his steamer to reach Canada, a day or two in which to settle his business, and a week or ten days for the homeward journey, she could expect his return *at any moment*. She would be a foolish woman did she not expect him daily as the time wore on, and as week succeeded week her expectation would deepen.

And further, reading the narrative in John xxi. 18-23, we gather that the communication was made to Peter *privately*, for turning back he saw John following, and asked the Lord,

“ What shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? ”

The saying went abroad among the brethren—that is, beyond the circle of the apostles—that John would not die till the second advent.* The Lord did not correct

* We do not read that the saying went abroad that Peter must die, which confirms the impression that it was a *private* communication to Peter.

the impression, that it was possible for Him to return during John's lifetime, though He did not state that He would, and the disciples overshot the mark by believing a *possibility* was a *certainty*.

H. W. H. says :—

“ John takes pains to show that their thought as to him was founded on a misunderstanding of our Lord's words.”

True, but mark carefully John removed the thought as to the *certainty*, but was careful to leave it as a *possibility*.

Moreover, as the gospel of John is supposed to be the last writing in the sacred canon, at any rate of a very late date, the correction was made years after Peter's death. John's writings were written A.D. 90 to 96, whereas the date of Peter's second epistle is A.D. 66, and he was then to “ shortly . . . put off . . . [his] tabernacle.” The dates, doubtless, are approximate, but near enough to amply prove our statement.

It is true Peter had to die. We agree with *Nēpho* as to this. But will he agree that the Lord could have come during the time that John outlived Peter? The argument is of equal value.

And if He could have come in John's lifetime, then He could have come in the lifetime of any and every believer since that day, and hence *at any moment*.

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The Apostle Paul's Case.

Evidently *Nēpho* feels the difficulty of 1 Thess. iv. 13-18, for he says :—

“ It may be said that Paul raised this expectation in the Thessalonians, 1 Ep. iv. *Well, no time note is given there**. His statements would be perfectly true even if the coming were deferred for a million years. . . . The Scriptures I have referred to speak with no uncertain sound, and must be listened to.”

Will *Nēpho* include 1 Thess. iv. 15-18 as speaking with

* Italics ours.

no uncertain sound, and urge the imperative necessity of bowing to its teachings? Let him note the exactness of the language.

“ For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [go before] 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 ; and so shall we ever be with the Lord :

“ Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

Three times over Paul uses the word “ *we*,” as including himself, those associated with him in the epistle, and the Thessalonian believers. He puts before them the possibility that he and they might be alive at the coming of the Lord, and that they might be caught up without dying at all. There is no controverting this. The language is plain.

Nēpho's remarks as to “ a lengthy interval ” being necessary before the scoff as to the delay of the Lord's coming could be uttered “ with any show of truth ” would preclude not only Paul, but all the believers he wrote to being alive and remaining unto the coming of the Lord, and so would make the revelation given him a complete deception. The apostle exhorts the Thessalonians to “ comfort one another with these words.” Would he tell them to comfort each other with a deception?

As well comfort a traveller dying of thirst by pointing out the mirage—the phantom mocking lake—the pursuit of which, exhausting completely his feeble energies, could only end in death. Would there were no mirage to deceive!

“ No Time Note Given.”

And further, *Nēpho* says quite rightly, and we are very glad he has said it :—

“ Well, *no time note is given here* * [1 Thess. iv.]. His [Paul's] statements would be perfectly true even if the coming were deferred for a million years.”

Let *Nēpho* hold to this—*no time note is given*. Then Paul's statement would be perfectly true, if the Lord were to come *at any moment*, as perfectly true, as if the coming were deferred for a million years. *Nēpho's* sword is a true Damascus blade, two-edged, and each edge is equally sharp.

* * * * *

What about Paul's knowing he would Die ?

The reader may well ask, How do you account for Paul knowing he would glorify God by his death, and what about 1 and 2 Timothy ?

We answer unreservedly, *Paul did NOT know when he wrote 1 and 2 Thess. that he would die*. *Nēpho* writes :—

“ We dare not, in the face of Paul's known character (2 Cor. i. 17) assume that he wavered in his testimony ; ”

nor can *we* assume that he taught one thing as possible, when he positively knew at the time it was impossible, for mark you, *Nēpho's* remarks preclude the possibility of the Thessalonian believers being alive at the Lord's coming, not to speak of Paul himself.

Note this well, that 1 Thess. was Paul's *earliest* epistle. It was fitting the Lord's second coming should be revealed in it without a time note, as *Nēpho* so justly observes, for it was a truth intended to be for the comfort of the Lord's people during the *whole* of the Church's history upon the earth.

When his active life was over, and in prison, Paul writes of his approaching death by martyrdom, and to these later years also belongs 2 Tim., when he prophesied of “ the last days ” (a further development than the “ latter times ” of 1 Tim.), and which came in so soon with the Apostle's departure.

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What about Nēpho's "Lengthy Period" ?

A little examination of the passage (2 Peter iii) will show that Peter is not referring to the Lord's coming for His people, but *with* His people to set up His kingdom, which completely alters the whole case. *Peter never refers to the rapture.*

Nēpho, likewise, writes,

"Again, in James iv. 13-15, the expression is, 'If the Lord will, we shall live,' etc., not 'If the Lord tarry.'"

Of course it is, "*If the Lord will,*" and not, "*If the Lord tarry.*" Suppose the "no time note" Nēpho urges allows the Lord's coming to be delayed for a million years, then if we said, "If the Lord tarry, we shall live," we should claim to live for a million years, which would be nonsense. Surely when it is a question of dependence and guidance, it is, "If the Lord will." Nēpho's observation is quite beside the mark, and has no bearing on the subject.

As to the expression, "*If the Lord tarry,*" we read, "For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." *He will not tarry* is a very cheering word, and is dead in the teeth of the tribulation theory we are examining. Scripture says the Lord will not tarry, yet Nēpho, by his theory, proclaims that He *must*, and yet objects to the expression as unscriptural. Truly "the legs of the lame are not equal."

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"The Hour of Temptation."

H. W. H. says :—

"We search in vain for *one single text* containing a promise, either express or implied, that the Church will be taken away prior to the tribulation."

For our part *we* search in vain for one text telling us the Church will be taken away *after* the tribulation, whereas Rev. iii. 10 states clearly what H. W. H. searches for, and that not by implication, but by *express* statement :—

“ Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

“ Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”

Mr. White, referring to this verse on similar lines to H. W. H., says:—

“ The whole point at issue is, what is the meaning of being ‘ kept from ’ ?

“ In John xvii. 15, the same word is used— but the keeping there is certainly not a removal from the evil in the sense of being taken from its sphere, for the Lord expressly says,—‘ I pray not that Thou shouldest take them *out of* the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from (*ek*) the evil.”

The point in John xxvii. 15, is guarded. The disciples were to be kept from the evil, that is a *moral* thought, whilst left in the world, which is a *physical* thought. Otherwise the disciples would have thought the Lord prayed for their removal from the sphere of the evil.

But Rev. iii. 10 does not need to be so guarded, for obvious reasons.

Mr. White tells us “ from ” is the translation of the Greek preposition *ek*. But so also is “ *out of*,” which he italicizes, thus forcibly drawing our attention to the meaning he attaches to it.

This helps us to the meaning of Rev. iii. 10.

“ I also will keep thee from [*ek*, *out of*] the hour of temptation.”

Mark well, the Church is not only to be kept *out of* the temptation, but *out of* the HOUR of temptation, necessarily being taken out of time altogether. Could language be more explicit or emphatic ?

Then Mr. White begs the question in a footnote:—

“ The Greek word variously rendered in the New Testament means to ‘ keep with care, to guard.’ It is so translated in John xvii. 12 (R.V.)—‘ I guarded them.’ It is never employed for taking away.”

Of course not. Mr. White is running away from the point at issue. He is now arguing about the meaning of the word "keep," but he started by stating:—

"The whole point at issue is, what is the meaning of being 'kept FROM'?"

That is to say, not about the meaning of *one* word, but of *two* words—not of a noun by itself, but of a noun followed by a preposition. There is a great difference between saying, "I will keep thee," and, "I will keep thee from the hour of temptation."

If to be kept *out of* the HOUR of temptation means going through the Great Tribulation, then words have no meaning, and are but counters in a game of chance. But, thank God, language could not be plainer or more explicit, for the next verse says:—

"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

We can rest on the very words of Scripture as meaning what they say.

It is something like a victorious general urging a beleaguered garrison at its last gasp of resistance to hold out a little longer, because relief may come *at any moment*.

* * * * *

A Divine Beseeching.

The Apostle Paul, in 2 Thess., writes:—

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him,

"That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ [the day of the Lord, R.V. and Alford] is at hand [is present]." (2 Thess. ii. 1, 2).

Mr. White rightly says:—

"The 'coming of the Lord Jesus Christ' and 'our gathering together unto Him' are both placed under one Greek article, and thus are inseparably connected in point of time—they form one event, the first completing itself in the second.'"

We quite agree that this is so. It should read, "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus and our gathering together unto Him." It is one act, in two parts, like the stroke of the sword and the cut. The first epistle had established the truth of the coming of the Lord and our gathering unto Him, and this passage is an appeal based on the hope revealed in the first epistle, as the *immediate* expectation of God's people.

Now the Apostle besought the Thessalonian believers *by the rapture* not to be troubled in mind, if false teachers tried to make them believe by forged letters as from the Apostle, or in any other way, that the day of the Lord was present. Why should he beseech them by the rapture? For the obvious reason that as the rapture would take place before the day of the Lord could set in, that day could not be present. Their very presence on the earth was proof that the day of the Lord had not arrived.

* * * * *

THE Apostasy.

And then the Apostle proceeds:—

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away [literally *the apostasy*] first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition [Antichrist]."

It will greatly help at this point of enquiry, if we clearly understand at the outset what this "falling away" means.

Mr. White has a footnote explaining it:—

"*Apostasia*, which, according to universal biblical usage, denotes apostasy from the faith, or from God. The definite article denotes *that* apostasy known to the Thessalonians by oral instruction (see *verse v.*)—LANGE."

If Mr. White will abide by this, we are content to do so. "Apostasy" is, then, "from the faith or from God." If the Church is present during this period, then it follows she must apostatize, that is *completely renounce the faith and God*. For it is only that which makes a profession

that can renounce it. But this proves too much. Mr. White would not go so far as this. Unwilling as he may be to admit this, his own arguments force him into this absurdity, from which there is no escape, unless by the acknowledgment of error.

For consider the situation. The *true* Christians on the earth are a very considerable number. They must be taken account of. "Apostasy" is "from the faith or from God." Could there be this Apostasy, if such a vast number of people on the earth did not apostatize? The trend of the mere profession in the Church is distinctly in the direction of apostasy, and nothing but the presence of the true Church of God hinders its *full* development.

Nor is Mr. B. W. Newton less definite as to the meaning of apostasy. He writes :—

"That part of the earth, therefore, which hitherto has been and which will be, till 'the end of the age,' the home and centre of civilization—the spring and pivot of the world's energies, will become utterly APOSTATE. It will utterly reject God as revealed in Christ: God as the Jehovah of Israel: and God as the Creator."

This is plain. "*Utterly* APOSTATE" is sweeping, and would leave not one believer in Christendom. And yet we are told the true Church will be left—a very considerable portion of the population of "that part of the earth," which Mr. Newton refers to.

Nor is Mr. George Müller less definite. He writes :—

"Not merely bad times in the Church, such as coldness, deadness, lukewarmness, lifelessness, but the *Apostasy*. Now what is the Apostasy? Entire rejection of everything that is divine; the fulfilment of the second Psalm,—'Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us;' let us have neither God, Christ, nor anything divine: the setting up themselves, the denying everything that is divine, the rejecting even the *form* of godliness, this is the Apostasy referred to . . . this has not been fulfilled in Popery. It is *anti-Christian* altogether."

If apostasy refers to anything it refers to that which

makes a profession. You cannot give up the faith, if you have not professed it. The true Church will never do that, therefore it must be raptured before that terrible apostasy sets in. How could Christendom be "*anti-Christian altogether*," and the Church present? Into what strange conclusions these writers land themselves!

* * * * *

What Restraineth ?

We read in Scripture, following on the intimation of the apostasy and the revelation of the Man of Sin:—

"And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.

"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only He who now letteth [hindereth] will let [hinder] until He be taken out of the way.

"And then shall that Wicked [Antichrist] be revealed" (2 Thess. ii. 6-8).

We are assured this hindering power is that of the Holy Ghost, exercised through the powers of this world, "ordained of God," and as long as these are upheld by God they maintain a powerful restraint on the lawless working of the will of man. But when the Lord's people are raptured the Holy Spirit will cease to dwell on the earth as indwelling the Church, and it is by the rapture of the Church, the restraining influence of the Holy Ghost will be withdrawn.

The examination of objections to this view only serves to establish it.

Nēpho enquires:—

"But as the Holy Spirit with the Church did not prevent the apostasy of 1 John ii. 19; hinder the rise of many antichrists (*verse* 18); nor withhold the spirit of Antichrist (*chap.* iv. 3), is there any ground for assuming that He now prevents the coming apostasy and restrains the development of the personal antichrist?"

Certainly the Scripture is plain. If Paul wrote in A.D. 54 to the Thessalonians,

"The mystery of iniquity [lawlessness, R.V.] doth ALREADY work,"

it is not surprising that John, about forty years later, could describe the form it took. Even *Nēpho* will allow that much can take place between 1913 and 1953.

Paul distinctly states two things :—

1. "The mystery of iniquity [lawlessness] *doth ALREADY work,*" mark, it is "the *mystery of iniquity,*" the thing is not open yet.

2. "Only He who now letteth will let, *UNTIL* He be taken out of the way."

There is no reason for *assuming*, as *Nēpho* asks, that the Restrainer is preventing the coming apostasy, *for the Scripture PLAINLY STATES that He is doing so.*

How *Nēpho* can ask a question, capable of such an obvious answer, we cannot understand, and how he can mention the opinion of a writer that the Restrainer is Satan, without a note of disapproval, passes our comprehension.

Mr. Shackleton writes :—

"As to who the restraining one is, there has always been a difference of opinions. In the previous verse [2 Thess. ii. 6], 'that which restraineth' must be a power or influence, for the verb is in the neuter; while in this verse [verse 7], as it is masculine, a person must be intended. My own belief is, that the person is God, and the hindering thing is His restraining power exercised through the government of states, and perhaps also by the workings of His providence in the affairs of men.

Here we get the admission that the Restraining One is a Divine Person. But God works by His Spirit, and His Spirit is a Divine Person. Moreover the Person is looked at as on the earth, and till He is taken from it the apostasy is hindered.

We cannot understand Mr. Shackleton telling us the verb in verse 7 is masculine, and therefore a Person is intended, and yet writing :—

“ We could not take such an expression as, ‘ Taken out of the way ’ (2 Thess. ii. 7) as referring to the Supreme One. However, the Greek does not present this difficulty. The words are *έως έκ μέσον γένηται* = until it shall be from the midst.

But why *it*,* Mr. Shackleton, when you have told us verse 7 is in the masculine, and a Person must be intended ? Scholars prefer “ He ” to “ it ” as a correct translation. A Person is intended, and that Person to be taken from the midst, from this earth, and how else than by the Church being raptured ?

Then Mr. Shackleton states a difficulty, which admits of a simple and obvious answer :—

“ With regard to the . . . view (that the restraining one spoken of is the Holy Spirit in the Church), it is incredible that those who will be witnesses for God against the Antichrist will be left to cope with him and his delusions, without the aid of the indwelling Spirit of God.”

It is obvious the Holy Spirit indwells the believer in a very special way in this dispensation. For instance, the Lord said to His disciples :—

“ If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ” (John xvi. 7).

And again we read :—

“ The Holy Ghost was not yet given ; because that Jesus was not yet glorified ” (John vii. 39),

evidently showing that the Holy Ghost was not on the earth in this special way before Pentecost.

How then, if the Holy Spirit were not indwelling the believers in this special way *before* Christ was glorified,

* There is no gender in the Greek words quoted by Mr. S., but because of the gender of the article preceding the participle (*ό κατέχων*.) the translation naturally would be, until *HE* shall be from the midst. The learned translators of the Bible have given “ HE.” Why does Mr. S. give “ *it* ” ? Is it a case of special pleading ?

Mr. Shackleton might ask, did the Old Testament saints sustain the terrible trials narrated in Heb. xi.—torture, cruel mockings, bonds, imprisonment, they were stoned, sawn asunder, tempted, slain with the sword, destitute, afflicted, tormented? We reply, The Holy Spirit was blessedly active in the times *before* the day of Pentecost, before He indwelt the believers in this special way, as forming the Church, and linking the members of the body of Christ with a glorious Head in heaven, as He will be blessedly active *after* His restraining influence is removed. As He supported Daniel in the den of lions, and the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, so will He support God's *earthly* people—Jew and Gentile—saved in view of *earthly* blessing after the Church has been raptured.

* * * * *

Not Appointed to Wrath, but to Obtain Salvation.

In full agreement with all we have just written, we read that

“ God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him ” (1 Thess. v. 9, 10).

Evidently the wrath is God's, and is in apposition to “salvation.” We must distinguish this from the thought of the believer being appointed to tribulation at the hands of the unbelievers, and being thereby a partaker of Christ's suffering.

“ Whether we wake [*may be watching, N.T.*, that is, watching for the Lord's return] or sleep [fallen asleep in Jesus],” has evident reference to the rapture as outlined in the previous chapter, and *in that connection* we are not appointed to wrath, which sets in after the rapture, but to obtain salvation.

Then in the second epistle, following the reference as to the apostasy and the man of sin, speaking of that salvation the Apostle writes :—

“ But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

“ Whereunto He called you by our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“ Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle ” (2 Thess. ii. 13-15).

That is to say, they would never enter into the Great Tribulation at all. So again we read :—

“ And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come ” (1 Thess. i. 10).

A faithful literal translation gives a clearer rendering, “ Jesus, our Deliverer from the coming wrath,” thus correcting the past tense of the A.V. It is significant that 1 and 2 Thessalonians are so full and precise on this point.

* * * * *

When does the Lord's Coming Take Place ?

All the different writers advancing the theory that the Church is to go through the Great Tribulation agree that it takes place as described in Matt. xxiv. 29-31.

“ *Immediately after the tribulation of those days* shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken :

“ 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.

“ And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

The whole question at stake lies in the interpretation of this passage.

Mr. Müller, B. W. Newton, Dr. Tregelles, Mr. White, Nêpho, Mr. Shackleton, H. W. H., etc., all teach that Matt. xxiv. contains instructions for *Christians*, and that the passage above quoted tells us the time the rapture will take place.

On the other hand, those who believe that the Lord may come *at any moment*, hold that the instructions are given to the disciples, *as representing the Jewish remnant* in the day to come, and that the passage quoted above will be fulfilled when the Lord comes *with His heavenly saints*, to bring relief to God's *earthly* people—Jew and Gentile—blessed subsequent to the rapture.*

This latter view excites the wrath of some of our authors. Mr. Shackleton says :—

“ This Judaizing practice seems to have sprung up side by side with the doctrine of the Pre-tribulation theory, and was no doubt produced by it. . . . If it is permissible for me to put out of court as Jewish any Scripture that I adjudge to be so, I can easily bring the Scripture into accord with any hypothesis I choose to advance, because I shall have silenced all obnoxious passages. . . . This method has been aptly described as making use of a ‘ Jewish waste-paper-basket.’ ”

H. W. H. says :—

“ We fully admit the ‘ distinctive character of the Church and its heavenly character,’ though we do not admit all that is assumed to be covered by the somewhat general phrase.”

Now in spite of this disclaimer, it is just this failure to understand the distinctive character of the Church, and its heavenly character, that characterizes the school whose

* Matthew xxiv. and xxv. outline the great prophecy of the Lord, beginning with the bearing of future events on the Jew, then taking up (in the three parables) the responsible Christian profession, and finally in Matt. xxv. 31-46 the effects of the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom on the nations, in relation to that which is world-wide. The three parables illustrate the *present* effect the truth as to the appearing should have upon the Christian, and constitute a warning against mere profession.

teachings we are examining. We confess to utter amazement that such obvious distinctions are not seen.

For instance, Mr. George Müller, speaking of the rapture in reference to Mark xiii. and Matt. xxiv., says :—

“ Our Lord Himself directs the minds of His Church to look for certain predicted events, and to consider them as signs of His return.”

Mr. White says to treat Matt. xxiv. as Jewish and future is to reject our Lord’s counsel. He writes :—

“ If we reject our Lord’s counsel in the above Scriptures, can we consistently claim His comfort in John xiii. to xvii. ? ”

On the contrary, it is by seeing to whom the Scripture is addressed, and “ rightly dividing the word of truth,” that we indeed honour the Lord’s counsel.

A Careful Examination.

A careful examination of Matt. xxiv. will establish certain points, which cannot be controverted, for they are plainly to be seen on the surface. Its locality is Judæa.

“ Then let them which be in Judæa flee into the mountains ” (*verse 16*).

If this is instruction for the whole Church scattered throughout the world, it is extraordinary that it should apply only to a tiny portion of the world, about the size of Wales.

It is obviously Jewish, for we read :—

“ Pray ye that your flight be not . . . on the sabbath day ” (*verse 20*).

Now the sabbath *always* in Scripture is Jewish. A back-sliding tendency to Judaizing principles is sternly rebuked in Scripture. To the Colossian believers the apostle wrote :—

“ Let no man . . . judge you . . . in respect . . . of the sabbath days ; ”

meaning they did not as Christians observe them, and some were judging them because they did not.

Again he wrote in hot displeasure to the Galatians :—

“ How turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage ? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.”

The first day of the week is *never* called the sabbath in Scripture.

Then again the gospel that is to be preached proves it is Jewish,

“ This gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations : and then shall the end come ” (verse 14).

The gospel of the kingdom was the only gospel preached at the time the Lord spoke to His disciples. John the Baptist and the Lord proclaimed it, and He commissioned the apostles and the seventy to preach it.

Then it was confined to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It was a gospel *for the earth*. It called for repentance *in view of an earthly kingdom*. The King was coming to reign.

Now the gospel of the grace of God, the gospel of the glory, is being preached, calling out of this world a people for *heavenly* blessing. The Apostle Paul speaks of “ MY gospel,” and says :—

“ For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ ” (Gal. i. 12).

And yet, proving how this school of thought confounds things that are plainly said to differ in the Scriptures, Mr. Shackleton says :—

“ So the gospel of the grace of God, by which we are introduced into the kingdom in its present form . . . is also the gospel of the Kingdom.”

In a future day, after the Church is raptured, the gospel of the kingdom will again be preached, but this time going out to *all nations* according to Matt. xxiv. 14, and

its results being manifested in Matt. xxv. 31-46, when "all nations" shall be gathered before the throne of Christ's glory, and those who have bowed to the gospel of the kingdom will be the sheep and pass into millennial blessing, whilst those who do not bow will be the goats and pass into everlasting punishment.

A Careful Comparison.

A careful comparison between Matt. xxiv. and 1 Thess. iv. will further emphasize the truth.

* * * * *

In Matt. xxiv. 30 we find three things: (1) The sign of the Son of man in heaven; (2) Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn; (3) Then they (the mourning tribes) shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

* * * * *

In 1 Thess. iv. *the Lord HIMSELF* shall descend from heaven with a shout, the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God. Nothing is said of a preparatory sign in the heavens, nothing of mourning nations.

* * * * *

In Matt. xxiv. nothing is said of the resurrection of the sleeping saints. Why? Because the resurrection has no relation to the appearing of which Matt. xxiv. treats, but of the rapture.

* * * * *

In 1 Thess. iv. we are told that the dead in Christ shall rise when the Lord comes. Why? Because the passage is dealing with *the rapture*, and is the explanation of how the Lord can come *with* His people, viz., by coming *for* His people, rapturing them from earth to heaven.

* * * * *

In Matt. xxiv. the elect are gathered *by the angels* from one end of heaven to the other.

* * * * *

In 1 Thess. iv. *the Lord Himself* shall come for His own—a deeply important difference. He comes *Himself* for

His heavenly saints, He sends *His angels* to gather His earthly saints. So, too, John xiv. 3, referring to the rapture, tells us,

“ I will come again, and receive you unto Myself,”

taking us to His Father's house. Mark well, there is no word in this of anything else. Why? Because nothing else is in view in this passage—the rapture and not the appearing.

* * * * *

In Matt. xxiv. nothing is said about the elect being changed. Why? Because the passage has nothing to do with the rapture, but with the appearing, and their entering into earthly and millennial blessing.

* * * * *

In 1 Cor. xv. 52 the living saints are changed (the same event as set forth in 1 Thess. iv.). Why? Because it refers to *the rapture*, and going into heavenly blessing in the Father's house.

* * * * *

In Luke xxi. 27, 28 (a parallel passage to Matt. xxiv. 30), we read :—

“ And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.”

This passage is overwhelmingly conclusive. When the Son of man comes the tried and suffering saints are to—

1. *Look up.*
2. *Lift up their heads.*
3. *Know their redemption draweth nigh.*

Evidently to look up, and lift up their heads is symbolical of cheer and comfort, and hopes about to be realized. To know that their redemption “*DRAWETH NIGH,*” means they had not as yet received it, but are about

to do so, *and that it is COMING TO THEM upon the earth*, and not that they are going to it to receive it in heaven. The former will be true of the earthly saints at the appearing, the latter of the heavenly saints at the rapture.

* * * * *

In 1 Cor. xv. 52, the rapture occurs

“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye”—

an interval of time not allowing space to look up and lift up the head, whether these expressions be taken literally or symbolically.

* * * * *

Taken in Judgment, Left for Blessing.

In Matt. xxiv. we are told that the coming is to be like the days of Noah. We are told the antediluvians were unconcerned till the flood came and took them all away. The flood was judgment to them, and a type of judgment to come—water then, fire in the future. The antediluvians were *taken* in judgment, Noah was *left* for blessing, *left* to enter a renewed earth, type of this earth purged by the fires of God's governmental wrath. We are told by the Lord Himself that the coming is to be like that.

Next the illustration is applied. Two are to be in the field—*one taken*, like the antediluvian unbelievers, *in judgment*; *the other left*, like Noah and his family, believers and sheltered, *for blessing* in the millennial earth. Two women are to be grinding at the mill, one *taken in judgment*, the other *left for blessing*. So with the sheep and the goats—the goats “taken” for judgment—“these shall go into everlasting punishment”; the sheep “left” for blessing—“the righteous [go] into life eternal,” and mentioned in this order. How exact is Scripture!

Taken for Blessing, left for Judgment.

1 Thess. iv. needs no comment. The sleeping saints raised, and the living saints changed, are “taken” for blessing, the mere professor “left” for judgment—*just the exact reverse*.

* * * * *

And yet with all these *radical* differences we are accused of rejecting our Lord's counsel, of treating the Scriptures contemptuously, if we do not mix up dispensations, and treat Jewish and Christian hopes as if they were one and the same thing. Such treatment of Scripture cannot lead to a clear and intelligible grasp of the truth; and it certainly would be rejecting our Lord's counsel were we to read Scripture so carelessly.

* * * * *

Who are "The Elect" Gathered by the Angels ?

H. W. H. says on this point :—

" [Nor] can the term the 'elect' be alleged to be necessarily Jewish in view of the words of St. Paul in Col. iii. 12 : 'Put ye on as the elect of God, holy and beloved bowels of mercies,' not to mention other passages."

We reply, Nor can the term the "Elect" be alleged to be necessarily Christian in view of the words of the prophecy in Isaiah xlv. 4, lxv. 9, 22—

" For Jacob My servant's sake and Israel *Mine elect*."

* * * *

" And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of My mountains : and *Mine elect* shall inherit it, and My servants shall dwell there. . . .

" *Mine elect* shall long enjoy the work of their hands."

H. W. H.'s sword is two-edged. If the term "elect" is not necessarily Jewish, neither is it necessarily Christian. We can only decide by an examination of the setting of the passage.

The word translated "elect" in the above passages is rendered "chosen" in other passages in the Old Testament, so that the disciples were familiar with the idea of God's elect in connection with Israel, whereas *the truth of election in its Christian sense was not then made known*. The disciples therefore would understand the term in no other sense than referring to an earthly Jewish people

elected for earthly blessing, widening out indeed to the Gentile nations blessed by the reception of the gospel of the kingdom, as indicated by the Lord Himself in Matt. xxiv. 14.

If H. W. H. makes the Jewish "elect" to refer to the Church, then he robs God's earthly people of their blessing, promised to them as God's chosen or elect people, and would render null and void the Old Testament promises to that effect—a very serious result. The difference of blessing is well illustrated by the following verses:—

"Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you FROM *the foundation of the world*" (Matt. xxv. 34).

"According as He hath chosen us in Him BEFORE *the foundation of the world*" (Eph. i. 4).

* * * *

Who are the Four and Twenty Elders ?

With one exception* all our authors either pass over any reference to the above, or content themselves with telling us what they are *not*. Their treatment of the matter is most significant, for if they could prove they did *not* represent the Church, how willingly they would do so.

The "elders" in the Old Testament are representatives of Israel; in the New Testament, of the Church. Twenty-four is the number of the courses of the priests, over which was set a high priest, and over all a Great High Priest.

Twelve in the Old Testament is the number representing Israel, for there were twelve tribes. Twelve in the New Testament is the number representing the Church, for there were twelve apostles; the holy city, representative of the Church, had twelve gates, twelve foundations, and the measurements of the city was twelve thousand furlongs.

Then further, the twenty-four elders are not angels, for in Rev. vii. 11 these classes are distinguished. They worship. They are *around* (not before) the throne, in closest proximity, following intelligently the course of

*Mr. Shackleton, to whose view on this point we shall refer later.

events, unaffrighted and undisturbed by all the happenings of judgment.

Moreover, Rev. iv., where the twenty-four elders are first seen, begins the *third* section of the book—the “things which must be *hereafter*.”

“The things that are” are past. Rev. ii. and iii. give us the addresses to the seven assemblies in Asia Minor, addresses, doubtless, prophetic of the Church’s history to its close.

In the sixth address the Church has the promise of being kept *out of* the hour of tribulation, and the Lord presents Himself as coming quickly. Evidently till that coming “the things that are” go on.

Then, as we have said, Rev. iv. begins the section of the “things which must be *hereafter*,” or more precisely, “after these things” (chaps. ii. and iii.). The rapture comes fittingly in at the close of “the things that are,” though as suited to the scope of John’s writings it is not directly alluded to, but is distinctly seen in its effects. We should expect, therefore, to see the Church in glory at this point, and it is remarkable that next to the Supreme One, who is seen sitting on the throne, the four and twenty elders are brought before our notice just here.

Surely there can be no reasonable doubt that they are “they that are Christ’s at His coming.” Sitting, clothed in white and crowned with golden crowns—all is expressive of the position the saints in glory will occupy.

Nēpho does not tell us who they are, but he attempts to prove to us, who they are *not*. He says:—

“The four and twenty elders, whose song be it remarked, is not respecting themselves, but others (see R.V.). It may be added that one reason at least for thinking that these elders do not represent the Church is the fact that they offer the prayers of the saints.”

Nēpho is quite right in saying the elders do not sing about themselves. They are the heavenly saints represented thus, and no others, save those *exceptionally* associated with them, who are *martyred*, as seen in Rev. vi. 9, and xiii. 15, and who doubtless as a reward receive

a position analogous to the saints of the Old Testament times. They will live and reign with Christ—"priests of God and of Christ"—during His millennial reign (see Rev. xx. 4-6).

But the beautiful point about their song is, that they celebrate the worthiness of Him who has redeemed, and not the *subjects* of His work, for the literal rendering of the passage is as follows :—

"And they sing a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open its seals; because Thou hast been slain, and hast redeemed [not *us* or *them*], to God, by Thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and made them to our God kings and priests: and they shall reign over the earth" (N.T.).

The sinking of all reference to the *subjects* of redemption, because the hearts of the redeemed are so full of worship to Him who has redeemed, is striking, for the subjects of such a work become unimportant to the heart in comparison with the infinite value of it, and the glory of Him who has wrought it. Such is worship!

Surely all this is an overwhelming proof that the elders represent the glorified saints.

Further, *Nēpho* thinks they do not represent the Church because they offer the prayers of saints. But if *Nēpho* will read the passage carefully he will see that it is not said that they offer the prayers of saints. It simply states they have "golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints."

The word for *odours* here is used six times in the New Testament, and four times out of the six it is translated *incense*, pointing to the priestly character of those represented by the elders, and how in their rest on high they identify themselves with the suffering saints upon the earth, and can tell John all about them (see chap. vii. 14).

Evidently it is Christ Himself, under the symbol of an angel, who "offers" (really gives effect to) the prayers of saints in chap. viii. 3-5, the result of the answer to these prayers being seen in judgments falling upon the Roman earth. It is a pity *Nēpho* had not read on.

Then again he says :—

“ It will be observed that the elders in chap. iv. etc., are seated on their thrones, although the Lamb as yet only occupies His Father’s throne. This would also go to prove that the elders do not represent the Church.”

The answer is obvious—there is only one supreme throne in heaven. On it, according to Hebrews, Christ sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high ; according to Rev. iii. 21 He sits with His Father on His Father’s throne. *His own throne, however, has always to do with earth, and is not set up till the millennium.*

The Lamb is seen standing here in connection with His governmental judgments about to fall on the earth, and preparatory to the establishing of His earthly throne. Seeing the Church has nothing to do with the government of the earth, till associated with Christ on His throne, the fact that the four and twenty elders sit on heavenly thrones, robed and crowned, only rising to fall down in worship before God and the Lamb, clearly gives great weight to the conclusion that they represent the saints raptured at Christ’s coming.

Mr. Shackleton is the only author, to whom we have access, who attempts to tell us who the twenty-four elders are.

“ It is the Church in glory speaking of ISRAEL, who will at that time ‘reign on the earth ;’ while those in glory—the risen and glorified saints—act above as priests and intercessors for Israel ; *i.e.*, for those saints in Israel who will then be ‘kings and priests on the earth.’ ”

So evidently Mr. Shackleton has to admit the strong evidence that the twenty-four elders represent “ the risen and glorified saints.” Nor has he any difficulty, like *Nēpho*, as to their intercessory character. But it is remarkable that he should make out the multitude out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation to be *Israel*. Every kindred cannot be *one* kindred. Every people cannot be *one* people. Every nation cannot be *one* nation.

But let it not be supposed that Mr. Shackleton gives away his theory by teaching that the twenty-four elders represent "the risen and glorified saints, raptured before the tribulation." So later on he writes :—

"What some maintain is, that this chapter represents the saints being in glory *before* those dark parts of the Revelation *begin* to be fulfilled : and the statement appears plausible at first ; but the whole scene is evidently *millennial*, and therefore prophetic every part of it ; for, *at the same time* that the risen saints are seen as represented by the 'elders' and 'living creatures,' Israel is seen as 'reigning and made priests unto God upon the earth.'"

How can the whole scene be *millennial* ? Is the Lamb taking the book sealed with the seven seals—the prelude to the terrible judgments about to take place—*millennial* ? And it is in connection *with this act* the four and twenty elders fall down, worship, and sing this song, which evidently is a general song of praise as to Christ's redemption without particularizing any special class.

How any one reading the passage can say it is a *millennial* scene is extraordinary. We are firmly convinced the elders represent "the risen and glorified saints." The evidence in Scripture is overwhelming on this point.

* * * * *

Who are the Great Multitude ?

Rev. vii. 9 reads :—

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands."

The beginning of the chapter gives us 144,000 sealed of all the tribes of Israel, evidently not a literal but a symbolical number, typical of God's perfect goodness and grace to His earthly people. The vast multitude out of all nations is formed of Gentiles, who have received

the gospel of the kingdom. An examination of their place and portion confirms this.

They are *before* the throne, that is, in presence of it, not necessarily in heaven.

The twenty-four elders (symbolical of heavenly saints) are *around* the throne, necessarily in heaven.

The multitude out of the great tribulation serve Him day and night (time) in His temple, the place of an earthly and divinely suited system of worship.

The heavenly saints have no temple, in direct contrast to this, and no need of sun or moon (time). When we come to the Church's portion we read the glowing words :—

“ And I saw no temple therein : for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

“ And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it : for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof ”
(Rev. xxi. 22, 23).

The great multitude do not worship as the elders do as the nearest circle round the throne, in holy intimacy with Him who sits upon it, but ascribe

“ Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.”

They have no crowns as the elders have. One of the elders tells John they have come out of *the* Great Tribulation.

If this multitude represents the Church, where shall we then find the nations walking in the light* of the heavenly city, typical of the Church during the millennium ? Where shall we find the nations that are to be blessed in the coming day ? Where the inhabitants of the new earth ? We believe the great multitude who come out of great tribulation form that company.

* * * * *

Is the Rapture to be Secret ?

Our authors generally endeavour to make great capital out of the point that the rapture cannot be secret.

* The light of the city is not its own—“ the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”

Mr. White says :—

“ The passages which speak of the *day* as our hope contradict all thought of secrecy. Could the Sun of Righteousness arise without the day beginning ? ”

Here the confusion, which runs right through the writings of these authors, is seen. We must remember that the day has to do with the appearing, *and NOT with the Rapture.*

The day is the hope shared in common by the Church and Israel, and it is connected with Christ as the Sun of Righteousness.

On the other hand, the bright Morning Star has to do with the special hope of the Church, Christ coming to rapture His people before the day commences.

So that the above quotation is beside the mark. There is no secrecy as to the appearing with which the day is connected. No one ever said there was.

Mr. White continues :—

“ Three distinct circumstances accompany the descent of our Lord from Heaven and the rapture, either of which entirely precludes the thought of *secrecy*, (1) the SHOUT, the signal shout of our victorious Lord Himself . . . ; (2) the VOICE of the archangel, like himself, powerful and full of majesty ; (3) the TRUMP OF GOD.”

We believe the rapture will be secret, but its *effects* cannot be secret. Seeing it will take place in the twinkling of an eye it cannot be anything but secret.

As to the *sounds* for which the Church is listening, do not instances in Scripture bear one out that they *may* be secret as far as anything intelligible is concerned ?

For instance, Paul, narrating his conversion, says :—

“ And they that went with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid : but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me ” (Acts xxii. 9).

Evidently they heard a sound, but it conveyed nothing

intelligible to them. Remember Mr. White is urging that *sounds* preclude secrecy.

Again, our Lord prayed in the anguish of His soul,

“ Father, glorify Thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people, therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered : others said, An angel spake to Him ”
(John xii. 28, 29).

Evidently the voice, so intelligible to the One addressed, sounded like a sudden brattle of thunder.

Now in 1 Cor. xv. and 1 Thess. iv., the sounds are not said to affect more than the sleeping dead and the living saints. Nothing is said about the world hearing the sounds. The Lord's shout is a *signal*. To whom? Not to the world. It is like the shout of the leader of a trireme to his oarsmen, or the captain to his men, which only they will have to do with, and understand.

Moreover, as we have pointed out, seeing the rapture is to be “ in the twinkling of an eye,” it may be truthfully said to be secret.

Its immediate *effects* will not be secret, for a vast number of believers in all positions of life, and in every quarter of the globe could not be simultaneously and suddenly removed from the earth without its causing great amazement and consternation for the moment.

But as the restraining presence of the Holy Spirit will be removed, the strong delusion will immediately rush in, and neutralize any effect the coming might be expected to have.

* * * * *

Who are to be Caught Up ?

A view is being pressed at the present time that a *portion* only of the Church of God will be raptured at His coming, and that those who are not looking for Him, or who have failed in some way, will be left behind “ to be purged by the fires of tribulation.” This is only different in place and degree to the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory.

Surely one Scripture is decisive on this point, and to it we gladly bow.

“ In Christ shall all be made alive.

“ But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; *afterward* THEY THAT ARE CHRIST'S *at His coming* ” (1 Cor. xv. 23).

How conclusive this is, especially occurring in an epistle addressed to believers who could be asked, “ Are ye not carnal, and walk as men ? ” where frightful immorality was allowed, where leaders were vieing one with the other, where serious evil doctrines were taught—in short, where looseness and carnality were rampant. And yet the apostle never once questioned that they belonged to Christ. He said to them, “ Ye are Christ's ” (1 Cor. iii. 23).

Nor when he refers in this passage (1 Cor. xv. 23) to the Lord's coming does he hint at any exceptions, or anywhere else, but in one blessed encouraging statement he sets our hearts at rest by that beautiful unequivocal statement.

“ THEY THAT ARE CHRIST'S AT HIS COMING.”

There is a tendency to make the gifts of the Spirit the special attainment of advanced believers ; the rapture, the special attainment of “ consecrated believers ” ; the kingdom, the special attainment of the worthy. We solemnly believe at the bottom of all this is the enemy's effort to occupy us unduly with ourselves, and our attainments, and to obscure “ the true grace of God wherein we stand.”

Such teaching does violence to the whole truth of God, and is a marked feature of the hour. May all Christians be delivered from its baneful influence.

* * * * *

A Significant Silence.

If the Church is to go through the Great Tribulation, we are confronted by the strange fact that she is not addressed in any way, nor given instructions how to comport herself under the new conditions. Is this likely ?

Matt. xxiv. gives plain instructions to those *in Judæa*, whilst that passage and the Book of Revelation are silent as to giving instructions to the Church, which is not seen between the end of Rev. iii. and chap. xix. 7, save as in heaven, represented along with the Old Testament saints by the elders, in a spot where such instructions are not needed.

And yet the Church is the most precious possession of Christ, the closest in relationship. The absence of instructions is obvious. *There will be no Church on earth to instruct during the tribulation.*

* * * * *

An Important Point to Remember.

The *rapture* is very rarely alluded to in Scripture. The *appearing* is constantly referred to.

Mr. Shackleton says :—

“ The so-called rapture, though often implied, is only mentioned once in the Bible.”

It is true it is only fully explained *in one place*, viz., 1 Thess. iv. 13–18. It is alluded to in such passages as 2 Thess. ii. 1 ; 1 Cor. xv. 51–55 ; John xiv. 2, 3 ; Heb. ix. 28 ; and Rev. iii. 11. Once the rapture is revealed in 1 Thess. it is looked at ever after as engrained into the whole life of the Christian, thus contemplated in its *effects* when not specified in passages such as 2 Cor. v. 4, Phil. iii. 20, 21, etc. Hence the propriety of 1 Thess. being the earliest of Paul’s writings.

The *appearing* is mentioned repeatedly and at great length in every New Testament book, save Ephesians, Galatians, Philemon, 2 and 3 John.

Why is so little said about the *rapture*, and why so much about the *appearing* ?

The *rapture* is the special unique hope of the Church, and is connected with heaven and the Father’s house.

The *appearing* has to do with Christ’s millennial reign, with which is connected the hope of both the Church, as to reigning with Christ, and the Jew and the Gentile as to coming into earthly blessing.

The *rapture* is never alluded to in the Old Testament.
 The *appearing* is often alluded to in the Old Testament.
 The *rapture* has to do with *grace*.

The *appearing* has to do with *government*, with place in the kingdom, rewards, manifestation.

Therefore all the exhortations as to continuing and conduct, reward and manifestation, have to do with the *appearing*, and not with the *rapture*.

The *rapture* is the more wonderful—how surpassingly wonderful to be with the Lord, in closest intimacy, and profoundest reverence, to see Him at home, as it were; yet how blessed it will be to come out with Him, when He reigns in power, and be associated with Him in that reign, and share His glorious triumph.

The apprehension of this truth would save much confusion of thought. For instance, Mr. White asks:—

“ How could this [whom the heaven must receive UNTIL the time of restitution of all things] be true if the coming of the Lord is to be followed by the reign of Antichrist ? ”

Acts iii. 21 refers clearly to the appearing and not to the rapture. Hence the question is capable of a simple and obvious reply.

Mr. White asks a succession of questions, winding up with:—

“ I ask these questions in no spirit of triumph over those against whose views I am contending, but in heart-felt concern for the truth of Christ.”

Our previous remarks answer one and all of his questions on this head, for they are all the result of this confusion of thought.

* * * * *

Tribulation—The Portion of the Saints.

Our different authors press this as a reason why the Church should go through the Great Tribulation. They fail to grasp the essential difference between the tribulation the Church is called upon to endure in this present dispensa-

tion, and that which will come upon the earth in a future day.

Now the tribulation the Church is called upon to endure is from the hands of men.

Then it will be from the hand of God, whatever the instrumentality He may employ.

Now it is upon the Christian only.

Then it will be upon the whole earth.

Now it is as being "partakers of Christ's sufferings."

Then it will be as coming under God's chastisement for the rejection of Christ, in its special Jewish character.

Now, if believers are reproached, happy are they, and need not be ashamed, but can glorify God on account of it.

Then tribulation will be penal and retributive.

Jer. xxx. 7 speaks of "the time of Jacob's trouble;" Dan. xii. prophesies of "a time of trouble" for God's ancient people; Matt. xxiv., as we have seen, has reference to trouble coming on Judæa, consequent on the apostate part of the nations turning to idols, and above all to Antichrist (*see* Dan. ix. 27).

Of course, during the Great Tribulation, believers—Jew and Gentile—converted subsequent to the rapture, will be persecuted by unbelievers because of God's testimony, in many cases suffering martyrdom. In that they will be upheld. But this will be tribulation within tribulation, different in its source, nature, essence, and effects to *the* Great Tribulation.

In outlining the tribulation of the present period we have gathered our thoughts from 1 Pet. iv. 12-19, which has a *present* application, and does not refer remotely to the Great Tribulation at all.

Yet *Népho* extracts from this very passage the title for his book, and quotes it at the beginning of his preface, thus betraying on the very cover of his book ignorance of the real nature of those things, as to which he takes the place of teacher.

And not content with this display of ignorance, he quotes 1 Thess. iii. 3, 4, at the beginning of part two of his book, which again has only a *present* application.

Surely the cry, "Throw the Christian to the lions," the catacombs of Rome, the inquisition of Spain, the fires of Smithfield are enough to characterize the sufferings of the Church as "the fiery trial."

* * * * *

Striking Analogies.

Once a doctrine is proved from Scripture, analogies, in the way of types, are useful and instructive.

For instance, why does Heb. xi. 5-7 give us the incidents of Enoch's translation to *heaven* and Noah's salvation through the flood, and entrance into a *renewed earth*, typical of millennial blessing ?

Not only does the Spirit of God call our attention to these incidents, but *in this order*. Why ?

Enoch was raptured to heaven.

The Church will be raptured to heaven.

Enoch knew of the appearing and his share in it (*see Jude 14*).

The Church is instructed as to the appearing and her share in it.

Enoch knew about the coming flood, though he was not to go through it. He was translated before it came. He knew of the approaching flood, because he named his son, Methusaleh, signifying, When he is dead, it shall be sent, i.e., the deluge. The flood came the year of his death.

The Church is instructed as to the coming tribulation, but will not go through it.

Noah went through the flood, but was sheltered from its deadly character in the ark.

The Jewish nation will go through the Great Tribulation, though sheltered from its full deadly character.

Noah passed into an earth purified by judgment.

The Jewish nation will enter into an earth purified by judgment.

And what further strengthens the analogy is that our Lord, in Matt. xxiv., *only* mentions Noah's case. Why ? Because the Church is not in question, but the Jewish

and Gentile believers, blessed by the gospel of the kingdom, in view of *earthly* blessing.

In the corresponding passage in Luke xvii. Lot is mentioned, *but not Abraham*. Why? Abraham, on the lofty plains of Mamre, is typical of the saints on high.

Lot, in Sodom, is typical of the earthly believer, passing through the trial, sent from God in judgment on the unbeliever.

Abraham knew of the approaching judgment. Lot did not, till the hour of his rescue arrived.

Noah and Lot were not translated—they emerged through the trial into a place of rest and safety.

* * * * *

Concluding Remarks.

If the Church were to go through the Great Tribulation a new departure in God's ways would be involved for which there is no instruction in Scripture, only a significant silence to which we do well to take heed.

In Old Testament times God dealt in blessing in connection with *Judaism*.

In New Testament times, since Pentecost, He deals in blessing in connection with *Christianity*.

In Old Testament times the converted Jew remained a Jew religiously, and a converted Gentile found his blessing in connection with *Judaism*.

In New Testament times, since the day of Pentecost, a Jew converted ceases to be a Jew religiously, and a Gentile converted ceases to be a Gentile religiously, and form part of the Church of God.

If the Church were to go through the Great Tribulation we should have the extraordinary spectacle of the Christian evangelist preaching the gospel of the grace of God, telling his converts they ceased to be Jews or Gentiles religiously, that they belonged to the Church of God, that there was no priest on earth, no earthly temple, that theirs was a heavenly calling, and to be taken up with an earthly priesthood and an earthly temple would be to go back to what was "beggarly," and "the elements of the world."

On the contrary, the Jewish evangelist would preach the gospel of the kingdom, tell his converts they were connected with earthly blessing and an earthly system of blessing—temple, altar, priests—designed by God for their blessing.

What confusion ! The silence of Scripture on this point is as eloquent as its speech on others.

Indeed, the more we have enquired into this matter, the more profoundly are we convinced of the truth that the Lord may come *for His people at any moment*, and that moment very near. Whilst unable for want of space to criticize very fully the statements of our authors, we have shown, we trust, most clearly from Scripture how unscriptural is the theory that the Church is to go through the Great Tribulation.

Such a theory involves ignorance of the crudest kind of the heavenly character and calling of the Church, of the differing dispensations, throwing into utter confusion the word of God bearing on these points, and confounding things that differ.

Peter tells us :—

“ No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation ” (2 Pet. i. 20)

That is, no prophecy is complete in itself, but is part of a glorious whole.

It is something like a picture puzzle, if we may use the illustration reverently. No block is a complete picture, it is part of a whole, and each block stands in a certain relation to all the other blocks.

It is plain that each block that is put into its wrong place renders each subsequent step more difficult and the whole impossible ; whereas each block put into its right place makes each subsequent step more and more easy, and when each block is in its place a complete and perfect picture is formed.

So with this enquiry. Each step as to the theory that the Church is to go through the Great Tribulation on the part of our authors makes things more and more difficult,

“confusion worse confounded,” and the whole proof impossible ; whereas each step of enquiry as to the truth of the Lord’s coming *at any moment* amply confirmed us that this is the clear teaching of Scripture. Part answers to part, scripture to scripture, fulfilment to prophecy, antitype to type, event to event, in connection with the rapture, the appearing, and the glorious earthly reign of Christ, till one complete picture of prophecy is unfolded to our wondering and adoring gaze.

How gladly we seek grace and purpose of heart to keep “the word of His patience,” knowing that before “the hour of temptation” comes we shall be safe in the Father’s house on high—raptured thence in a moment, looking on the face of Him, whom not having seen we love, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, changed in that blissful moment into full conformity with Him, whose image we, thus, shall bear for ever.

May the Lord graciously use this attempt to set forth the truth to the deliverance of many who have imbibed this false doctrine, and to the confirmation of the truth in the hearts of those who hold it.

May our hearts yearningly and adoringly cry in response to Him who says, “Surely I come quickly,”

“Even so, Come, Lord Jesus,”

whilst serving Him faithfully and steadily moment by moment, not forgetting how our hearts should go out earnestly in the gospel of God’s grace, for we read,

“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. *And whosoever will, let him drink of the water of life freely* (Rev. xxii. 17).

May God grant it. Amen.

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