

ON THE RETURN
OF
THE LORD JESUS CHRIST
FROM HEAVEN
TO
MEET HIS SAINTS IN THE AIR.

PART I.—THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA.

PART II.—ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS.

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PART I.

THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA.

WE easily perceive different measures of attainment, both in knowledge and grace, in the churches of old. The elevation, for instance, of that at Ephesus was much above that at Corinth. At Corinth the apostle had to occupy himself with the correction of various errors and abuses, and was thus hindered from bringing out to the disciples the strong and rich meat of the word. He kept from them that "hidden wisdom" which he had in store for the "perfect," because they were "carnal, babes in Christ" (1-Cor. iii. 3). But at Ephesus his course was free; he had not to stop in order to correct abuses and errors, but could go on to feed the church with wisdom and

knowledge, and reveal to them "the mystery" or "hidden wisdom" which he had to keep back from the saints at Corinth (Eph. iii.). At Corinth the Holy Ghost, by the apostle, had to take care of their own things, and show them to them for correction; but at Ephesus he could do his more blessed work of taking of the things of Christ, and showing them for edification and comfort. So that, in distinguishing the condition of these two churches, I might say that the Priest was trimming the lamp at Corinth, using the golden snuffers there for the correction of evil; while at Ephesus he was feeding the lamp, pouring in fresh oil for the filling and brightening of it with increase of light and grace.

The other churches under the care of Paul occupied, as I judge, certain standings between Corinth and Ephesus; that is, they did not call for the same measure of rebuke as Corinth, nor did they stand so much beyond the necessity of all personal notice as Ephesus. But in the epistles to them we discern a mixed action of feeding and trimming the lamps. Indeed, I might class the churches in Galatia with that at Corinth, for there such error had entered that the apostle had little to do but to correct and rebuke it, and thus, as it might be, restored the minds of the disciples. But whether it be at Rome, Philippi, Colosse, or Thessalonica, we see the apostle applying himself both to the evil and the good that was among the saints there; and I would shortly look at each of them.

Thus at Rome he has in view to bind Jewish and Gentile believers together, as among the disciples in that city there appears to have been the retaining of their several prejudices, which were threatening to divide. A great deal of blessed truth is brought out in the epistle; but the present practical end of it all seems to be to secure the union and forbearance of the saints one towards another. But there is not any great amount of evil or mischief recognised by him.

At Philippi the church was beautiful for much grace, and for grace, too, that was peculiar to herself. Yet the apostle, in his epistle to that church, evidently alludes to symptoms of disunion which had appeared among them; but because of the other grace that was there, he alludes to this evil with marked tenderness and reserve, often expressing the comfort wherewith he was comforted in them. And this tender style of the apostle, while noticing the evil among the Philippians, should tell us, when we see much of the grace of Christ in a brother, we should remember that, when dealing with evil that may be in him also. It is not that the apostle overlooked the evil at Philippi, but he remembered the grace that was there; and this imparted a chastened and affectionate tone while addressing himself to the evil.

At Colosse the apostle, it is true, feeds the saints with the most precious knowledge, with the richest thoughts of Christ and His fulness. But this evidently was because he feared the entrance of Judaizing principles among them, for which fear he gives us clearly to see

that he had good reason; and the only divine corrective of that evil is the knowledge of the sufficiency of Christ for all the necessity both of the sinner and of the saint.

At Thessalonica the coming and kingdom of the Lord Jesus had been specially received through the apostle's ministry; and in the epistles to the church there he still feeds them with further light upon that great doctrine. But while he does that, he has also to correct a certain practical error which was peculiar to them.

Thus we clearly discern different conditions in the grace and knowledge of the different churches. And all these things happened unto them for ensamples, as much as the things that happened to Israel in the wilderness; and they are here in the same way written for our learning (1 Cor. x.). And we may bless God that we have this His own inspired answer to so many anxieties and questions that might arise in our hearts while walking one with another.

In what I have said, I may not have altogether rightly discerned the standings of the several churches; but I have no doubt of the fact that they were different. I speak of the churches, as known by the epistles addressed to them severally. Into some of these lamps of the sanctuary more oil had been poured than into others. The fact which I have already noticed so clearly shows us this—that the apostle withheld from the Corinthians the revelation of the mystery which he so fully makes known to the Ephesians. And this at once shows how impotent and unwarranted the requi-

sition is, that the minds of all the disciples should be found exactly according to one measure and standing before the fellowship of the church can be allowed or administered. Nay, so far from this, I am free to believe that if a member of the church at Ephesus had visited Corinth, he would have found them so concerned with questions and strifes which had never troubled him or his brethren at home as might have left him in doubt respecting them. And so one going from Corinth to Ephesus would have found them so occupied with such truth which he had never heard of at home, that he might have suspected, in modern language, that they were all in the clouds at Ephesus. I can thus suppose, from their different measures of light and attainment in Christ, that they might not well have known what to do.

Now I believe we see among the saints at present what we thus might have seen among the churches of old; we have our Ephesian and Corinthian difficulties still. The truths received by some disciples are treated as mere speculation by others, and the condition of some is low and doubtful. The large and blessed mind of God which filled the apostle could, of old, survey them all, and provide for them all, and feed them at Ephesus and trim them at Corinth. But we are weak and narrow-hearted; and the only result commonly is to walk in mutual distance and suspicion. Thus we do not understand one another's speech, and we are scattered. But better is it to be scattered than to be brought together on the terms of any bond short

of God's own bond in the Holy Ghost. Whereto we have already attained, in that let us walk by the same rule, hoping for more; but let us not force beyond that by any fleshly compacts. The fear of God must not be taught by the commandment of men.

In connection with this I would notice the state of Job and his three friends; for I believe that it illustrates the same thing which this state of the churches does. Job could not understand the truth which was in their thoughts, nor could they allow that which he had of God's mind in his; they were but partially in the light, and, through the remainder of darkness that was in them, they mistook the way and jostled each other. And the correction lay only in God, and in the end He applied it. They were all accepted—God proved Himself the adequate healer of all their divisions, as He will by-and-by join the whole of the heavenly family as the Bride in the mansions on high, and unite the two sticks of Ephraim and Judah in the earth below. The largeness of the mind of God contains the remedy, but nothing else does. That mind may express itself forth from the whirlwind, or by the ministry of an apostle; but however that be, it bears the remedy with it. The Lord, who can with one hand separate the chaff from the wheat, with the other can gather up all the scattered grains that are now strewing His field in shameful disorder, and find room in His garner for them all.

And this comforts while it admonishes. It is not that we are to confound the chaff with the wheat. It

is as much of the Spirit of God to say, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema," as to say, "Peace be on all them who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." It is as much of the testimony of God to say, "He that hath not the Son of God hath not life," as to say, "He that hath the Son hath life;" "if any other man preach any other gospel, let him be anathema." But still let us know that there have been different measures of attainments among the saints, and let our personal and individual care be so to walk in light and grace ourselves as not to give occasion either to the enemy to speak reproachfully or to our brethren to speak doubtfully of us. And let us have our hearts and consciences in lively exercise before God, with a purpose to follow our light, lead us where it may, in the grace and fear of the Lord. But when these are the springs of the personal movement and course of each of us, we have, though in many things differently minded, the materials of both safe and blessed communion.

Among the several churches of which we read in the New Testament, I have lately been led specially to meditate on the character and standing of that at Thessalonica. To understand it rightly, we must look first to the nature of St. Paul's preaching at Thessalonica, and then to the purpose and bearing of his epistles.

He visited the place immediately after his sufferings at Philippi, but it was only to renew his sufferings (Acts xvii.). However, a people were gathered out, and in this place gathered out not only to the knowledge of

God's salvation, but eminently to the hope of His "Son from heaven" (1 Thess. i. 10).

On visiting the synagogue at Thessalonica, the apostle sought to prove to the Jews that their promised Messiah was both to die and to rise again; and upon this he asserts, in the first place, that Jesus was the promised Messiah. And having thus claimed for Jesus identity with the Messiah, he asserts, in the second place, that this Jesus the Messiah was also King. This we gather from the challenge of his accusers (Acts xvii. 7). And the scriptures of the Prophets had already testified this, as well as the former—"the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." But these things did not contain the full mystery of Christ. He left something lacking in their faith which he desired to supply (1 Thess. iii. 10); for his ministry among them had been interrupted. The enmity of the Jews had forced him suddenly out (Acts xvii. 10). This, with many other reasons, gave him special concern for them. The grace that was among them was so abundant; they were so excellent for work of faith, for labour of love, and for patience of hope; the tone of their faith was so honest and decisive, and the purpose of heart with which they had come forth to own, as far as they had learnt it, the hope of the gospel—all this drew out his pastoral anxiety for them. And he spent so much labour and care upon them, and they themselves were so exposed to such trial of faith, and to so much that might naturally tempt them to give up Christ, and yet withal they had

made so fair a promise of being his joy and crown in the day of our Lord Jesus, that the apostle was specially jealous over them; and under all this anxiety he had already sent Timothy to them, consenting to be left at Athens alone, desiring greatly to see them himself, and attributing the hindrance to Satan.

Now out of all this care for them the epistles flow. All this is not merely the apostle's but the Spirit's care. The Spirit, who had wrought among them by the apostle, now yearns over them in the apostle.

In their present state of knowledge, their minds were tried and troubled. They had fallen, as I judge, under the power of two distinct apprehensions, which were very painful to them, one of which concerned the sleeping saints, and the other the living saints.

- 1.—They feared that their brethren who had died would come short of the kingdom on the Lord's return to the earth (1 Thess. iv.).
- 2.—They feared that those who were alive would meet the terror of the day that was to accompany that return and usher in the kingdom (2 Thess. ii.).

This, I believe, was their present condition; and to comfort their hearts respecting these two fears and apprehensions appears to me to be the chief purpose of his two epistles to them.

His first epistle was soon after Timothy's return from Thessalonica. Timothy had brought back (iii.) most comfortable intelligence about them; but it is

likely that he had also told the apostle of their anxiety touching their sleeping or dead brethren, and, to remove this, he at once writes to them, that they might be no longer ignorant of this, that the saints, whether sleeping or alive, should be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air at His coming (iv. 13-18).

His second epistle was drawn from him on his hearing of their other anxiety touching the living saints. It matters not how that had arisen, whether from the false suggestions of others or from an imperfect interpretation of his own first epistle; but, to remove it, he writes to them, as I judge, his second epistle, that they might know that "the day of the Lord," in which they feared the living saints would be involved, could not come till the "man of sin" was revealed, and that the man of sin, and all departed from the truth with him, would be the due object to meet the terror of that day, and that therefore they might put away their fear (ii. 1-9).

These I judge to be the occasion and the principal purpose of each of the epistles, the apostle by them meeting the apprehensions of the Thessalonian disciples by teaching them that by the power of Him who raised Jesus from the grave the sleeping saints were as sure of the kingdom as the living ones, and by the gathering together of all to the Lord in the air the living saints were as free of the terror of the day that was coming on the earth as the sleeping ones. Neither life nor death, things present nor things to come, could

separate them, for that they were to ascend, with equal certainty, from the grave or from the earth, as the Lord should descend from heaven, and thus all of them meet Him before He reaches the earth in the terror and judgment of His day.

This I receive as the divine instruction of these epistles. It is important to the standing and hope of the saints. I say not that I have surely discerned aright, but I have had this long in my thoughts, and heard nothing that leads to a questioning of it. But we know nothing but in part, and as the Lord may give to others so may I, and each of us, beloved, receive either for confirmation or correcting. It is more as suggestion, and calling other souls into holy exercise, that I would now give forth this. But the Lord meeting His saints without any necessary cause of delay, without their being subject necessarily to wait for any of the troubles that usher in the glory, I do judge has been from the beginning the promise and hope of the dispensation; and to present that is my desire here.

The descent to saints is to be "with a shout"—the voice of gladness; the descent to the earth, or world, is to be in "flaming fire"—the minister of righteous wrath (comp. 1 Thess. iv. 16, and 2 Thess. i. 7). There would thus be two stages in the Lord's descent, as there had been before in His ascent; for as He went up from the grave to the highest heavens, He stopped on the earth by the way there to meet His remnant and talk with them of the kingdom (Acts i. 3); so, as He comes down from heaven to the earth, He will stop in the air

by the way, there to meet His church or heavenly household, fashioned like unto His own glorious body, to conduct them to the Father's house.

But this day, or descent to the earth in flaming fire, shall find out its object. This will be the spirit of the Lord's mouth consuming, the brightness of His coming destroying, the wicked—the sword out of the mouth of Him whose name is called "The Word of God." The Lord shall then meet the lawless one. The appearing of Him who comes in the glory of God shall meet him that comes according to the lying working of Satan, and set him aside for ever. But those in whom the truth dwells shall shine from above in that day. They shall be to the glory and admiration of the Lord in that day (2 Thess. i. 10). They are to be brought with Jesus in that day (1 Thess. iv. 14). It is the day of the Lord, the day that brings Him forth to the judgment of darkness. It will be as the surprise of daylight upon night. The place of the Lord will be the day then; the world, the place of night and of darkness: and what communion can they have?

The contact must be in judgment, and not in concord. But the saints, who even now are the spirit of the day, must be then in the place of the day. They are "children of the day" (1 Thess. v. 5), and will be in the sphere out of which the day is to rise, and not in the sphere upon which it is to fall. The full power of the day will not be poured down without their presence.

They belong already to the truth, having believed the testimony (2 Thess. i. 10 and ii. 13), and thus will

appear in the train of Him who is called "Faithful and True," when He comes forth for the judgment of those who received not the love of the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (Rev. xix.).

Thus the separation of the saints from the scene of judgment, or the place which the day of the Lord is to surprise, will be like that of Enoch's from the flood, and that was different from Noah's. Noah was carried through it, so that not a hair of his head was wet; but Enoch, before it came, had been translated to a place which the waters could not reach, or rather out of which the waters came. The Lord, accordingly, when speaking to the Jewish election, takes Noah for his text (Matt. xxiv).; for the remnant, like Noah, are to be carried through the judgment. But our apostle, in addressing the church, takes his language rather from the translation of Enoch (1 Thess. iv. 17; 2 Thess. ii. 1).

And this was what the anxiety of the Thessalonian saints, touching themselves as the living saints, craved.

The apostle after this proceeds to describe the object of the righteous wrath of the day. He speaks of "the man of sin," "the son of perdition"—titles expressive of the character and the doom of the great enemy of God in the latter day; and I would shortly now consider that object.

This form of evil has been, in some sense, under the nature of every age of corrupted Christendom; for, from the beginning, "the mystery of iniquity," as we here learn, has been at work. But he has not yet

been manifested. Wickedness is in the ephah still with the talent of lead upon it (Zech. v. 8). But ere the day of the Lord shall visit the earth, the wicked one shall be revealed in the full form of Satan's creature (2 Thess. ii. 9, 10). For Satan's beauty shall be upon him, his power in him, his seat given to him, and his captives serve him. He will thus, in a special and awful sense, be the workmanship of Satan, and he will exalt himself above every God (Dan. xi. 36), be like the Most High (Is. xiv. 14), set his heart as the heart of God (Ezek. xxviii. 6), and sit in the temple of God, as the apostle describes him, showing himself that he is God. He will say in his heart, "There is no God" (Ps. xiv.); and being such an one as this, it remains for the spirit of independency of God to bring him forth to perfection. A mere dark and superstitious system could not do this; there must be more than that, for he is to be king of all the children of pride. And there is nothing that more signalizes this present day of ours than this spirit in man which affects independency of God. There is abroad at present much that is like the getting ready of a temple wherein man may show himself to be God. "See what manner of stones and what buildings are here" is the language of every day, as man is now displaying to his fellow the art and workmanship of this busy age, the report of which now rapidly flies all the world over, promising, as men hope, to form all into one great confederate body.

Indeed I do believe that Satan has now many and

many a hand employed in erecting a suitable temple for the man of sin. I speak, of course, only of the spirit of it, and one knows not how long the building may continue, or how long the infant, who in spirit is now preparing to sit in it, may be in attaining his manhood, or (to which the heart turns from all this sweet relief) how long the forbearance of God may wait on the repentance of sinners. For both the long-suffering of God is to have its blessed measure, and the tower which the children of men are building must again rise to its due elevation. The long-suffering of God, which is salvation, will lead all known to God to repentance (2 Peter iii.), and the iniquity of the wicked be as a breach swelling out in a high wall. The triumph over the wicked must be displayed in a moment of his fullest pride. The invitation to the banquet was given, not only for the first day, but for the second also, ere Esther made her request to let Haman's heart be filled with thoughts of his greatness, so that he should fall before the righteous in the height of it all. But when the building shall be completed, and Satan's creature seated in it; when Satan, after his own manner, shall have fulfilled his own promise, "Ye shall be as gods" (Gen. iii. 5); then, upon this consummation, this full-grown form of evil, this manhood of iniquity, the doom of God will come, and the man of sin shall become the son of perdition. It will be the due and righteous mark for God's vengeance, the creature that shall draw down the lightning from the throne, and call forth the "brightness of his coming" (2 Thess. ii. 8), as the apostle here

speaks, raising up the Lord again out of His holy habitation, to see and to confound the tower which the children of men have builded.

But it is not our immediate concern to know how long all this will go on. We have to do immediately with the Lord's descent from heaven to the air. And St. Paul frequently presents His appearing as the immediate object before the hearts of the saints (Rom. viii. 23, 30; xiii. 12; xvi. 20; 1 Cor. i. 7; xi. 26; xv. 23, 58; Phil. i. 10; iii. 20; iv. 5; Col. iii. iv.; 1 Tim. vi. 14; Tit. ii. 13; 1 Thess. i. 10); and in like manner the other apostles (James v. 7; 1 Peter i. 5; 2 Peter iii. 12; Jude 21). And so the apostle speaks of himself and of those to whom he was writing as remaining alive for the coming of the Lord; for we are drawn forth to that hope. We wait every moment, as it were, for redemption, having the earnest of it already (Rom. viii. 23; Eph. i. 14; iv. 30). We wait for the coming, as the coming waits for our fullness. But nothing but that fulness, which is God's salvation (2 Peter iii. 15), do the apostles appear to me ever to contemplate as necessarily delaying it.

Thus: 1. As to sufferings and persecutions. It is true they were to be, but they always address the saints as ever being more or less in them. 2. As to death. They speak of it as that through which the saints have already in some sense passed (Col. iii. 3), but never present it as the hope of the saint. 3. As to corruptions within the church. They certainly anticipate them, but still they guard that generation against them,

speaking of corruptions even of the last days as having already appeared. 4. As to revival of the church. They never, I believe, promise it, or offer it as the hope of the saints. And, 5. As to revolutions and political changes in the world. They never allude to them or instruct us about them. If in any sense St. Paul makes us acquainted with politics, it is with millennial politics; for, while he says nothing to us about the affairs of the present kingdoms of this world, he does tell us of the affairs of the kingdom of the Son of man; how all things are to be subdued to it, and then how it is itself to be delivered up (1 Cor. xv. 24-26). But till that kingdom come, he gives us no place in, or dependence upon, the changes in the nations. He would have us be subject to the powers of them, and to pray for their peace; but our heavenly hopes he does not suspend on any such earthly circumstances. In the exhortations even to patience there is still the drawing nigh of the Lord (James v. 8.; Heb. x. 37). In the old dispensation there was necessarily a delay, because they without us could not be made perfect (Heb. xi. 40). But now in our dispensation that needed perfection is come (Heb. x. 14).

I therefore judge that our immediate hope—that of meeting the Lord in the air—does not necessarily wait for any thing. His coming to the earth, I surely know, must wait for much. But that is not our first prospect. I do not say when the rapture will be. It may be more distant than our hope would have it, and hope deferred should make the heart sick. But the

delay is not for the purpose of sickening the hearts of saints, but for saving the souls of sinners. "The long-suffering of God is salvation." We should remember this, every moment of the delay, be it long or short; and our patience should be unmurmuring, as God's patience is saving and gracious. But I do not judge that the apostles teach us that there is a necessity for some events taking place before that patience ends in the rapture of the saints. There will be strange and awful events, trials and distress of nations, such as never have been; and how soon we know not. The saints, too may be left here for much of all this (I say not otherwise); but their eye is not to be towards such things as their due object. Revolutions in the earth may go on without farther delay, and help to show that the Lord is beginning to think of Israel, to pluck His hand out of His bosom, and to break His long silence towards His ancient people. But I do not judge that the saints necessarily wait on earth for any stage in that great and interesting action. Their rising into the air to meet their descending Lord is independent of it—an event, too, which is not, as I further judge, the subject of signs and tokens. The hour of it rests in the accomplishing of the number of the elect, and that is the Father's secret, of which no movements among the nations are the sign or the harbinger. It waits for nothing necessarily, I believe, but the Father's pleasure touching His heavenly family, not even for the manifestation, much less for the destruction, of that last and full form of evil, which is to bring the

Lord, as we have already seen, in judgment down to the earth. Something was to hinder this manifestation (2 Thess. ii. 7). It has been an inquiry among the saints what this let or hindrance is; and no doubt it belongs to such a department of the revelation of God as must have us prepared to find a difference of judgment upon it. But such differences never touch, nor can they touch, "the unity of the Spirit." And it should be our desire, in the love of the Spirit, both to bear with one another in full peace, and to help one another's joy in the future knowledge of these, and all the ways of our blessed Lord.

Were I to speak particularly on this, I should say that it appears to me that we have to judge of the nature of that which hinders by the nature of that which is hindered. It was the presence of "the accursed thing" which in old time let or hindered the manifestation of the power of God, and, till it was removed, that holy power could not display itself. I refer to Achan in the camp of Israel (Josh. viii.). So the presence of the traitor hindered the Lord's expression of His own glory (John xiii.); but when "he had gone out," that glory was declared. Now, according to this, it must be the presence of something good, something that is of God, which is now hindering the manifestation of the full power of Satan, and, till that is "taken away," the wicked one cannot be displayed. It is not the way of evil to restrain evil, or of good to restrain good; each rather nourishes its own likeness, while it hinders the full operation of its opposite. It

must, therefore, I judge, be something good, something that God can own, which is τὸ κατέχον, the letting thing here. But I say no more; for it may be more according to the mind of the Spirit to leave this alone as a secret. The Spirit of God leaves this letting thing, perhaps advisedly, undefined. But even this is enough to show us that the saints are not necessarily delayed here on earth. If that which hinders the revelation of the man of sin is not now to be known by the saints, they may know, even from this, that they do not necessarily wait here for such revelation; and that is all that I am pressing. It may be, I grant, that the letting thing is thus advisedly, in the wisdom of the Spirit, left as a secret.

But this I again say (having slightly noticed it before), that the heavenly people are a people not left like Noah, but taken away like Enoch—taken away too, not by the day of the Lord or by judgment, as the antediluvian generation, but before that day or judgment, like that heavenly man who “walked with God.” For Enoch was a heavenly man—a man, I mean, of a heavenly destiny. And he was not on the earth when the judgment of the Lord visited it: he knew of it and prophesied of it (Jude 14), but he was not in it. Ere it came, he had gone to heaven. And all this, I believe, savours of us and of our calling. We are a people destined to be taken away from the earth at some undefined moment, though instructed in its subsequent judgment. And when that judgment comes, we shall be in the train, and not before the face, of Him who executes it.

Enoch, as one taken away, is surely our pattern, and not the sinners in the day of Noah. For Enoch was taken away to heaven because "he pleased God;" they were taken away by judgment, because "all flesh had corrupted his way" before Him.

Simple, happy, and yet serious lessons!

And surely we can have no doubt that the saints are not to wait on the earth for the coming of the Son of man. They wait for the "Son from heaven" (1 Thess. i.), *i.e.*, for the Son of God's descent from heaven to the air, and not for the Son of man's descent to the earth. All this persuades me more and more of the saints being removed before the day of the Lord visits the earth at all. It is not only that they shall be saved out of it or taken away during it, but taken away before it surprises all them that are on the earth in the day of the coming of the Son of man, who is then to come as a thief.

Such are the great matters taught, I believe, in these epistles, the fear of the Thessalonian saints, as I have noticed, calling for the special comfort of these truths. And, as connected with these truths, they show us also the path of the saints into the kingdom; and in that path there is something that is truly blessed. But it is a wondrous and divine subject, and we should remember, as with unshod feet, on whose paths we are treading. May the Lord ever keep and guide our thoughts!

The first stage in the glorious journey is the ascent of the saints, as we have seen, whether dead or alive, in their bodies of glory, to meet the Lord as He reaches

the air in His descent from heaven (1 Thess. iv.). This is the coming which the saints now look for, and of which their Lord has said to them, "Behold, I come quickly." It is at this meeting with Him "in the air" that we shall (1 Thess. ii. 19) be presented to Himself, His own glorious and ransomed saints. This will be the redemption of the body (Rom. viii.). The vile body will be fashioned like unto His own glorious body (Phil. iii.). And this meeting will be in the gladness of a jubilee, for the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, and the church shall ascend with a responsive song: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. xv.)

And after thus meeting the Lord, and being thus presented to Himself, the next stage in the blissful way will conduct us to the Father (1 Thess. iii. 13). The path of life will then be ours, beloved, as it has already been His—the path that leads to the Father, and thus to fulness of joy and everlasting pleasures (Psalm xvi.). And this will be the full owning of the saints as children; as the next scene into which they are to pass, and which we will look at presently, will be the full owning of them as heirs. For the divine order is, "if children, then heirs" (Rom. viii.).

But before I pass to the next stage in these paths of glory, I would observe, that these stages in the way of Himself and the saints the Lord in His own teaching had already presented to the faith of His disciples; for He had told them that, though they could not follow Him at that time (and He was then going to

the Father), yet that they should follow Him afterwards, when He had prepared mansions in the same house of the Father for them. But before they should follow Him into that house, He told them also that He would "come again, and receive them unto Himself"—as the apostle speaks, meet them alone in the air (John xiii. 36; xiv. 3). So that, in these words and promises, the Lord, in St. John's Gospel, had already opened these paths to the eye of faith, His own path to the Father, His coming back again to meet His saints, and then their all going together into the Father's house. They were to see Himself before they went into the prepared mansions of the Father's house; as here our apostle presents them meeting the Lord immediately on their ascent into the air, and then, when thus joined with Him, but not till then, going into the Father's presence (1 Thess. iii. 13). And I know not what language can more clearly express this than our Lord's own words in the place I have referred to. Speaking of the Father's house, He says, "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." He would first receive them to Himself, or meet them alone, and then conduct them into the Father's house. And these are the ascending paths of the saints. We shall have to trace a descending one presently; but in either direction they are still glorious, and the Lord is with them for ever.

And it is now, after the saints are at home with the Lord in the Father's house, I believe, that, according

to the language of the Jewish prophet, the Son of man comes to the Ancient of days and gets dominion (Dan. vii.); or, according to the vision of the Apocalypse, the Lamb takes the book out of the right hand of Him that sits on the throne, and the church rejoices at the prospect of their speedy reign on the earth (Rev. v.).

Then, in due season, the third stage in the path of glory will be trodden. Jesus, thus in power, will come down with His mighty angels in flaming fire to put away the wicked from the presence of His glory, and to be glorified in His saints. This we have also in our epistles (2 Thess. i. 7-10). This will be His coming in clouds—the clouds of heaven—not alone as when He met the church in the air, nor yet with His saints in the character of the children of the Father when He took them to their mansions, but with them as the “armies of heaven.” He now comes with ten thousand of His saints, as the rider on the white horse, the heaven opening to let down the descending hosts of the Lord to execute judgment on the corruptors of the earth, and then to vindicate His title to the kingdoms of the world (Matt. xxiv. 30; xxvi. 64; Jude 14; Rev. i. 7; xix. 14). And this will be the redemption of the inheritance. For the glory of the Lord shall survive all the scene of judgment, and the lovers of the truth shall have their place in it, when the last lie and darkness of Satan and the world shall be set aside (2 Thess. ii. 14) for ever. Then shall Jesus be seen as the King in His beauty. Every knee shall bow

to Him. He shall sit on the throne of His glory, and His saints receive power with Him, according to their service (Matt. xxv. 31; Luke xix. 17). This shall be the promised appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ, which He shall show, who is the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. vi.). And then shall one enemy after another be subdued to Him, till all close in the delivery up of the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. xv. 28).

Thus, beloved, our happy feet will first tread the heavenward way to meet the Lord Himself, and then by His own hand we shall be guided first to the home of love, and then to the throne of glory—the house of the Father, and the kingdom of the Son of man. And like these were the ways of Joseph and his brethren after their reconciliation; for Joseph first revealed himself to them in the secret of his own presence, commanding every one to go out from him but themselves; then he brought them in and presented them as his brethren to Pharaoh, seated in the seat that was higher than his; and then he led them forth into the scene of his power and glory, and gave them the richest portion in the inheritance above the people of the land (see Gen. xlv.-xlvii.). And let me add that nothing will be lost as we go onward. The joy of the Lord's own presence, and the fulness of the Father's house, will still be ours after we have entered upon the rule of the kingdom, and ours, beloved, for ever. Surely we may say, in a deeper sense than even David—our God has spoken to us of our house for a great while to come, even for

ever. And again, in a deeper sense than even he, may we not also say: What are we, that we should be brought hitherto? (2 Sam. vii. 18, 19.) For His word's sake, and according to His own heart, He has done all these things (2 Sam. vii. 21). His own love must account for it all, for nothing else can. The lowest are exalted the highest. Angels are passed by, and the seed of Abraham taken up (Heb. ii.). The separated Jew is passed by, and the sinners of the Gentiles taken up; the tattered prodigal gets the best robe, and he that ate swine's husks, the fatted calf; for grace—the riches and the glory of grace—must be displayed; and these are its ways, its blissful ways. It is only for us, beloved, to tread softly here where all is defiled, till our feet travel these paths of joy and glory without fear of thorn or stain for ever.

These great things of God's counsels are thus noticed in these epistles to the Thessalonian saints. They had come forth from an idolatrous world to own the living God in the midst of it, and to wait for His Son from heaven; and the Holy Ghost here feeds their enlarging desires.

But the apostle had to notice also some evil that was among them. He had to admonish as well as comfort, and to pray not only that their hearts might be comforted, but established in every good word and work. (2 Thess. ii. 17). For some of them had ceased "to labour with their hands." It may be that this had been the fruit of some corrupt view of their great distinguishing doctrine, the coming of the Lord. For it

is Satan's way, if he cannot rob us of truth, to corrupt it while it is still in our hand. The Thessalonians were zealous; they had come to meet the Lord with purpose of heart; but this had become connected with a desertion of their quiet industrious private walk. But he does not condemn this zeal, or seek to correct the evil, by withdrawing the Lord's coming from their view. We have seen that it is rather his great subject; but he desires for them that they might be in patient, and not disorderly, waiting for it, and urges this duty upon them by reminding them of his example and his precept while he was among them. For he had been a labourer for his own support at Thessalonica, this having been so ordered in the provisional wisdom of God, who now by His Spirit uses that fact for the admonition and guidance of the saints there.

Such, I judge, was the standing and character of the church at Thessalonica, with their peculiar doctrines and anxieties, and the apostle's teaching upon them. Eminent they were for simplicity of faith, brotherly love, and desire for the return of the Lord; but withal, as we have seen, needing further light on the ways of the Lord, and also rebuke and admonition for some of their own ways. But above all that, I would again, in closing, press on the thoughts of my brethren, as it was that which was the chief point of attraction to my own mind, this—that we have here the doctrine of the rapture of the saints, whether "sleeping" or "alive," to meet their Lord "in the air," before He touches the earth. This rapture into the air may be

called resurrection, but it is ~~ascension~~ as well as resurrection; and the church's history is included between the resurrection or ascension of the Lord and this her own resurrection or ascension. The one gave her life, and sent her, on her wilderness journey, a stranger in the earth; the other will close her wilderness journey, and take her to her home in heaven. But these resurrections of the Lord and of the church are peculiar. They are resurrections *from* the dead. It was Sadducean pravity to deny resurrection *of* the dead, and that doctrine is numbered among Jewish principles in Heb. vi. But a resurrection from the dead was something quite beyond a Jewish measure of faith. The disciples questioned what it could mean when the Lord spake of it (Mark ix. 10); and an allusion to it quite crossed and passed by all Martha's thoughts, though she presented a fair standard of the nation's faith (John xi. 24-26). When she spoke of a resurrection at the last day, the Lord told her of a power of resurrection in Himself which would not wait for the last day, but would act in a manner that should gloriously forestall all other resurrections by a resurrection worthy of Him who is "the resurrection and the life." And this alone is a resurrection in the power of the presence of the Spirit of God (Rom. viii. 11). This was the resurrection of the Lord Himself, a resurrection from the dead, and this will be the resurrection of those that are His "at His coming," or presence, as the Spirit in the church now speaks (1 Cor. xv. 22).

The patriarchs of the Jewish family all put special value

on their dead bodies. They were religiously laid up in Machpelah, and this care and zeal of theirs was the confession of their sure and certain hope of resurrection. But they connected resurrection with the land of Canaan; and therefore Jacob and Joseph, who died in Egypt, provided that their bones should be carried over and laid in Canaan, thus telling us that their hope of resurrection was the same as their hope of final possession of the promised land. All this, it is true, was perfect in those who had but earthly resurrection hopes.

But the church has a higher hope. Heaven and ascension into the air are now before her; Canaan and resurrection from the grave of Machpelah were before the patriarchs. She has already, in spirit, gone on high with Christ, and is looking for the day when she shall ascend after Him to meet Him in a glorified body. And this alone is perfect in her, as the former hope was perfect in them; for each is in season with the enlarging mind and grace of God towards us. The patriarchs were to die, and they looked for resurrection and the land under God (Gen. i. 24, 25). The church is risen, and looks for ascension and heaven with the glorified Lord (Phil. iii. 20, 21).

And this resurrection or ascension of the saints is, as I have already observed, that which is to close the dispensation of the church, as the resurrection or ascension of the Lord opened it, like the two passages which opened and closed the wilderness to Israel.

And we stand, beloved, on the banks of Jordan. It is the wilderness still, and the Manna and the Rock are

wanted still. But it is also the skirts of the glory : our salvation is nearer then when we believed. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." The Holy Ghost, sent down already from heaven, is in us (1 Cor. vi. 19), the harbinger of approaching daylight. He makes us already "children of light and children of the day" (1 Thess. v. 5). "It is high time to awake." Let us only rise and look out, and we may see the streaks of the morning. The spirit of the day is in us, the pledge that it will itself soon break in glory on our heads.

But there was, it is true, a lingering on the banks of the Jordan. The host of God waited till a certain mission into the defiled land of the Amorites was over. Certain spies went into the land of judgment (Josh. ii.). The sin of the Amorites was then full, and Joshua's sword might have entered at once. But there was a moment of respite, and it proved salvation. It was a standing at the very door of the doomed house, and knocking, if haply anyone would even then open the door. And so it was ; a poor defiled sinner of the place arose at the bidding, and, moved with fear, prepared an ark for the saving of her house. She was in the place of death and judgment ; but mercy was made to rejoice there, and her house, with the scarlet thread hanging from the window, became another blood-sprinkled lintel, and the angel of destruction again passed on. And so do we now wait. The glory has not yet broken, but waits for the appointed mission of grace to go and do its work. The long-suffering of God is salvation, He being not willing that any shou'd

perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter iii.). We wait till the body be completed in all its holy and appointed measure, till all have come in the knowledge of the Son of God to a perfect man. Then the power of death shall give way before the feet of the priests again (Josh. iii.). "For if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. viii. 11). If we thus, as sons and priests of God, carry the ark of the Lord, the waters shall not withstand our passage. We have the hidden life, and this is above the power of death.

These, and richer and better than these, or than heart can conceive, are the ways of Him who hath loved us. They are telling, and will still tell us, that God is love, and that in blessing He is doing His work, and in manifesting grace to the unworthy showing Himself. We now learn what grace is in all its varied resources, and our feet shall by-and-by tread one path after another, that we may learn what glory is. Since Jesus rose, we have found every path in the desert a path of grace; but glory is still before us. Its paths we do not yet tread, as Joshua said to the people on the banks of Jordan, anticipating their speedy passage through it: "Ye have not passed this way heretofore" (Josh. iii. 4). But, surely, we need not fear the dazzling paths. The hand that divided the Red Sea will with equal ease divide the Jordan. He that raised up Christ from the dead will also quicken our

mortal bodies to the same glory. It is as yet an untrod way, it is true; but the hand of the Lord is the same. It is not the glory of Christ that is the great thing: it is the cross of Christ that is the great thing, and that is ours already. If God has given us His suffering Son, it will be found a small and easy thing (to speak after the manner of men) to give us His glorious Son. If we know that Jesus, bowing His head on the tree, is ours, we may well know that Jesus exalted—exalted in highest glory—will be ours. The pledge is sure; and, even as there was a pillar of twelve stones—a stone for every tribe, so will there be the abiding praise of all His saints to speak the riches of grace and glory for evermore.

“To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.”

PART II.

ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS.

“THE important thing is having Jesus in the glory as our hope; a very subordinate thing, the question *when* shall we be in the glory with Him. If any-one’s teaching made the saints value Jesus as their hope less, it would be sufficient to show their teaching to be faulty. But if it be only to the effect of making them think the time when they shall be in the glory farther off than they supposed, I have nothing to say. Those who have such a hope ought to be able to wait.”

Fully do I consent to these words of a brother much loved in the Lord; and though I may go a little into details on the subject, nothing I trust may at all arise to contend with this judgment. But some have judged that inquiry into these details has been evaded, or at least that the word of God concerning them has been treated carelessly, and confidence upon this ground ought not to be lightly shaken.

For though it may be true that, in the progress of our thoughts upon them, haste has been betrayed, and conclusions have either been assumed unguardedly, asserted too strongly, or adopted merely from the teaching of others, yet the sole and supreme authority

of Scripture has been (at least intentionally) upheld, and not a jot or tittle of it treated with a wilfully careless mind. This indeed we would say, and seek for happy common confidence herein. But let me add what I believe is very important also, that while Scripture alone is to form all our thoughts, it is also to give to our minds the relative place and proportion of the different branches, if I may so speak, of divine knowledge. As to the knowledge then of prophetic truth, it is, like every other branch, to have only its due measure of importance given to it.

And upon this I would observe, that when in the course of his teaching St. Paul comes to touch upon it he merely says, "I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant" (Rom. xi.); a style surely which he would not and could not have used had he been about to propound some of the essential parts of gospel or saving truth. But not only is its proportionate value to be thus considered, but also seasonableness in the pursuit of this knowledge. The intercourse of the Lord with Nicodemus shows us this; for the Lord would not meet his inquiry or desire after heavenly mysteries till the state of his own soul was called into question and settled. Paul's treatment of the Corinthians intimates the same; for he would not feed them, as they were carnal and walking as men, with that hidden wisdom which was seasonable only for the perfect (1 Cor. ii. 3).

And again, I observe that there is to be a measure in our expectations about this knowledge; for it is told us that our present knowledge, compared with what it

shall be, is that of mere childhood ; that we know only in part, and see as through a glass darkly (1 Cor. xiii.). And Peter intimates the same. For while he speaks of the prophetic word as a light or a lamp, he gives us to know that the lamp does not shed the morning, for the day-dawn is to spring in another season* (2 Peter i.). And it is morally important to remember that our expectations are to be thus measured, for it will help us to a lowly mind, and rebuke a spirit of authority and self-complacency.

But then I fully grant the value of prophetic knowledge. It has been again and again used to verify the claims of Jesus, and affirm our holy faith. It is of use to nourish right affections and a godly mind. It feeds our hopes. It secures us (under the Holy Ghost) against the working of Satan and his deceits ; it prepares us for the opening circumstances of the world, so that we may not be surprised by them ; and it teaches us something of our dignity as saints, by letting us see how the Lord entrusts us with His secrets, and brings us into greater nearness to Himself.

These are among the blessings to our souls which attach to this knowledge. And if I hint at the measure of importance to be given to it, the expectations to be indulged respecting it, or that there is to be a season for pursuing it, I am not daring for a moment to discourage it : that would be the enemy's work. It was the commu-

* [I doubt that this is Peter's meaning, but rather the value of the prophetic word allowed while the superiority of the heavenly hope is asserted.—Ed.]

nicator of prophetic light whom "the prince of the kingdom of Persia" would have kept from Daniel (chap. x.).

And let me say that a habit of thoughtful reading of every passage I would also cultivate.

But there may be error on the one side as well as on the other. If the imaginative tendency of some minds is to be watched, so has the literal or exact method of others. It was an error of too much exactness in interpretation to say, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" because Jesus had been speaking of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. It was an error of too much liberty in interpretation to say, "that disciple should not die," because Jesus had said, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" This is so, I believe; but I pass it, desiring now, in the first place, to notice the principal Scriptures, on the authority of which it is judged by many that we should give up the hope that the Lord may return from heaven to meet the saints in the air at any time, or the thought that the moment of that return is not made necessarily dependent on events not yet transpired; and then, secondly, though briefly, to notice the grounds on which that thought rests. May we all be conscious, in handling the precious things of God, that we have no credit of our own to sustain and no opinions of our own to promote! May we tremble at His word as well as rejoice in it, surrender our minds to it through the Spirit, and seek the profit and joy of all the saints! And may the Spirit who dwells in us keep our hearts in holy charity and like-mindedness continually!

Psalm cx. 1.—It has been said that this passage forbids the thought that the Lord Jesus can leave His present seat in heaven till all the earth is put in readiness for His treading down His enemies, and executing vengeance on the matured wickedness or lawlessness of the world.

If this be just interpretation, surely I must grant that this Scripture witnesses against the thought that nothing now hinders the Lord's return from heaven to meet the saints in the air. But we must patiently consider it, and in doing so I think I have the warrant of Scripture itself for more than questioning this. And here let me say, or rather remember, what all of us would readily admit, that Scripture must always be read in the light of Scripture: in other words we must act on this principle—"it is written again." The Lord Jesus, when tempted, did not answer the tempter by telling him that he had not quoted Scripture exactly, but by saying that there were other Scriptures to be listened to also. The latter light must be consulted (see 1 Cor. v. 9, 10). As to this very distinguished verse in Ps. cx., the inquiry is—does this language hinder the Lord leaving the seat He then took till the moment of His exercising the power here pledged to Him? It teaches us that His next action in the earth shall be that of taking vengeance; but does it teach us that He is to do nothing in heaven till then but sit on the right hand of God? I believe not, for two reasons drawn from the light of other words of God.

1. The word the Holy Ghost is commenting on

is τὸ λοιπὸν "from henceforth," and not ἐκεῖ "there" (Heb. x. 12, 13). That is, we are told that all along the time till the promise be made good He would be expecting; but we are not told that He would be seated in His then place while thus expecting.

2. In entire accordance with this suggestion, which we get from this passage, we find that His sitting has been interrupted; for Stephen saw Him standing (Acts vii.), and John saw Him walking among the candlesticks in Asia, taking a book, descending to set His foot on sea and land, and then standing on Mount Zion with 144,000 (Rev. i., v., x., xiv.). This is all consistent. And if He come to meet His saints in the air, there will be no more violence done (Psalm cx. 1), than when He filled those actions which Stephen and John witnessed. So that, rightly to interpret that inspired verse (Ps. cx. 1), I get two inspired commentaries. I get Heb. x. 13, which leads me to know that His present expectation is not linked with His sitting, but simply with the interval from the time of the promise to its accomplishment; and I get such passages as Acts vii. 56, which lead me to see that His sitting has been interrupted.

All this is very simple, as I judge; but the passage is so full of meaning and value to our souls that it invites and will excuse a further meditation.

The death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ are spoken of under two very distinct characters, or looked at in two different lights.

1. The death is treated of as that of the Lamb of

God for us sinners, inflicted by the righteous gracious hand of God Himself, accomplishing the remission of our sins. The resurrection is treated of as flowing from such a death, and furthering the ends of blessing to us; and so is the ascension (see Rom. iv. 25, viii. 34; Heb. viii. 1).

2. The death is also considered as having been endured at the hand of man, his wickedness and unmixed enmity to God. In such character, the Lord continually anticipates His death, and speaks of it in the gospel (see Matt. xvi., xvii., xx.; Mark viii., ix., x.; Luke ix., xviii.). His resurrection is also spoken of in each of those passages, and is anticipated no doubt in harmony with this character of His death, and, therefore, not as resurrection for our blessing as sinners, but for His vindication as wronged and rejected by man (see also Acts xvii. 31). And so also as to His ascension. As the death was at the hand of wicked men, and as the resurrection was a vindication of Jesus, so the ascension was the exaltation of Jesus in order to capacitate Him, so to speak, to execute the judgment upon wicked man. The figure of the stone made the head of the corner in heaven, for the purpose of falling and grinding the enemy to powder, sets forth this truth (see Matt. xxi.).

Now Ps. cx. 1 is the same. It is Jehovah welcoming Christ, after His rejection here, to heaven, promising Him rest in that bright and holy place, that place of all honour and power, till the due season come for His putting His enemies as the footstool for His feet.

And on the ground of this solemn truth, Peter warns the whole house of Israel to take care how they still reject Jesus (Acts ii. 36); as Jesus afterwards warns Saul of Tarsus (Acts ix. 5). The ascension of the Lord is thus noticed in Ps. cx. 1. Jehovah undertakes to maintain Jesus in the place of honour and power till the day of public vindication and vengeance come. This is the view of the great fact of the ascension given there. It is not looked at as for the saints, but as against the world. It is Jesus, exalted in defiance of man, and not in behalf of sinners; and it does not hinder His acting for His people, or His sympathy with them. That word could suffer no wrong—His present vindication, in defiance of His enemies, will suffer no abatement by Jesus rising from His seat at the right hand of God, either at the martyrdom of Stephen, or His coming down to meet Saul on the road to Damascus, or to meet His ascending saints in the air, or being present at the celebration of His own marriage supper; though such acts might take place before His enemies be made his footstool. His washing His disciples' feet, and preparing mansions for them in the Father's house, even now, are not at variance with His constant session at the right hand of God in the real divine sense of Psalm cx. 1. Hebrews x. 13, shows us the affection with which the Lord Jesus seated Himself in this appointed place of honour and power, or (to speak of the manner of men) how He understood the words of Jehovah in Psalm cx. 1. He heard them as a promise of vengeance upon His

enemies, and expected accordingly. He did not know the time, but He did the truth of the promise; and He therefore expected, and would expect: be the time long or short, He was kept by it in prospect of the day of vengeance. This, I must say, forbids our impressing such a sense on the word "until." In every day's intercourse with one another, we use this word "until" as meaning "in prospect of"—a sense, which it is manifest the Spirit simply puts on it in 1 Tim. vi. 14, and several kindred passages; where St. Paul did not intend to say Timothy was to continue in his ministry up to the very moment of the Lord's return in glory, but was merely urging him to a faithful discharge of that ministry in prospect of such return, come when it may. He was speaking morally and not prophetically—to the conscience, and not to the mere intelligence of Timothy. He was stirring up his diligence, and not instructing him in the circumstances of the second glorious advent of Jesus. But I pass from this.

Romans xi. 25.—The next Scripture to which I will refer is suggested by the preceding, because it depends on the value of the same word "until" (*ἄχρι*).

This passage, strictly read, only tells us that the Lord will not deal with "the blindness of Israel" till He has ended His work with "the fulness of the Gentiles." It does not determine that He is to enter on the second of these actions immediately on His closing the first. But even if that be implied, it does not interfere with any previous thoughts we may have had; because, as I

have been just reminded by another, all of us own that the Spirit will begin to move the hearts of the remnant in Israel when the moment thus marked off arrives. So far all is consistent, and our thoughts and judgments quite in common. But on the authority of this verse it has been asked, can we conceive that Israel will incur their time of thickest darkness (as they will when they consent to the pretensions of the wilful king) at a period subsequent to the taking of the saints out of the world, and therefore subsequent to the coming in of the fulness of the Gentiles; while this verse so clearly intimates that their darkness or blindness lasts only up to the time of the coming in of the fulness of the Gentiles?

This Scripture is surely most worthy of being strongly pressed on our attention on such a subject as the present. But I must still inquire from the whole book of God whether the conclusion drawn from it is sanctioned by the great standard and test of all conclusions? Now I find in Galatians iii. this language, "the law was added because of transgressions, till" (*ἄχρι*) &c. We all glory in knowing that our blessed Lord is the Seed here anticipated; and when I remember that, and then bethink me what His life was, I find that after the Seed did come the law both exacted and received its fullest, nay, its only answer; and by that Seed was magnified and made honourable. The very Seed Himself, when He came, said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." And the law was discharged

only by the death of the Seed. (Rom. vii. 4; Eph. ii. 15; Col. ii. 14.) And if the law only received its highest honour and fullest vindication after that Seed had come, there is divine or scriptural analogy to warrant our saying that the blindness of Israel may be the thickest after the fulness of the Gentiles has come in. The error is altogether in our own minds. I need not say that, save for the joy of justifying the oracles of God; for wisdom is justified of her children. The Scripture needs no apology nor defence from us, but the error is in our own minds. We have not the divine method. We are accurate after a human model merely. And I am sure that in Romans xi. 25, the Holy Ghost was only marking out large dispensational truths; taking the great landmarks, by the hand of the apostle, in the vast scenery which lay before him, and leaving it, if I may so speak, to be surveyed more particularly by others, if the Lord of the country should so please it. For such had been the divine method from the beginning. The words of the prophets must open to let in the further revelations which we get through the apostles. I need not instance this; it is known too well among us. A paper, entitled "Things New and Old," in the *Christian Witness*, gives full illustration of this. And I am sure that it is so in these passages from Galatians iii. and Romans xi. Am I offended by finding that the law was making its fullest claims and receiving its highest honours after the period to which Galatians iii. 19 refers? Not at all. I only learn by this that the apostle is speaking of

grand dispensational truths, and not of exact moments of time; and I admire the divine method suggested by all this. I can delight in the extensive view which the more distant position up to which the Spirit led me affords, as I can delight in the more minute and varied undulations which a nearer sight gives me to discover. "Thou son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, and if they be ashamed of all that they have done, show them the form of the house." The second discovery was more minute than the first. And this is the constant way. And we are not to say, that because the Lord is graciously telling us of grand dispensational matters (as He does in Galatians iii. and Romans xi.), that therefore the whole secret is exhausted. The house was shown, but within the house there was a form and a fashion, and ordinances, and laws, and goings out and comings in, which the more distant and earlier sight of the building itself had not discovered, but which, in due season, were all to be exhibited (see Ezek. xlii.).

Matthew xiii.—The parable of the wheat and tares has been much used to the same intent, forbidding, as is judged, the thought of our meeting the Lord in the air till the end of the age, or the time of the judicial cleansing of the earth.

I take leave to look at it therefore a little particularly, desiring to remember that the word is the teacher, and we are only to learn. At the close of chapter xii. our Lord had looked on the apostate condition of Israel

and found all there ready for judgment. In the figure of the unclean spirit returning to dwell in the desert house, He gives notice of the matured state of evil in Israel (xii. 45); but then, in the course of the next chapter (xiii.), another thing shows itself: that He is only leaving one scene of apostacy for another—that He is to find apostacy or corruption in that dispensation called “the kingdom of heaven,” as He had just found it in Israel (*i.e.*, in the field of the world, as well as in the house of the Jew). Being disappointed of all fruit in Israel, He becomes a sower again—a sower of good seed; but His ground soon yields Him a mingled crop of wheat and tares. This is the first impression, I believe, to be received from this chapter.

But of course there is much more, for the Lord goes on to give the history of the two kinds of seed in a general way, onward to the harvest. Thus, as to “the tares,” He presents them under two figures of the “mustard seed” and the “leaven.” As to the “wheat,” they also appear in two characters—the “treasure” and the “pearl.” The quality and value of the two kinds of seed are thus, as in figures, taught us; and at the close, in the parable of the drag-net, the separation of the two is declared, or the putting apart for ever the tares and the wheat, the good and the bad fish, the children of the kingdom and the children of the wicked one. I therefore quite allow that this chapter deals with the history of Christendom, but as surely judge that in this history of the dispensation the Lord does not design to fill out the

whole scene, or give every feature in the picture—quite according to the divine method. I have already noticed certain details in a great, grand subject, remaining untold for awhile, or reserved for a more due season—as the great Teacher Himself says, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” The taking of the saints into the air to meet their descending Lord before He reach the earth in judgment was a part of the great mystery which might well have been reserved for a season beyond the time of Matthew xiii. ; and it appears from the clearest testimony of the passage itself that it was so reserved, and advisedly passed without notice, because in this parable of the wheat and the tares the removal of the “children of the wicked one” is made the first action : “Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them.” The judgment of the wicked is made the first act in the proceeding here contemplated ; and we all know and acknowledge that it will be prior to the manifestation of the saints in the kingdom, but as surely ulterior to the ascension of the saints into the air. That is, the wicked will be cleared away by the judgment before the righteous shine forth in the kingdom, but not before they meet their Lord in the air. This is of common consent among us. We may differ as to the length of the interval, but we may assume it to be a point of common consent that the meeting the Lord will precede the cutting off the ungodly,* or the burning of the tares. And this deter-

* [Not their gathering and binding in bundles.—ED.]

mimes the suggestion that the Lord has passed by the rapture in the circumstances of this parable. And accordingly He speaks of the harvest as the shining of the saints in the kingdom. This is language which also verifies the same suggestion. The rapture into the air and the shining or manifestation of the kingdom are not the same action, as the house of the Father and the kingdom of the Father are not formally the same place. I may therefore conclude that the strict language of the parable (if we try its value by the rule of strict literal exactness) compels us to say that the taking of the saints into the air is advisedly passed by.

And I may just add that the word, "let both grow together until the harvest," had more of a moral character than has been given to it. It was said to check the impatient thought of present judgment. The Lord's word was rather to the heart and conscience of His mistaken servants—happy, by the way, to see they were spoken of as servants, though mistaking. May we have increased grace and wisdom from Himself!

Luke xix. 12-27.—It has been observed that this parable gives us to know that the saints of the heavenly places are to continue here in the place of service till the Lord come back—or that when He returns to the earth He will find them at their work. My observation on Matt. xiii. may generally, I believe, apply to this. For such a construction of the parable as the above conclusion gives it, I have no doubt is too literally exact. For it is plain that the Lord had no

design by this parable to instruct us fully in all the mysteries of His absence in the distant country. For much more, as we know, awaited Him then than the getting Himself a kingdom; and more was to attend on His return than the rewards of His servants and the excision of His enemies. In this parable, therefore, He does not design to tell the whole secret, but He set Himself to correct the thought that the kingdom of God was immediately to appear; and He gives such a view of the mystery as fully answers that end. It is the kingdom He is treating of; for it was the kingdom and its time of appearing that the thoughts of the multitude were now upon. The rewards of that kingdom, and the clearing the scene of it of the rebel citizens, He anticipates and teaches; and if these things, if these features in the mystic picture are all that are taught, there is something omitted, just as in the preceding case of the wheat and tares. The Lord postpones the kingdom to His absence in the distant country and return here. That is most sure, and the rewards of His servants wait for that kingdom most certainly also. But we all consent, on the testimony of many Scriptures, that ere His feet again touch the scene of His kingly power He will have met His saints in the air. And therefore to say that He is to find them at work here is too precise. I am sure, from these samples of a certain character of interpretation, that it errs in a too literal exactness from not duly considering the purpose of the Spirit in the given Scripture. If the purpose be moral, designing to affect the conscience or move the

heart, and I read it as if it were prophetic or historical, designing to teach mysteries, I shall miss my way through it. If, for instance, I read Psalms cv. cvi. as a piece of history, or as purposing to give me merely God's dealings with Israel, and Israel's dealings with God, I should say, and contend for it too, that in the land of Egypt the plague of darkness came before that of frogs, and that in the wilderness the sin of Korah preceded the sin of the golden calf. But this would all be error, and great historical inaccuracy, though strict interpretation and accuracy as to the Psalms. The moment, however, I discover that the Spirit's purpose in these Psalms is not historical but moral—to convict the conscience of the Jew, and not merely to remind him of the history of his nation—then, instead of being stumbled by this inaccuracy, I am delighted with all, and admire it; for I find in it the language which is spoken among ourselves every day. For when we refer to past events for the purpose of illustrating some moral lesson or enforcing some duty, we feel warranted in not observing strictly the times or other mere circumstances of such events; whereas, were we proposing to convey historic information about them, integrity, as well as a desire to accomplish our purpose, would make us careful of every circumstance. I strongly feel this, and discern in it God's most perfect as well as most precious word. For He speaks to us (blessed be His name for it!) in our well-known language, and not with the voice of a barbarian—nay, with the wisdom of the schools of man. But accuracy of a certain character

(human or scholastic, and not scriptural or divine, I am sure) spoils all this, and robs the soul of the mind of God. I suggest this, as it occurred to me while considering the conclusion drawn from the parable in Luke xix. But as to the parable itself, I might again say that we cannot, I surely judge, sustain such a conclusion; because, as I observed, we must all admit that the Lord has passed by some of the action in the scene of His second advent, designing principally, if not merely, to correct the thought of an immediate kingdom here on earth. He passes by the act of our meeting Him in the air, before He comes to share the kingdom with us, which is as clearly declared in another Scripture as that He will have a kingdom in the earth is declared here. For I cannot but assume it to be a truth of common consent that the meeting in the air will go before the kingdom, or even judgment on the earth. I assume that none of us will suppose that the Saviour will have come here and parcelled out the honour and authorities of the kingdom among His faithful servants, and then go back in order to come again to meet them in the air according to another Scripture. Our meeting Him in the air must be before He touches the earth.

2 Thess. 1.—This chapter has been much used to affirm the thought that the saint cannot possibly be removed from the present scene of trial till the Lord return to the earth in judgment. I do not wonder at the influence which it has had to such an end. I own

that it appears to have much that favours it; and let me say that I have never, even in thought, held lightly those dear brethren who have adopted the opposite view on the great and interesting question I am considering in this paper. I have not, for a moment, with a disparaging thought wondered at them, or felt that they had nothing to say for themselves, or judged them as not duly reverencing God's word—never for a moment. I have not, I may say, even been tempted to such thoughts of them. But still I am to “prove all things,” and not be divided either by my respect or love for them. I do not think then that the support which they have derived from this chapter is more than apparent or superficial. The apostle is speaking of judgment or recompense. Tribulation, he says, is to be recompensed to the one and rest to the other; and that too on the same day, at the one great discerning moment—the hour of the Lord's return to the earth in flaming fire.

This is the teaching of the chapter. I read it as giving me the great action of awarding or recompensing righteously after this manner between the persecuted and their oppressors, between the saints and those who have been tormenting them. But this is a different action from that of taking the saints into personal rest. To be recompensed with rest is not the same thought as to be taken into rest. I believe, moreover, that other Scriptures forbid me to confound them. 1 Thess. iv., for instance, shows the saints taken into rest, and that too before the Lord comes to the earth in flaming

fire. In that chapter the apostle exhibits Him on His way from heaven to the air; in this chapter (2 Thess. i.), the same apostle—the same Spirit, let me rather say—exhibits them coming to the earth. The voice of the archangel and the trump of God attend Him to the air; flaming fire and angels of power accompany Him to the earth. But none will say that the saints have not been actually or personally borne into rest by their ascension into the air to meet their Lord. Nay, to more than to simple rest does that journey conduct us; for all admit that Rev. xix., the marriage of the Lamb, is a scene in heaven after the saints have ascended, but before the Lord comes in judgment; and that is something more than mere rest, as all our hearts ought easily to know. So that it is plain to me that we must, let me say, with a little more exactness read this chapter, and take care not to confound personal and recompensed rest; and then we shall join in our judgment. For I fully grant that the saints will not get rest adjudged to them till the revelation of Jesus in power, or the great “day of the Lord,” when He will clear the earth of all things that offend, and share the honours of the kingdom with His faithful ones. And I may say that Rev. xi. 18 is another expression of this. But our meeting Him in the air would be a moment of displayed or recompensed rest and reward.

And what affirms this distinction between rest personal and recompensed is the apostle bringing himself into the scene. “Rest with us,” he says. For none of us doubt that the apostle at this moment is in actual

or personal rest, though he himself thus tells us that he has not received the kind of rest which he is speaking of in this chapter. By way of illustration, I might say that nothing is more common in the affairs of life than circumstances after this pattern. How many maltreated persons are brought into actual rest and security ere the case can be brought to trial, and the injured party be publicly vindicated and the offender punished ! It is of the righteous thing with God the apostle speaks, and the exhibition of that righteous thing. It is the kingdom of God, and judicial rest and tribulation as between two parties. But the air, when the saints alone meet their Lord, could present no such character as this. And though it may detain me over this Scripture a little longer, I must add another thought. When the Lord was instructing His disciples in Matt. xxiv. or Luke xxi., He warns them of coming troubles, such as the beginning of "sorrows" and "the great tribulation." But here to the Thessalonians the apostle does not speak of coming but of present troubles ;* according to which I see this plain distinction, that the Lord (Matt. xxiv., Luke xxi.) guards His disciples against the words "the time draweth near," or against any promise of immediate rest, on this ground, that ere He

* As when the prophets speak of Israel, they speak of a certain time of trouble (see Jer. xxx., Micah iv., &c. &c.). And the cities and kingdoms of the earth, as well as Jerusalem and Israel, are said to have their time of sorrow and travail. Thus Damascus and Babylon (Jer. xlix. 4). But as to the heavenly saints, there is no such special hour of travail spoken of ; but they are represented as always in the sorrow till they see Jesus again (John xvi.).

should come for their relief, they must pass through sorrows. But, on the contrary, the apostle (2 Thess. ii.) guards the disciple against similar words—"the day of Christ is at hand" (or present)—on this ground, that ere the Lord should come for judgment they would be gathered to Him; advisedly separating the "coming" from the "day," linking our gathering to Him with the "coming," and His judgment of the earth with the "day," the same words (*παρουσία* and *ἡμέρα*) being severally used here (2 Thess. ii.) as before in 1 Thess. iv. 15, and in chapter v. 2.* I do not at all say that the coming and the day are always thus distinguishable: I believe not, the purpose of the Spirit not requiring it. But here the distinction is marked, and

* It is true that Bengel does give to *ἐπιφάνεια τῆς παρουσίας* the force of an earlier stage than the *παρουσία* (2 Thess. ii. 1-8). "Hic autem apparitio adventûs ipso adventu prior, vel certe prima ipsius adventûs emicatio." Without having the slightest pretension to be a critic, or affecting Greek scholarship, I ask, is not the *mid-day* power of the day, rather than the *dawn* of it, intimated in the use which the New Testament makes of this word? In 1 Tim. vi. 14., the "Potentate" is to show this *ἐπιφάνεια*, and we can scarcely say that it is as the "Potentate" the Lord will meet His saints in the air. As Potentate He will be manifested on earth. In 2 Tim. 1-10, it is connected with Christ perfecting the everlasting purpose of God in the abolishing of death. But surely that was not done in the *dawn*, but at the full, or rather *evening*, hour of His course, as at Calvary. In 2 Tim. iv. 8 it is connected with giving crowns of *righteousness*; and surely that will not be at the earliest moment of His coming, but rather late in the great action, when servants are rewarded in the kingdom. And surely if Bengel had seen the common truth, that the saints are to meet the Lord in the air *before* He takes His journey in judgment to the earth, he could not have interpreted the action in 2 Thess. ii. as being the *earliest* moment in His returning journey.

intended, I believe, to be so. And I cannot but think that the "coming" and "gathering" are made the ground of stability and comfort to the saints in 2 Thess. ii. 1, and not merely introduced as a subject concerning which the apostle is about to treat. But I add no more.

Matthew xxiv.—I am aware that we have been much condemned for not seeing another witness against our thoughts in the prophecy of this chapter, and for not receiving all the words of it fully to ourselves. The whole of the moral application of this grand prophetic word I desire to let in with full power upon our hearts and consciences, for I doubt not it all belongs to each of us. "What I say unto you, I say unto all—watch." But I cannot judge that the saints now gathering for heaven are in the prophecy itself. I judge that those whom this chapter contemplates as being killed (verse 9) will surely be borne by a glorious resurrection to heaven, as well as the saints from amongst the Gentiles now gathering. But the preserved ones of this chapter, I believe, are preserved for the earth, like Noah in his day. For it is flesh that is saved (verse 22), and the heavenly people have no interest in the saving of flesh. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." And after we have received the clearest instruction on this—that it is in the air that we are next to see the Lord (1 Thess. iv.), would the words "he is in the desert," or "he is in the secret chambers," have seducing or deceiving attractions for us? How must we

have surrendered all the light of such teaching ere we could listen to such reports! I cannot think that the Lord is anticipating us or the present election from the Gentiles in this prophecy. And I surely grant He is not addressing His words, and instructions, and warnings, to the Jews considered in their present unbelief: I know not how such a thought could have risen for a moment. I judge that He is looking at that remnant in Israel who, in coming days, are to be separated from the apostate or unbelieving nation. Scripture largely speaks of such a people, and, let me add, largely speaks of their state of soul, describing it, I believe, as being much more advanced in knowledge of God and His truth than many among us (beloved ones as they are) apprehend, but who are still to be His Israel on the earth; which, in connection with Matt. xxiv., I might notice a little further. Thus I believe it is His earthly people who are not to see Him till they say, "blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." And what intelligence there is in that cry! For it is the rejected stone, the rejected Christ, which is welcomed back in those words; and this tells us that they who utter it must be acquainted with the mystery of the death of Jesus.

And what witness does Psalm lxxix. bear to their condition? The preserved remnant in that psalm look to their being a people on the earth; they have no heavenly expectations, but they are able to appreciate their martyred brethren, and in a great sense identify themselves with them. And how do they, in the very

next (Psalm lxxx.), express their trust in the man at God's right hand as all the hope of their wasted vineyard? And must not such language be that of precious and intelligent faith? That there is a man in heaven (blessed thought! while the pen writes it down) to whom alone the expectant possessors of God's fruitful hill in Canaan are looking! All this is very strong in forming my thoughts on the spiritual condition of the elect remnant in these coming days. And again, I ask, is not "if ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established" the standing oracle? And upon it must they not believe ere they can be established? An oracle, too, that connects itself expressly with the name and revelation of Immanuel (see Is. vii.), as Peter attaches the hope of Israel and the expectations of the earth on Israel's repentance and conversion (Acts iii.). And what could that required repentance and conversion be, but the believing that testimony which Peter was then delivering? I am not saying that heavenly portion of the remnant may not be distinguished by larger attainments both in knowledge and in devotedness. But I believe there will be but one remnant, so to speak, in those days—one in the general character, I mean, of their moral or spiritual state; and martyrdom will be the distinct feature of the heavenly portion of them, of which Revelations xiv. 13, and xx. 4, are, I judge, further witnesses. The dwelling together of Abraham and Lot at the same time and in the same land, the former being in principle a heavenly man, and the latter an earthly, may help us, as by analogy, to appre-

hend this. Abraham may have been more advanced and more devoted, I grant it. But, in a great sense, they were morally one. Lot was a righteous soul in God's account, in the heart of a Sodom world. I do therefore judge that there will be a people in Israel by and by, whose position will be in the earth, but whose hearts and consciences the Spirit will have been dealing with before Jesus manifests Himself personally. They look on His wounds under the Spirit of grace in Zech. xii. 10, but personally and actually He does not stand in the land till xiv. 3. These things and others of like character are strong on this point.

And in this connexion I may notice Daniel vii. also, which links itself much, I believe, with this Matthew xxiv. For there again the imperial misleader, under the symbol of "the little horn," is spoken of as one that is to shed the blood of the heavenly saints. This I entirely admit, and those martyred heavenly saints I identify with those killed according to our present chapter (verse 9). But Daniel, in a very decided way, passes over the present dispensation: for those heavenly saints of his are only in connexion with the little horn. But we know full well, and we ourselves are the witnesses of it, that there are heavenly saints before that time, whose history, consequently, Daniel never even touches. This, however, does not disturb or annul anything found in Daniel. Surely not: that could never be. Scripture cannot be broken. But in company with Daniel's words we are to read other words. That is, we are

to remember, "It is written again," as I have observed before. And we have to look to other words of God, beyond those by Daniel, for the full history of the heavenly saints. Daniel vii. 25, Matthew xxiv. 9, and the prophetic part of the Apocalypse, treat only of a portion of these, and such as are connected with Israel, and the coming day, or time of the end. But I will add no more to this.

Dan. vii.—A Scripture of extensive signification this surely is, involving truth also of serious character, and, as we all know, suggesting matter about which there is large diversity of judgment. These considerations may lead us to meditate on it with great interest, with recollected and serious minds, and in a modest forbearing spirit. We should greatly desire the grace of unprejudiced thoughts, that we may come to learn what it teaches, and not to read it in the mere light of any previous conclusion of our own.

In a night-vision the prophet sees the four winds beating upon the great sea, and out of the agitated waters rising successively four great beasts, the last of which had ten horns, in the midst of which came up another, little in comparative size, but in action more terrible than all, destroying three of them, and having in it the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking very boastfully.

After thus looking along the whole line of these earthly powers, the prophet is given another vision. He sees certain thrones set, and the Ancient of days

taking His seat for judgment with His myriads of attendants, and books opened before Him; and in the progress of judgment he sees the fourth beast slain, because of the boastings of the little horn. And he sees the Son of man come up to the Ancient of days and receive from Him the glory and power of an everlasting kingdom.

Such was this night-vision in its two parts, its earthly and heavenly. Daniel was troubled at it, and craves instruction about it. And he is, in a general way, told that the four beasts represent four kingdoms that were successively to arise in the course of the world's history, but that after their dominion the saints should take an enduring kingdom.

How large, how awful, how blessed is the scene which here lies before us! How engaged should our hearts be when we look at each part of it! In extent it ranges over the history of the earth, from the fall of Jerusalem under the Chaldean to the exaltation of Jerusalem under the Messiah. In awfulness it tells us of the lengthened domination of certain powers, which in all divine reckoning were as rabid and as heady as wild beasts. In the blessedness it assures us that the good and great God, the Lord of all, will close the scene in the glory and joy of all His saints.

Daniel's heart was not unmoved by what he saw. His affections were stirred, and so should ours, or we read and acquaint ourselves with these things very undivinely. The apostle seems to stand somewhat in the presence of all this truth as well, though not so

formally, as the prophet, and in like manner encourages our souls to the due affections, saying, after he had contemplated the departure of all beside, as the prophet does here of one kingdom after another, "We receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved (as the prophet had been told of the saints' kingdom), let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire." The assurance of our immovable kingdom should plant our souls, according to this commentary of the apostle, in the joy and worship which such grace may well inspire, while the sight of such consumption of all besides may mingle that joy with other suited sentiments of heart. But these reflections I have followed rather by the way.

The prophet, it appears, was not satisfied with this general interpretation, and makes special inquiry after the fourth beast and his ten horns, and the distinguished little or eleventh horn which, as he saw, made war with the saints, till the Ancient of days came, and the kingdom was given to the saints. And the interpretation, accordingly, goes into this special matter, telling him that the fourth beast was the fourth kingdom, that the ten horns were ten kings that should arise, and that the little or eleventh horn was another king that should rise afterwards, the mightiest of all, but whose kingdom should last only a time, times, and the dividing of time; for that then the judgment of God should close it, and the whole power under the heavens be transferred to the saints of the Most High.

The vision thus interpreted is made plain in all its great features, and the general history of the world, within the given time and territory, is communicated to us. Some incidental inquiries will of course arise. And I judge that, in pursuing them, we are most chiefly bound to consult Scriptures kindred with this. And of such, in the most eminent degree, is the Revelation by St. John.

I believe then that that book is much to be used in considering this chapter; and my present judgment is this, that the course of that book will be found concurrent with that of this chapter, where this chapter takes up the act of judgment, or the act from heaven upon earth. Thus:

Dan. vii. 9 . . Rev. iv.

10 v.

11 xiii. xix.

12 . is parenthetic.

13, 14 , Rev. xx.

I place these passages as having correspondence in general import, though details are far more opened and incidental matter is introduced in the Revelation.

The Revelation is the ulterior writing of the Spirit, and we might, therefore, count upon its being more full, and admit it to be our simple and natural way to read the previous writing in its light. Nothing in the ulterior word can be allowed to gainsay a single jot of the earlier, but it may enlarge upon it, and be used as a light by which, as I have said, we shall surely read it. Now this chapter in Daniel tells us nothing of "saints

of the Most High" till the times of the little horn. The book of Revelation confirms the fact that there will be such saints in those times, but adds the further truth that there have been the same before (as we know all the New Testament Scriptures do), and we ourselves are the witnesses of it, being saints of the Most High, or heavenly people, ourselves.

This is very plain. These Scriptures do not interfere with each other, but the latter goes into larger matter than the former. And it does more. It affords a light in which to read this chapter; and, accordingly, I read verse 9 in the light of Rev. iv., and I gather the fact that, ere this judgment sits (at least I so read it), there have been conveyed to heaven a company of saints; for I see them already there as twenty-four elders. The thrones are set in Dan. vii. 9; but they are occupied as well as set in Rev. iv.

Were there a single word in Daniel to deny the previous existence of such, were there a single word in his prophecy to forbid the thought that any heavenly saints could have been taken to heaven before the times of the horn, then indeed we must renounce our conclusion. But none such do I find; for I do not believe Daniel once in this chapter tells us that the judgment sits in heaven in consequence of the boasting and blasphemy of this little horn. I grant that, in consequence of such blasphemy, the Judge causes the fourth beast to be slain, and also the dominion of the little horn itself to be consumed and destroyed. But that, I believe, is all we learn from either verse 11 or 26.

The prophet does not make the sitting in judgment to depend on the words of the horn. Had he done so, of course we must have read the book of Revelation under the control of such a word from him; but, not having done so, I see that Daniel's testimony is quite consistent with that of John, who shows us the judgment sitting in chapter iv. and doing many things before even the horn appears in the scene, which is not until chapter xiii.

Nothing, therefore, is disturbed or annulled—surely not. That could not be. The only thing is, we are to let every word of God instruct us, and if an ulterior Scripture bring out larger materials, we must let them in to take their place, not with a disturbing and rude violence, but for the filling out of the revealed purpose of God.

1 Cor. xv. 23.—On the authority of this verse, some have concluded that the Lord will not come till all who are His, and are children of resurrection, are brought to know Him, and are ready to rise together to meet Him in the air at one and the same moment. I admit the apparent force of this. But I believe it is but apparent, and will not abide the light of the whole Scripture. Because, if we have nothing further, we have the ascension of the two witnesses, after the quickening of their dead bodies in Rev. xi.—ground, may I not say, for denying that this verse includes all that are Christ's. This would be enough for checking confidence in the unimpregnableness of this conclusion. But I believe, further, that the

Apocalypse teaches us that there will be other saints taken up at other times than that contemplated in this passage. For instance, in chapter xii. there appears to be a remnant who are heavenly in their destiny, after the man-child has been caught up; and there are companies seen at times, through the action of that wondrous book, apart from the living creatures and crowned elders, and yet in heaven—such as the slain ones on the sea of glass in chapter xv., as, at the close, distinction is still preserved in chapter xx. 4. And, again, I observe, this is not disturbing Scripture. It leaves previous revelations untouched. It does in nowise break 1 Cor. xv. 23. But it again shows us, that in His perfect method, the Lord so orders and fashions His word under His various "ready writers," if I may so call them, as to provide that the earlier light should let in, not the rebuking or disturbing, but harmonising light of His further revelations. And to help our apprehensions of the heavenly position of Israel joining "the fulness of the Gentiles," now gathering in the heavens, I might remember such ones as Hobab and Rahab. Canaan had been espied by the Lord as the portion of the twelve tribes. But at least these two strangers sit down in that inheritance with them. This, however, was no disturbance. It involved no infraction of the family settlement. It was not a new thing or an after-thought with God. Our exactness may be offended, but God's provisions were quite ready for those things. But I by no means speak of this as a type, but only as a little helping of our thoughts.

Rev. xvi. 15.—This verse has been read as marking the moment of taking the saints into the air. I would therefore consider it a little, desiring ever to do so in fear and yet delight before Him. There is a promise that the day of the Lord shall not overtake the saints as a thief in the night (1 Thess. v.). A question may arise—in what way will this Scripture be fulfilled? for, like every other, it cannot be broken. There are two ways in which the goodman and his household might be secured from a nightly thief. They might be either removed previously from the house, or kept from their guard in it. Both of these ways will, I believe, in the varied and perfect doings of the Lord, get their illustrations. For when His day comes, and in the majesty and power of judgment He touches this rebel earth again, He will find His elect Israel ready. "Blessed is he that cometh," they will be prepared to say, or have already said, like a guarded watchful household; though they know neither the day nor the hour they will be in readiness. They will not be injuriously surprised by the solemn visitation which is to destroy the wicked. But in that hour the saints of the heavenly places will be seen in the train of Him who comes as the thief. As the heavenly army they will then accompany him (Joel iii. 1-11, see verse 9). For we are abundantly taught that to exercise the power of that day in company with the Lord is part of their promised honour (Col. iii. 4; Rev. ii. 26, 27, xvii. 14, xix. 14). Two distinct companies, therefore, exhibit these two things. Israel will be delivered from the judgment of "the day of the Lord,"

by being prepared for it in the place where it enters ; and the heavenly saints, by being taken away from that place, belonging, as children of the day, to that sphere out of which the day is to pour down its light and terrors. I say not how long this previous removal may have taken place. Other Scriptures may lead to that inquiry. I speak here only of the fact of that removal, and thus of the mode of the security of the heavenly saints against the day of the Lord. But I may add that it is morally fitting, I judge, that "the more excellent way," so to call it, should be prepared for them.

And these two modes of deliverance can scarcely fail to remind us of Enoch and Noah. Enoch knew that a day of the Lord was coming, for he prophesied of it (Jude 14, 16) ; so did Noah, for he was told of it (Gen. vi.), and that day did come (of course I know that it is still to come, in the full sense of Enoch's prophecy). But Enoch had been previously removed (Gen. v.). And Noah was prepared for it in the place it visited. And all this, I quite believe, has mystic or typical meaning for us. Now in reading 1 Thess. v.,* I do not at all doubt that the fear of being kept here on the earth for the hour of the thief might arise in the mind of the disciples. And I believe that it did ; for that fear, as I judge, becomes in its season the occasion of the second epistle, in which the apostle sets himself to correct the error which sprung from that fear. For, as I observed under another meditation, he separates the

* [It is to me certain, however, from 2 Thess. ii. 2, that the true source of the terror in the minds of the Thessalonians was not from reading 1 Thess. v., but from a false word and lying spirit—a forged

coming of the Lord from the day of the Lord, attaching our gathering to His coming, and the exercise of judgment in the earth to His day. And in this way their minds, which had been in fear, would be fully relieved. Their fear had come from an imperfect reading of the first epistle,* or from some source which would have worked in the same way; and that epistle at least had not given them ease. But their relief would come from the second, telling them that they should be separated from the house ere the thief enter it. And let me add, that the coming of the Lord in the character of a thief in the night is always (if I judge rightly) connected with this return to the earth, or the coming of the Son of man, *i.e.*, the day of the Lord (Matt. xxiv. ; Luke ; 1 Thess. v. ; 2 Peter iii.). It is connected with the manifestation of judgment, and not with the Lord meeting His saints in the air, or with His coming again to receive them unto Himself.

The duty of watchfulness, most surely, is a moral duty of common enforcement. "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch." Nothing that could be said as to the strict prophetic application of the Lord's coming as a thief in the night should for a moment be allowed to weaken the sense of the common duty of watching. It is therefore in the full spiritual power of this, as being of common concern, that it is said, "If therefore thou wilt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief." But still I say that, as prophetic of a given step or action in the divine purpose, the coming of the Lord as a thief epistle, purporting to be Paul's, but not that which we have. In 1 Thess. v. the fear of that day is shown to be for the world; false teachers sought to urge its terrors on the saints.—Ed.]

in the night intimates His surprising the earth in the day of His judgment of it. "As a snare shall it (the day of the Son of man) come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth."

According to this I read Rev. xvi. 15. I find the coming of the Lord there spoken of under this figure, and announced as belonging to the time when that faction has been formed on the earth which is to bring Him back. And the reappearing of this figure, "the thief in the night," at this place of Scripture, is evidence to me that this word of Scripture contemplates an earthly action. And let me ask—let me put it to the thoughts of brethren—does it suit our minds or our hearts to speak of the Lord's coming to meet His saints in the air under such a figure as this? Jesus then comes, and His reward is with Him. He comes as the bright and morning star. He comes again to receive us to Himself, having prepared mansions in heaven for us. He comes with the voice of the archangel. Our conversation is already in that very place from whence He comes, and the bride is ever in spirit bidding Him welcome. Is a coming, thus variously and gloriously spoken of, to take its likeness from the coming of a nightly thief? Never, I believe, does the Spirit give it such. "That day shall not overtake you as a thief." His day will surprise all who dwell on the face of the whole earth after that pattern; but He meets His heavenly ones, already in the spirit of their minds there from whence He comes, with other thoughts altogether.

If we therefore consult all the Scriptures which speak

of "the thief in the night," we shall find, I think, that such a coming of the Lord does not connect itself with the mystery of His meeting the saints in the air, though it most surely addresses our souls in the power of an exhortation to watchfulness. Rev. xvi. 15 is not, I therefore in submission suggest, a note of the time at which the saints of the heavenly places are borne upward to meet the Lord. On 2 Peter iii., where the same figure, as we know, is used, I would just add a word—that in the brilliant and distinguished prophecy which occupies that chapter, the apostle clusters objects together (not confusedly, most surely, but still together) very much in the style of the prophets. It is as though the mantle of the prophets of the circumcision had fallen upon the apostle of the circumcision when he prophesies. But of course I say this as remembering that all was but the penmanship of the Holy Ghost; believing, however, that this style is to be observed as a help to a right interpretation of that grand prophetic Scripture.

Here I will now leave this deeply interesting subject, desiring, I trust unfeignedly, that the light of His own word may either rebuke or sanction all our thoughts as they need.

2 Pet. ii. &c., &c.—It has been observed that in the epistles we get constant warning of certain things which were to happen in the course of the present dispensation, which is sufficient notice to us of delay being put on the coming of the Lord. I grant that we have this warning again and again. "Latter days"

and "latter times" are marked by strong moral characters. Greivous wolves also were to enter. Perverse things were to be spoken, and thus both from without and within danger and evil were to come. False teachers were to appear, as in Israel there had been false prophets. These and more than these are announced. The deep and deadly shadows of many corruptions are definitely forecast. I grant all this most surely. How could it be denied? And, further, I grant that the history of the dispensation has already been making good, and, as long as it lasts, will continue to make good all these notices, and reveal the substances and terrible forms of these appalling shadows. But the apostles, who severally declare these things, attach them to that present generation, warning those to whom they ministered personally about them, and giving them instruction as to the security of their own souls against them. And at length, under the ministry of one of them, the crisis of the churches or candlesticks arrives, the lights of the sanctuary are all gone out, and in the next moment the scene is changed from earth to heaven, and the elect are there (Rev. i.—iv). The longer, however, the time of the present gathering from among the Gentiles goes on, and with it the unjudged field of wheat and tares, all these awful notices, I quite admit, will only be the more and more realised, as they hitherto have been. The only thing I suggest here is, that this has not made a necessary delay to our passing upward to meet the Lord, since that great crisis of the candlesticks. Certain things were

to be, surely ; but the saints of that day are counselled as though they were, even before that crisis. But after that crisis the heavens are opened and the elect are seen there, as it were, like Enoch, without any necessary passage through either evil or sorrow any farther, and without the needful measuring out of days and years.

I will not go on with any other Scriptures which I have heard or read as used on this subject. I have taken what appeared to be principal. Much, I doubt not, has been urged which I never heard or read. And I could say with simplicity, I wait to be further instructed, if so be there is light from the Lord.

I would not close, however, without adding a few suggestions of a freer character as to the ground on which my present thoughts rest. And in the first place I ask, if the seventieth week of Daniel be reserved, as we know it is, and if the previous sixty-nine weeks concerned Daniel's city and people, Jerusalem and the Jews, are we not to conclude that the reserved seventieth week concerns itself with them also? And if the Apocalypse treat of the last week, are we not to read it also in connexion with the same, that is, with Jewish saints? I believe so; though I fully admit that they, in a sense, represent us, inasmuch as they will then stand, as we do now, in the faith and confession of Jesus. I fully admit, also, as to the same book, that the Lord Jesus is hidden during the action of it till chapter xix.: I never had a thought that He was personally manifested till then. And, further,

I admit that, in the same wondrous book, He is not on His own throne: I altogether allow that—surely I must. This, however, I must also add, that in the action of that book He does not appear as a priest in the sanctuary, but though presented in different aspects and under various symbols, yet in not one of them as High Priest of our profession, making intercession for us. This is much to be observed. It shows that the action is peculiar. And I judge that the throne in chapter iv. which presides over the whole action till chapter xx. is therefore peculiar also. It is not simply the present throne nor the millennial throne, but the throne in the heavens, having taken to itself certain attributes and powers suited to the peculiar action of those days which the book itself contemplates.

I have thus cleared my way a little, in order to state what is my strong conviction, long since suggested to me by a much loved brother, and never since then removed from my mind, that *the election now gathering from the Gentiles is to be removed to meet the Lord in the air before the time of Rev. iv.* There had been nothing, I believe, in the earlier part of Scripture to hinder this. The consideration I have been giving to different Scriptures had that point in view. But while, as I have judged, there is nothing to hinder this, there were some notices to prepare us for it. Jesus had said, "I will come again and receive you unto myself." Paul had taught that we should be taken up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and on account of His coming he had comforted the saints against His day. All the apostles had

kept the hearts of the elect in the attitude of hourly expectation. But these were but notices faint and precursory till we get the disclosure of the great fact that the saints have been borne away to heaven at some untold moment, from whence it is given them to survey, and be interested in, the terrible action of the last days (Rev. iv., v., vi. xiv., xv., xix.).

The crowned elders represent or symbolise a company of redeemed sinners, whose place and inheritance are heavenly. The inquiry is, "Where are they who are thus represented during the action of the book of the Apocalypse?"

This is a question among us, suggested by the Scriptures—lawful, therefore, to be entertained in a spirit of godly fear, as well as in a spirit of liberty. My judgment is that they are actually in heaven, having previously ascended there in their glorious bodies. The grounds of thus judging I would submit to my brethren, companions of the joy of these inquiries of the temple.

These mystic personages, when first presented to our view, form part of the order and court of heaven. Nor do they then appear as though they had only that moment reached the place, for there is nothing of the freshness of admiration which might suitably be expressed by those who were just opening their eyes on the celestial glory, but there is the calmness of a people familiar with it.

Chapter iv.—A central throne appears in the scene, having taken to itself this expression that the time

had come when the Lord in heaven was again conceiving remembrance (so to speak) of the earth, for the rainbow is seen round it. But as the earth is not to be brought into the joy and full power of its covenant till it be purged of all that corrupts it, we find lightnings, thunderings, and voices, in attendance on the throne, as well as the rainbow; all this giving witness that the time had arrived when the earth becomes the object of interest and attention in heaven. For the power on the throne there must put forth destructive judgments, which shall destroy the destroyers of the earth, before it can array itself with the earth, its desired companion in the glory; as it is written, "heaven is my throne, earth is my footstool."

The mystic personages of whom I speak are part and parcel of this august scenery. But if, as I said, they do not appear there as though they were only fresh in the admiration of the heavenly beauties, so they do not appear as though they were personally anxious about the tremendous action, for which the powers in heaven are getting themselves ready. They are not awed by the thunder, or scared by the lightning, or quake, like Moses, before the voice; but clothed in white, crowned with gold, and seated on thrones, they keep up the constant worship of God, and, in conscious elevation above all water-floods, glory in all that is round them. In this manner they are introduced to us.

The question of the inheritance of that earth which has now, as we have just seen, become the object of attention in heaven, arises after this, and very naturally

so. If the earth be now to be purged, and then brought into connexion with heaven again ; if the moment have arrived for thunders, and lightnings, and voices to break from the throne, and for the bow to encircle it, the time has also come for settling the inheritance and government of the earth, or for the book or title-deed of that inheritance to be opened.

Accordingly this in its order is done. The book is seen in the right hand of Him who sits on the throne ; and after a general challenge of all creation, none is found either "worthy" or "able" to take it and open it but the Lamb that was slain, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. But His taking it at once becomes the occasion of universal joy. Everything and everyone in their several way and measure express this ; for this taking of the book had given notice that the whole creation was soon to be made again the inheritance of Him whose right it is.

Chapter v.—But here I would pause a little. This burst of joy is but anticipatory—no doubt of that. For the time of Rev. v. is not the time of millennial kingdom—the restitution of all things, or creation's jubilee. This universal pulse of gladness is therefore all anticipative,* most surely. But this we observe, that it is in heaven the living creatures and crowned elders sing their anticipated joy. It is in heaven they sing as much as the angels. Every creature joins, but each in its proper place. For, as at the moment of Adam's sin, the creatures, in the ear of the Spirit, became groaners

* The book of God is full of these anticipative exercises of soul. The Spirit delights to raise these in the saints, and Jesus (may I speak so?) often indulged them.

after deliverance (Rom. viii.), so now, when the Lamb is owned as "Lord of the world to come," and as about to possess Himself of His kingdom, in the ear of the same Spirit these groans are turned into praises. The prisoners of hope get bright pledges of a glorious deliverance. Beautiful and precious is this momentary and universal rapture. And in the midst of it we hear the mystic ones of whom I speak uttering their part in their heavenly places, even angels themselves forming a larger and outer circle around them.

But I proceed. The book of the inheritance, which conveys the government of the earth to the Lamb, and which has now found its way into the hand of the Lamb, is sealed with seven seals, as it were closing up some action which is to be gone through or performed ere this government can be settled under the Lamb. The living creatures appear in the closest personal intimacy with the act of opening those seals by the Lamb. The Lamb alone opens, but they are very near Him. Perfect in its place all this is. The Lamb, as we saw, alone had "worthiness" or "ability" to touch the book. But the living creatures have just owned their share in the now expected inheritance and government, and therefore are naturally and fitly near the book; and as being already in the secret of it, they call the servant of God "to come and see," while the Lamb opens the first four of the seals. This is a high notice of these honoured creatures. We saw them before exercised in heavenly worship, forming a company nearer the throne even than angels; but here we see them intimate with

heavenly secrets, which the prophet of God had to learn. This bespeaks (if we hear it, beloved) the joy and thankfulness and praise of our hearts. Are the heights of glory thus ours? Are intimacies of heaven thus ours? But we are to see greater wonders yet.

After the opening of the sixth seal, among other things, we get presented to us a company who had been delivered out of the great tribulation; for such tribulation will immediately precede or wait upon the period of the sixth seal. But then we again see the living creatures and crowned elders; for one of them, one of the twenty-four elders, explains to John who this delivered company had been. Chap. vii. Surely this too is full of the same dignity, and very significant. Here they appear in the place of heavenly knowledge again, able to instruct the chief of the prophets; and they are also apart from the noble army of martyrs. And I feel that we are not to pass by all this, for these are high and heavenly places surely.

The first series of actions that are under the seals ends here. On the opening of the seventh seal another action begins, that of the seven trumpets. Over these seven trumpets seven angels preside. But upon the blowing of the seventh of them, our mystic objects are again seen. For the time of this seventh trumpet brings the course of events up to the eve of the kingdom, and in that bright prospect the twenty-four elders celebrate the Lord God Almighty, and all the glorious results of His taking to Him His great power. And in this we get them connected, though but

shortly, with the trumpets as well as with the seals (chapters viii.-xi.).

There is an action then which may be termed that of the dragon and the beasts with its results, in which the living ones are again for a moment noticed, and noticed in a place of much honour, in close neighbourhood to the throne, and apart from the company on Mount Zion, as we saw them apart from the martyrs in the seventh chapter (chapters xii.-xiv.).

I pass this however, and look more particularly at the next series of actions, or the pouring out of the seven vials of wrath. Seven angels come forward, and one of the four living creatures gives them seven vials containing the judgments of God, and the angels empty these vials, or pour out these judgments on the dire and doomed places.

Here then, in this action, our personages fill a place of distinguished honour. In the mystery of seals they were in the place of wisdom, calling John the prophet to the secrets of the book; but here they are rather in the place of power, committing the instruments of vengeance to the ministers of vengeance. Through other parts of the book they have been seen in greater intimacy with the throne than angels; but here was something beyond that—they arm angels with the implements of their service (chapters xv., xvi.).

Babylon is the scene of the next great mystery in this book of wonders. But in it the living creatures and crowned elders do not expressly appear (chap. xvii., xviii.).

The marriage in heaven then takes place, and for the last time our mystic ones appear. The twenty-four

elders and the living creatures worship God with their hallelujah, because He had judged the great whore, and had avenged the blood of God's servants upon her; and this, I may say (though they do not appear by name in the two preceding chapters), connects them expressly with Babylon, as we have seen them connected with each of the preceding actions, because Babylon is the great whore (chap. xix.). Here, however, we lose sight of them. But continuously (I may say, after this review) from the moment the heaven was opened to take up John in chapter iv. to this moment in chapter xix. when the heaven is again opened to let down the white-horsed rider and His army, we have seen them there in all the calm and happy sense of home, acquainted with the secrets, and entrusted with the resources, of that high and holy place—John, the prophet, instructed by them, angels that excel in strength armed by them, and other redeemed ones at times taking their place apart from and around them.

I ask then where have they been all this time? As all this mystic scene passes before us, does it convey no certainty as to the inquiry? Where have those who are symbolised by these mysteries had their place all this time? Does it betoken that they have been actually in heaven or on earth? I wait to learn why I am not to consider them in heaven as really as the throne itself, the Lamb, or the angels. Are they seen in the place out of which the judgments come, or upon which they come? Is the sphere where they move above or below? Are they in company with the throne all

through these actions, or tossed amid the agitations of the earth? Nay, are they not distinct from those who pass through the great tribulation itself, speaking of them most expressly as apart from themselves? Were I to go through these chapters unaffected by any prejudices, I know not that I could get more full and clear answers to these inquiries than they afford me. I grant, however, that I am to read them in company with all Scripture, and if any other part of God's most precious book note this point, I must re-read these chapters, not allowing myself to take them or listen to them alone. But as yet, at least, I have not found such.

I fully admit that, during the action of these chapters and in different stages of it, certain other companies take their place in heaven. I have no doubt that there is a heavenly people on earth during this action, or at least the greater part of it, and that such in their season will be taken to their distinct heavenly places.

But this leaves me still at liberty to say that those who are represented by these mystic persons have been there throughout the whole of it. The action itself is neither that of the present dispensation, where Christ is in heaven alone interceding for us, nor is it that of the coming or millennial dispensation, when the heaven and earth will be parts of one temple with their several happy families, but an intervening action of a corrective or judicial character preparing the way of the kingdom.

Here then I rest, waiting for further instruction from any, if there be light from the Lord, as He gives it now through His word. But at present I cannot

gainsay the conclusion that arises from all this. I cannot feel warranted to depart from the simplicity of the word, or to assume anything beyond what the first impression naturally conveys, that there is a company of redeemed ones actually in heaven, or in the place of the throne of God, before this action of the Apocalypse begins.

Perhaps, however, I might suggest a few objections.

1st. It may be said that the four-and-twenty crowned elders express only the disembodied spirits of saints. I would answer that I do not think we can give this interpretation, because they not only appear in so different a place and condition, and are as tangible and visible (so to speak) as angels themselves, but they actually minister, as we have seen, to the action that is going on, and help to conduct it to its great issue.

and. It may be said that their appearance in heaven is only in anticipation of their place (that being heavenly) in the age of the kingdom. I would answer that I do not think we can say this, because the action here is so entirely different from what it will be in the kingdom. Here it is corrective or judicial upon an unpurged earth; there it will be in happy government of a restored earth. And beside, they are as crowned elders all through this action, but as soon as it is over, and the kingdom comes, they are lost to our sight as such, and we see them only as the Lamb's wife.

3rd. It may be said that those represented by these symbols are the saints still really on the earth, and only in spirit, or in the purpose of God in heaven, as we read in Eph. ii. But I answer, the analogy seems to me to

fail, because the Epistle to the Ephesians shows the saints to be in heaven only as in Christ, or in the spirit of their calling, but actually on the earth; the Apocalypse shows these mystic ones to be actually in heaven, and only in spirit or in sympathy (as watching an action at a distance in which they are deeply interested) on earth. And this is to me rather contrast than similitude. Besides, during this action, the heavenly and earthly spheres are kept very distinct, and those of whom I speak are always in the heavenly. And again, John, who in spirit is called there, is at times down on earth, and even when in heaven, appears there in a way different from them. He appears to be there as a stranger or a visitor, but they are as fully at home as the throne, or the Lamb, or the angels.

Again I say, I wait to be instructed; but I cannot but judge that these testimonies from the book itself, and these considerations, lead to a conclusion very simple to a mind unprejudiced.

I do indeed judge that there has been a mistake in confounding the saints who form the elders with the saints under the last apostasy and the beast. This has been suggested to me by another; and I believe most justly. The saints of the Most High (Dan. vii.) cry "how long wilt thou not avenge?" (Rev. vi.)—at least this is characteristic of them. And their prayers bring earthquake and thunder (Rev. viii.). They have part in the first resurrection; but such as this is their characteristic; and they pass to the throne, as I have already said, only through death (Rev. xiv. 13; xx.

4), on which character of journey, so to speak, we know that the saints now gathering do not depend* (1 Cor. xv. 51). And this again distinguishes the two classes—death being not, in this way, a necessary stage now to the heavens as it will be (Rev. xiii. 15). For as being killed, the title of the Apocalyptic saints to take part in the first resurrection comes. How then, I may ask, can 1 Cor. xv. 51 wait for the time of the Apocalypse? This long since occurred to me, and I find that it has struck the minds of others quite independently. But what say we to all these things? Why, though they may be clear to one's own mind, yet how happy is it to know that these things and the like are the very material in which Peter says that there is much hard to be understood (2 Peter iii.), and that may give us happy forbearance one with another.

I however press on for a little longer. In the fourth chapter, as I observed, we see the living creatures and crowned elders round the central throne of God Almighty in the heavens. The action in the course of the book changes; the place of these mystic personages never does. They are interested in the action, they sing and rejoice at certain stages of it, but they are never engaged in it, nor leave their high habitations. This chapter exhibits them there, every succeeding one confirms this; and must we not say therefore that they had been previously taken there?

* Daniel and the Apocalypse alone give days and months and years—another striking witness that they deal with the same scenes, and are separate from the apostles who never talk to the present churches of such computation.

I believe that we have many notices which are enough to prepare us for such an event as this, though I know it is a difficulty to many—I mean the event here intimated, a secret rapture of the saints. I do not say that we have a single type of it, but only this, that we have many things which might prepare us for it. Horses and chariots filled the mountains, but the prophet's servant had no eye for them till the Lord gave him one. Neither would that prophet himself have witnessed the flight of his master if his soul had not passed through a testing and fitting process. Daniel was given to look on a very glorious and heavenly stranger, and to hear his voice as the voice of a multitude; but the men who stood beside him saw nothing: only a terror fell on them. The glory on the holy hill shone only in the eyes of Peter, James, and John, though there was a brightness there like that of the sun, which might have lighted up all the land. Many bodies of saints arose, but it was only those to whom it was given that ever knew of their resurrection; for no mere eye or ear of man, as such, conversed with that great occasion. The heaven was opened to Stephen, and Jesus and the glory seen by him there; but the assembled people saw nothing. If Paul went to paradise in the body (and whether he did or not, we will not say), none saw him. As when Philip was borne from Gaza to Azotus, no one traced his flight, for the Spirit carried him. In the presence and voice of Jesus, which arrested Saul on his journey to Damascus, there was no word for the ear of his companions, nor form of man for their

eyes—all was mere glare and sound ; but Saul saw and heard it all, and for a time conversed with it. Have not therefore all the circumstances which are to attend on the rapture of the saints been thus anticipated? And yet silence and secrecy, in a great sense, mark them all.

We have in these several visions and audience, resurrections, flights, and ascensions, the glory down here, and the heavens opened up there, and yet man a stranger to it all. And this is simple and easy. For all the things belonged to the regions and energies of the Spirit lying beyond the range of the natural faculties. "The natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God." The eye and the ear are not attuned to the appearances or voices of the Spirit, if the Spirit please it not. And let me add that, beyond all these, Jesus rose, and rose too forth from a tomb of hard-hewn stone, and from amid a guard of wakeful soldiers ; but no ear or eye of man was in that secret. And this resurrection of Jesus is a first-fruits.* And after He was risen, though He might have walked the earth before, He was seen only by those to whom it was given

* It was an unnoticed fact, the moment of which was not known. The angel afterwards descended, accompanied by an earthquake, and rolled back the stone. He then sat on it in triumph, putting the sentence of death into the keepers of it, and cheering the women who loved and sought Jesus. Does all this tell us that, after the silent secret rapture of the saints, there will come the appointed hour of *display*, when the power of the risen Lord shall be manifested in confusion on the enemy and joy to the waiting Israel? The secret rapture of Jesus did not affect the keepers of the stone : they were unconscious of it. It did nothing for anyone. It was its *results* in due time that told upon the enemies and the disciples, either in judgment or in joy.

Him to appear (Acts x. 40). And He could vanish out of sight as He pleased, or appear in various guises as He pleased, and none could trace Him. This last is the greatest instance; but all of these are notices helping us to apprehend how silence and secrecy may, if the Lord will, wait on the coming of the Lord from heaven to meet His saints in the air. I am sure that this presents a difficulty to many who would not dare in their own strength to grapple with the plain words of God.

But at present I feel that I should be doing wrong to the claims of Scripture were I to refuse to believe that these are saints gathered into heaven at some untold moment between the times of Revelation iii. and iv. The joy of chapter v. has been said to be but anticipatory: I grant it most surely. How could it but be so, seeing that the time of that chapter is not the millennium nor the season of creation's joy? But this I say also, that this anticipation is felt by each of the three companies—the redeemed elders, the angels, and all creatures, in their due places at that time, and the elders or living ones feel it in heaven. All whom the Son of man takes away in His day He will take away in judgment, after the pattern of the wicked antediluvians (Matt. xxiv. 38, 39). But the saints are not to be taken away in judgment, but to glory. Their removal finds its pattern therefore in that of Enoch, who was borne away to heaven before the flood or day of the Lord swept off the wicked from the face of the earth. Enoch was first taken to glory in heaven at some moment which did not depend on any event; and no

one, we may suggest, saw his rapture. Then comes the hour of ripened iniquity in the earth; and in that day the generation of the ungodly are taken away by a flood, and the earthly saint left for the new world here.

But, beloved, no more. With entire freedom of heart I can say, I do not desire to lead the opinions of others. Even our knowledge of truth itself is but little worth to the soul if it have not been attained by exercise of the renewed affections before God. And opinions are poor human things, the fruit of man's midnight lamp, at which he eats the bread of literary carefulness. And how can the saint value them? But if we walk together with right desires, though it may be in much remaining ignorance, we may assure ourselves, even at this still later hour of the day, that our Lord will not refuse us both His light and His company, as once to our brothers on their way to Emmaus. Do not, however, let me intimate that I find no difficulties in considering this great subject. Indeed I do; and besides difficulties, I am going to say this, that I think there may be some indistinctness as to it purposely left on the page of Scripture, in order to keep the saints in health of soul, maintaining them in spirit still, and ever longing for Jesus till His return, and yet being in divine strength, ready to reach Him by death through flames and floods. For indeed the soul's lively, hopeful, suffering energies are far beyond well ordered and carefully digested conceptions of these things. And sure, sure I am, that our Lord has another purpose touching us as His

disciples or pupils than the merely having us of one opinion by dint of the study of the Bible. For poor is the communion our souls have tasted as the fruit of that.

And I will add one other thought—that though I see nothing necessarily delaying our rapture into the air, nothing put as a drag upon it, yet I know and allow that many things are to be done on the earth before the full form of evil be revealed, or the reserved week of Daniel begin. The nations of the East may have either to be reproduced or organized, and all of the prophetic words about Babylon, Edom, Tyre, and the rest of these may have to be accomplished in the ancient sites of these famous cities and lands of the peoples. I do not deny this; and we know that much is to be done with Israel and with Judah, morally and politically, and with the land that is theirs by gift of God. And the West is to be got ready as the platform of a serious action ere the crisis comes, or its precursors in the seventieth week. Nor would I deny that a full 6000 years as to man's world is to tell itself out ere "the world to come" be displayed in its holy fruitfulness and beauty. And I grant that the present dispensation may still go on, because God's long-suffering is salvation, and He waits to be gracious. But still I add, that none of this is made necessary to our removal. We are not to be remembering days and years, though of course the longer we live the nearer is our salvation. Nor have we to ponder the ways of the nations, though of course the maturer the iniquity the more fit for the iniquity, the more fit for the judgment.

But "come, Lord Jesus" is ever to be the desire of the utterance. "Hope of our hearts, O Lord, appear" is a song, I believe, most suited to the worship of our congregations. And let me just add, that I grieve very specially over some prevailing thoughts on this subject, because they threaten to sully the heavenly atmosphere of our assemblies, and give check to the happier and more abundant flow of hope and joy in our souls. This would be bad indeed. Even increase of knowledge, with decline in the spirit of worship, would be bad. With this, however, I desire that our souls may be kept in patience. We should count the resistance of the world no "strange thing," take it what shape it may. We should all deem it a very likely thing that, instead of being at once with the Lord, we may have to answer for the profession of His name at the stake, or in captivity and loss of all things. O for the great conquering grace! O for hearts big with the expectation of Jesus, but ready also not only to suffer shame but to die for His name?

I say no more. May the Lord hinder the confidence of our hearts together from being soiled by suspicions and conjectures! A second journey across the Jordan will be worth the time and labour, if it hinder that, to prove that no altar has been raised to our own imaginations. Let us call each other's spiritual senses into exercise, but not seek either to frighten or to school others into our way of thinking. For on such subjects even an inspired apostle, as I noticed before, used this chastened style, "I would not, brethren, that ye should

be ignorant;" at the same time, as he also tells us in the same place, opening these mysteries, not for the filling of the mind of the disciples with opinions, but for the guiding of their hearts with right affections, saying to them, "lest ye should be wise in your own conceits." Let us then, beloved, get the apostle's taste and spirit, as well as his knowledge. A brother's spirit is more edifying than his communication. We experience that every day. And let us take a hint from another, "to aim to gather knowledge more from meditation than from study, and to have it dwell in us, not as opinions, but as the food of communion, the quickener of hope, the husbandman of divine charity, and the blessed refreshing of the kingdom of God within us." I esteem it holier to confess difficulties than to grapple with them in either the ingenuity or the strength of intellect. And surely it is bad when some fond thought or another is made the great object. It soon works itself into the central place, and becomes the gathering point. The order of the soul is disturbed, and the real godly edifying of the saints hindered. For we have to remember that knowledge is only a small part in the wide field of our husbandry (2 Peter i. 5-7). An appetite for it needs to be regulated rather than gratified. And many who in their husbandry have raised far less of it than others have more abundantly prospered in bringing forth richer fruits in service, and in charity, and in personal love to Jesus.

May the Lord deepen in the souls of all His saints the power of His own redeeming love, and shed more

and more among us the savour of His precious and honoured name!

But I desire still to add another thought. The sense of the nearness of the glory should be deeply cherished by our hearts, and we need to be at no effort to persuade ourselves of it. It is taught us richly in the word. "Whom he justified, them he also glorified," is a sentence which intimates this. It tells us of the path and the title to glory. When by faith we stand justified by the blood of Christ, we are at once made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. And the path to it being thus simple, the place of it is near, and its capacity to unfold or manifest itself lies in the compass of a moment or of the twinkling of an eye, if the Lord please.

The congregation of Israel were set at the door of the tabernacle to acquaint themselves with their high priest and his ways. They took knowledge of his consecration and services, and then the glory appeared. That glory was just waiting within its veil, and all it wanted was a title to show itself, an object worthy of its visitation. And as soon as the congregation stand in the value of the priesthood, the glory finds this object. This is very expressive of the nearness to the camp in which it was all the while dwelling (Lev. viii. ix.). Just so at the introduction of the ark into the temple afterwards (2 Chron. v.), and at the erection of the tabernacle before (Ex. xl.). And on these occasions the glory appeared to cause triumph and gladness, for the scenes it visited were ready first. But this was not always so.

A light surprised the persecutor as he journeyed to Damascus. It was above the brightness of the sun at noon-day. And well it might have been, for it was a beam from the glory and bore the Lord of the glory upon it (Isaiah xxiv. 23). But it did not come to gladden Saul all at once or merely to display itself. It had, I may say, weightier business on hand. It came to make this ruthless persecutor a citizen of its own native land. It begins, therefore, by laying him in ruins before it. It is the light of Gideon's pitcher confounding the host of Midian or the army of the uncircumcised. Saul falls to the earth. He takes the sentence of death into him. He learns that he had been madly kicking against the pricks, destroying himself by his enmity to Jesus, for that Jesus was the Lord of the glory. But He that wounds can heal, He that heals can make alive. "Rise and stand upon thy feet," says the Lord of glory to him, and he is quickly made His companion, servant, and fellow-heir. It is sweetly characteristic of the present age that the hand of a fellow-disciple is used to strengthen Saul to bear the glory, or to accomplish his conversion. The seraphim alone do that for Isaiah (chapter vi.), the Spirit does it for Ezekiel (chapter ii.), the hand of the Son of man does it for Daniel (chapter x.); but a fellow-disciple is made to do it for Saul.

What a transaction was this! what a moment! Never, perhaps, had such points in the furthest distance met before. The persecutor of the flock and the Saviour of the flock, the Lord of the glory and the

sinner whom the glory is consuming, are beside each other! The glory came, not to gladden, as it had the congregation of old, but to convict, and through conviction and revelation of itself and Jesus to turn a sinner from darkness to light, making him a meet partaker of the inheritance of its native land. Can we trust all this and rejoice in it? Is it pleasant to us to know that the glory is thus near us? Stephen found it so when the Lord of it pleased to raise the curtain (Acts vii.). And when the voice of the archangel summons it, and the trump of God heralds it, it will be here again as in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, to bear us up to its own country (1 Cor. xv., 1 Thess. iv.).

Thus may we cherish the thought that the glory is near us. Our translation to its native land asks but for a moment, for the twinkling of an eye. The title is simple, the path is short, and the journey rapidly accomplished. "Whom he justified, them he also glorified."

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