

AN ATTEMPT TO ANSWER
THE QUESTIONS,
MAY THE COMING OF THE LORD
BE EXPECTED
IMMEDIATELY?
AND,
WILL THE TRANSLATION OF THE CHURCH
BE SECRET?

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AN ATTEMPT,

&c.

It is proposed in this paper, (1) To give a statement of the views of those who hold the immediate coming of the Lord, and the secret rapture of the church; (2) To state some broad and leading objections to these views; (3) To bring forward some special passages against them; (4) To examine the principal considerations adduced in their favour; and, lastly, to conclude with some general reflections.

The view advocated by some is, the possibility that the Lord may come at any moment—a view supposed to be sanctioned by many passages, and to be not really at variance with others which appear to indicate that many events are to occur first. In order to bring these two classes of Scriptures into harmony, it is endeavoured to be proved, that there will be an interval between the coming of Christ into the air, where he receives the saints to himself, and his coming onwards to the earth, attended by his saints, to execute judgment—an interval long enough for the accomplishment of all those prophetic events which must be fulfilled ere he does thus come in judgment. That during this interval, the Jews will return to their own land,

the Antichrist arise, the great tribulation take place, the Apocalyptic seals be opened, trumpets sounded, and vials poured out. Many events, it is admitted, may interpose; "but in this case we could not say of any of them that they certainly will. At any moment, our blessed Lord may come to receive us to himself."*

It is true, that many passages clearly set before us the 'blessed hope' of the appearing of Christ: each generation of the Church might hope to see it. As a matter of corporate expectation, it might always be said, "We which are alive and remain." But, more than this, these passages *need* not be understood to express. That^a more than this they *cannot* mean will appear hereafter. If, however, they *need* not mean more, we are not obliged to resort to the strange idea of dividing the second advent into two comings; for any generation might witness the accomplishment of all those events which, in other passages, it is declared shall occur before the Lord's return. In a word, it is only by attaching an extreme and unnecessary sense to the one class of passages, that any embarrassment can arise about the other. But, it may be asked, "Is this difference of opinion of any great importance? Does it matter much whether or not the church will be on earth during the few years which will end the dispensation?" Truth is always important, and error always mischievous, even though we may not see it. The importance of the subject will appear as it is developed; meanwhile it is submitted, that a theory such as the above, which obliges its advocates to strain to the utmost one set of Scriptures, and to explain another by a supposition neither obvious nor natural, is not, on its very first presentation, calculated to prepossess us

* "Eight Lectures on Prophecy," &c. p. 184.

in its favour. We proceed to state some general objections to it.

1. It takes away from us our direct and full interest in considerable portions of the Gospels, and almost the whole of the Apocalypse; for these are regarded as strictly and properly belonging only to certain parties, Jews and Gentiles, which will come under the Divine dealings after the removal of the church. With such Scriptures, then, we can have no more personal concern than we have with portions, for instance, of Isaiah or Ezekiel, which treat of peoples and times alien to and distant from us. Instruction, it is granted, we may get; principles we may gather; warning, to some extent, we may receive; but we cannot take them home to us like the 17th of John, or the epistle to the Ephesians. We cannot put ourselves under their direct, point-blank bearing. Yet they are all parts of the New Testament; while the Revelation is repeatedly addressed to the 'servants of God' and the 'churches' (i. 1—3, xxii. 6, 16); and that with an earnestness incompatible with the idea that these are not personally concerned with its prophecies, but will be removed previously to their fulfilment. Truly, we should look well, ere we allow any one thus, as it were, to mark with an obelisk whole chapters, and almost one whole book of the New Testament, as portions that do not concern us except in an indirect and inferential manner, more particularly if they happen to be the very parts especially designed to direct our steps, and guide our testimony amidst the perils of the last days. In this case, our general objection to having our New Testament divided into portions of church and Jewish interest assumes a more special character; for we find the church's concern with the entire subject of *unful-*

filled prophecy materially affected. How can it be otherwise, if we believe that at any moment we may be withdrawn from its scene? To say that, while we *are* here, it is of use to us, is to plead for a very secondary concern in it. Of what special value is a chart to such as never expect to navigate the perilous waters for which it is constructed? What great importance will a traveller in the dark attach to his torch, who thinks he may any moment cross the threshold of his home? Peter's words, however, seem to present a different view of the matter. The word of prophecy, he says, is "a light in a dark place, till the day dawn, and the day-star arise." No hint that those to whom it is thus commended will suddenly be translated from the midst of the darkness, while the light shall be taken up by others; but rather an indication of its value to the former during the continuance of the darkness of this age, and up to the early morning light of the next one.

2. The passages in the gospels are few, and not to be mistaken, where the apostles are *not* our representatives; see *e.g.* Matt. xi. 5. With the exception of few things confined to the then time, all that Jesus had commanded them they were to teach among all nations (Matt. xxviii. 20), and "unto the end of the age." Like the stones of Solomon's temple, hewn and polished apart, and afterwards noiselessly built up together, the living stones of the spiritual house, prepared in the life-time, and by the death and resurrection of our Lord, were compacted together at Pentecost. But the fact, that the church was then first formed is far from furnishing an argument for separating it from any integral part of previous gospel instruction. Unless there be a good reason for the

contrary, we should regard ourselves always as addressed in the apostles and first disciples. Do they represent us, and listen for us, at the sermon on the mount, at the last supper, at the concluding discourses in John; and yet represent quite another set of people in the 24th of Matthew and 21st of Luke? Are we on church ground with Martha and Mary, at Bethany; and in company with the Jewish remnant when we place ourselves with the disciples on the mount of Olives? (Matt. xxiv. 3.) To such arbitrary distinctions as these does the view in question compel its adherents.

3. A further objection to it is the extraordinary result, that the church will be removed from the earth at the very time of all others, when we should think its testimony would be most needed, and when suffering will be most glorious. Surely, of all others, the church of Christ is best fitted to be confronted with the great Antichrist and his followers. Strange, indeed, should its martyrology break off at that critical period! Strange, if tribulations, closely linked in the Apocalyptic visions with the brightest glories of heaven, should be reserved for another than that body, which, for nearly two thousand years, has been associated in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ!

4. It seems to some a privileged position to know of no event that must necessarily intervene between themselves and Christ's coming. Yet it is clear that various Scriptures, presently to be mentioned, intimated a delay in that coming. Peter speaks of scoffers in the *last days*, who shall say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" &c. And it seems more in accordance with that confidential knowledge of the Lord, which is granted to us as his friends, (John xv. 15,) that we should be instructed about the signs of

his coming, than that we should be left utterly uninformed about them. If it be a privilege to know what shall befall *others* after we are gone from the earth, still more is it to be acquainted with what personally affects *ourselves*. It sounds rather paradoxical to make ignorance a feature of a heavenly and privileged condition, and knowledge a characteristic of an earthly and less favoured one. And after all, if we determine that the signs are not for the church, for whom are they? Those who observe them must be such as believe in Jesus, and can use his words, and are entirely of 'like precious faith' with ourselves: and if there be any valid objection to our own concern with the signs, how comes it that there is none in the case of others who so closely resemble us? It may be well we should ask ourselves, "Do I love the Lord, and desire to see him? *or*, do I wish to escape out of trouble?" If the former feeling preponderates in our hearts, will there not be 'the *patience* of hope'? Intervening events, which we expect on the authority of the word of God, cannot destroy that hope with which the Holy Ghost fills our hearts. Hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given unto us; not because there are no intervening events. That same blessed Spirit, through the word, instructs us concerning events. Such instruction is as surely a favour, and for our profit, as the hope of our Lord's appearing is glorious and sanctifying.

Such are some leading and general objections. But we have now to produce positive and special Scriptures. It must be observed, however, that the want of such on the other side of the question is very apparent. Of positive assertion there is no lack: fanciful infe-

rences, and airy analogies are to be found; but then they are so ethereal as to elude the grasp, almost as much of friends as opponents. Many a single plain passage is enough to demolish a Romish or a Socinian tenet. Where is there a solitary proof-text to establish either of the points here controverted? Our 'adversary' has yet to write his 'book'; a book, that is to say, wherein substantial reasons shall appear; wherein Scripture shall be used in a straight-forward, fearless, and natural manner; as when, for example, one is dealing with the corruptions of Romanism, or disproving the errors of anti-premillenarians. But the absence of Scripture proof on a point where it may reasonably be looked for is only half the evil. It is probably attributable to this felt deficiency that justice is not done to many passages that must be allowed to prove the opposite, unless we consent, in this instance, to abandon that plain and literal mode of interpreting Scripture which we have found so powerful in every vindication of the truth, and resort to something which appears to betray a conscious weakness, and to lay us but too open to the charges of unfairness, inconsistency, and trifling with God's word.

The following are some of these passages. The parable of the wheat and the tares. (Matt. xiii.) "*Both grow together until the harvest*" (ver. 30); a statement clearly decisive of the whole question, for unbroken continuity cannot possibly be more plainly expressed. As the harvest field was in the apostles' days, so it has continued to our own days, and so it will continue until the harvest, or the 'end of the age.' (ver. 39.) True believers and mere professors still form this mingled crop; and it is remarkable that the *latter* will be the first gathered together, that is, rooted up. (ver. 30.)

Some, indeed, interpret this of a 'process in Providence,' and explain that the agencies there at work will group men together into 'bundles,' according to their community of interests, tastes, &c.* Such associations and confederacies do indeed mark the present time; but men are not thus drawn together *as tares*, i.e. *as nominal christians*. Nor do such associations consist of tares *only*; many real christians being included in them. Again, 'gathering together,' or 'gathering up,' or 'gathering,' (the same word in the Greek, verses 28, 29, 30, 40, 41,) is removal from the field by reaping or plucking up, that is, the end of present existence—the gathering *out of* the kingdom, (ver. 41,) as is evident also from verse 29. Moreover, the gathering and binding are *coercive*, and cannot represent common interests leading to voluntary associations. Nor are these things the result of a 'process in Providence,' or some undefined 'agencies,' working during a prolonged period; but they are done by the holy angels, and at *one* definite point of time, the harvest, or the end of the age. On the express authority, then, of this Scripture, we are authorized to affirm that the church will continue on earth until the end of the age; and we are, consequently, deeply interested in the enquiry, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matt. xxiv. 3.) And until all the predicted signs shall have come to pass, it is impossible rightly to be expecting the Lord from day to day. Nor does the parable of the fig-tree (verses 32, 33,) sanction any such expectation. "So likewise ye, when ye shall see *all these things*, (therefore not before,) know that it (or he) is near, even at the doors." The parallel afterwards drawn between

* "The Church and the Kingdom," p. 42.

the days of Noah and the coming of the Son of Man, is to the same effect. (verses 37—39.) Noah's testimony continued to the end of that age, just as ours will continue to the close of the present one. The parable of the two servants (verses 45—51,) shews that the knowledge of the Lord's delaying his coming may be abused by an evil person, but will not operate unfavourably on the faithful. A similar notice of delay is a leading feature in the parable of the virgins, which gives so true a picture of the general state of the church during the greatest part of the dispensation. And here, too, is the same unbroken continuity; here are again the same parties—true believers, and mere professors—to the very end.

Luke xix. 11—27. The parable of the nobleman was delivered in order to check a premature expectation of the appearing of the kingdom. (verse 11.) It ought to answer this purpose now. The servants are the professing church, and the citizens are the Jews. The former do not cease to 'occupy' till the master comes, and he does not come till he has received his kingdom. (Compare Daniel vii. 13, 14.) The Son of man is invested with the kingdom after the blasphemies of the little horn [Antichrist.] (See also ver. 21.) So that the same servants, or the church, will remain on earth during the whole career of Antichrist. Thus, also, in Rev. xi. 15, it is only after the seventh angel has sounded, that great voices in heaven proclaim that the "sovereignty of the world hath become the sovereignty of our Lord and of his Christ."

The closing discourse of our Lord in John is full of intimations of intervening events; *e.g.* xvi. 2—4.

Such is some of the evidence drawn from the gospels. And when we come to the epistles, we find passage

upon passage proving that the early churches were acquainted with events which rendered the immediate expectation of the Lord impossible. Peter had his own death foretold him, (John xxi. 18, 19,) consequently all must have been certain that the Lord could not come in his lifetime. Yet, so little did this knowledge weaken in the apostle's mind the hope of the return of Christ, that in the certain prospect of his near departure, he dwells on the power and coming of our Lord, (2 Peter i. 14—16,) and would also have the church remember his instructions *after his decease*. (Compare iii. 2—4, already referred to.) Paul also expected his own death, (2 Tim. iv. 6,) and yet, like his brother apostle, in the same breath, he speaks of the appearing of the Lord (ver. 8), and like him too, predicts evils that should arise in the church, (2 Tim. iv. 3, 4,) and especially in the '*last days*,' (2 Tim. iii. 1; compare Acts xx. 29, 30,) and the '*latter times*.' (1 Tim. iv. 1.) He enjoins Timothy to keep the commandment....."*until the appearing [epiphany, or manifestation] of our Lord Jesus Christ, which in his times he shall shew who is,*" &c. In Tit. ii. 13, he speaks of our looking for that blessed hope, and *appearing [epiphany] of the glory of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ*. This '*appearing*' can be none other than that august and public advent spoken of in the gospels; and Timothy and the church could not have been exhorted to observe the teaching of the epistles till that appearing, if they were to be translated from the earth before it. In short, if the known intervention of events is to be regarded as incompatible with a right posture of expectation, it is difficult to see how large portions of the epistles, as well as of the gospels, could have been written;—how even it

could have been said to the church in Smyrna, "Ye shall have tribulation ten days." (Rev. ii. 10.)

In that important dispensational chapter, Rom. xi., we read that "blindness in part [or, partial blindness] is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." And as the antichristian period will be the time of the nation's greatest blindness, that cannot be *after* the fulness of the Gentiles is come in; since in place of the blindness becoming greater then, it is to be removed altogether, and all Israel will be saved. (vers. 25, 26.) Thus God will continue, as now, to take out of the Gentiles a people for his name (Acts xv. 14), and the fulness or complete number of the elect will be coëval with the national conversion of Israel. So that there can be no translation of the church till the close of the period of Antichrist.

From 1 Cor. xv., we learn that there will be three, and *only* three, epochs of resurrection: 1, Christ's; 2, of those that are Christ's at his coming; 3, 'the end,' or the general resurrection. (Rev. xx. 12.) Now the view of the possible translation, or 'rapture' of the church any day obliges us to infer that the saints slain in the Revelation under Antichrist will be raised subsequently to those who belong to the church. This necessitates a division of the second of the above epochs into at least two parts; which, besides being in itself unauthorized, is contradicted by verses 51, 52, of the same chapter. The resurrection of the dead precedes the change of the living (see also 1 Thess. iv. 15, 16); and both take place at one precise period, which will end the present dispensation.

In 1 Thess. v. 1—4, after speaking of the day of the Lord coming on the world as a thief in the night, the apostle adds, "But ye, brethren, are not in dark-

ness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." The natural inference being, that the day of the Lord will come *simultaneously* upon the world, and the church; only it will find the latter prepared for it, while it will be destruction to the former.

In 2 Thess. i. 7, 8, Paul declares that the persecuted saints will have *rest* with himself—When? At a period prior to the open judgment of the world? Not so; but "when the Lord Jesus shall be *revealed* from heaven *with his mighty angels*, in flaming fire taking vengeance," &c. Till then not even is *rest* to be expected. Surely, if 'it is written,' is to decide a question, this single passage ought to settle this one.

2 Thess. ii. It is needful to give a more accurate translation of the two first verses of this chapter, than that of the common version. "But we beseech you, brethren, concerning* the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken from your understanding—or be troubled—neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter, as from us, as (if we had said,) that the day of the Lord had commenced. See that no one deceive you by any means; for (that day will not commence,) except there first come the apostacy; and the Man of Sin be revealed, the son of perdition." Concerning the misapprehension of the Thessalonians, various conclusions have been drawn. "To be still in unchanged bodies, not having met the Lord in the air, and their departed brethren still in the grave, while, as they

* This preposition never has in the New Testament the sense here given it in the common version; "and it is most unnatural," says Mr. Alford (Greek Testament), "that the apostle should thus conjure them by that, concerning which he was about to teach them."

supposed, the terrors of the day of the Lord actually surrounded them, it is no marvel that they were shaken and troubled? * Surely the terrors of the day of the Lord are for his enemies, and the enemies of his people. How then could those terrors be present, and those enemies be unchecked in their cruel persecution of the Thessalonian saints? Could these saints have had such a notion? This idea indeed involves the very improbable supposition that the special instructions in the first epistle (iv. 13—18; v. 1—4,) had been entirely useless. Nor does it agree well with the praise bestowed on them in this same epistle, for their patience and faith, in all their persecutions and tribulations. (i. 4.) Another, and a more probable view is, that they believed (or at least some of them,) that the day of the Lord had commenced secretly in heaven (see Dan. vii. 13, 14): a thing, however, which could not be, previous to the blasphemies of Antichrist, as the prophecy shows, and as the apostle proceeds to remind them. But whatever their mistake was, one would have thought none could arise among ourselves respecting the purport of this chapter. "Its object," says, Mr. Alford,† referring to this epistle, "is to make it clear to them that the day of Christ, though a legitimate matter of expectation for every christian, and a constant stimulus for watchfulness, was not yet come: that a course and development of events must first happen, which he lays forth to them in the spirit of prophecy; showing them that this development has already begun, and that not until it has ripened will the coming of the Lord take place." And this is probably the view of all (however they

* "Plain Papers on Prophetic and other Subjects," p. 238.

† Prolegom. vol. iii.

may differ as to further details,) who are not under the bias of the idea we are opposing. "As to the early fathers, their interpretation," says the writer just quoted, "is for the most part well marked and consistent. They all regard it as a prophecy of the future, as yet unfulfilled when they wrote. They all regard the *παρουσία* as the personal return of our God to judgment, and to bring in his kingdom. They all regard the adversary here described as an individual person, the incarnation and concentration of sin."* "The view of the fathers," he adds, "remained for ages the prevalent one in the church." In all the quotations which he gives at length from the early christian writers,—from Irenæus in the second, to Jerome in the fourth century, there is not a trace of the notion of the church not being on earth during the time of Antichrist, but often quite the contrary. Mr. Alford may perhaps have never heard of this notion, but his remarks will nevertheless apply to it: "The subject of the coming of Antichrist must have been no uncommon one in preaching and in converse, during the latter part of the first, and the second century. That no echoes of the apostolic sayings on the matter should have reached thus far, no savour of the first outpouring of interpretation by the Spirit penetrated through the next generation, can hardly be conceived."†

Such being the evidence of the epistles, it would be surprising if we did not find it corroborated by the Revelation: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those

* Prolegom. vol. iii. p. 56.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 65. The reader will also find more bearing upon this subject in "Maitland's Apostles' School of Prophetic Interpretation."

things which are written therein; for the time is at hand." (i. 3, compare xxii. 6, 7, 9.) "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches." (xxii. 16.) From these passages it appears: 1. That the prophecy was expressly delivered *to the church*, with a special blessing annexed to the diligent use of it. 2. That its words have to be *kept*; an expression, to say the least, far more in favour of a direct personal concern in the events predicted, than so very secondary an interest in them, as would be the case on the supposition of the church's previous translation. Compare the frequent use of this word in John xiv. and xv. 3. That the time of the fulfilment of the prophecy being *at hand*, is the special motive for this careful attention to it; leaving the fair inference, that it is the parties just addressed who are to contemplate the possibility of the fulfilment of the visions in their own time.

Rev. x. 10, 11. John eats the little book: that is, he enters into full communion with the things it treats of; and he is then to prophecy against many peoples, &c. He is here, then, as a representative of those who shall actually testify of these things in the last days. And who are they? Surely, the same referred to in the inscription of the Revelation just quoted: the same whom John also represented on the Mount of Olives (Mark xiii. 3): for on what principle of sober interpretation can the apostles represent more than one body in future times; or any other body than the church of Christ?

Rev. xi. 1, 2. Christian worshippers and Jewish, at the time immediately preceding the last 1260 days, here stand in contrast. The former represented by such as have liberty to enter into the (symbolic) temple, or

heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews, *passim*), the latter by those in the outer court, whose worship God does not acknowledge, but gives up their city to the oppression of the Gentiles. The inference is, that *both* classes of worshippers will continue during the 1260 days: which is confirmed by xii. 11, 17, where the confessors and martyrs of this period are described as those who overcame Satan "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death:" and, "who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus." Again, xiii. 10, it is said, "Here is the patience and the faith of the saints:" and xiv. 12, (the same period of the ascendancy of Antichrist,) "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the *faith of Jesus*." The next verse announces the resurrection of those who have died in the Lord: for it is written, that such are blessed *from henceforth*; and verses 14, 15 describe the coming of the Lord, and the harvest. (Matt. xiii.)

Rev. xvi. 15. Just before the gathering of the kings to Armageddon, the warning of the suddenness of the coming of Christ is once more repeated: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth," &c. See also iii. 3, where the church is thus addressed. Rev. xvii. 6. "And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." Would any one in the early church have understood any other body than that to which he belonged, to be in question in these passages, or any other 'coming' than *the one* mentioned in the gospels and epistles?

It is in the nineteenth chapter that we first really see the church in heaven (ver. 14); coming with the

Lord to the judgment on the Beast and his followers. It must evidently have been caught up just previously to meet the Lord in his descent. The first resurrection is therefore past, though not alluded to till chap. xx. 4, 5, in which place the prominent, if not indeed exclusive, mention of the souls of the martyrs under Antichrist, proves of itself that they are *part of the church*, (not merely sharing in some of its glories,) raised simultaneously with all its other departed members, at the resurrection of the just, or of "those that are Christ's at his coming." (1 Cor. xv. 23.)

It has been properly observed, that up to chap. xix. the Revelation (except where Christ's actings are mentioned *anticipatively*; as, for example, vi. 2, x. 1, 2, &c.) relates to the judgments of *God*, Christ being still at his right hand (Ps. cx. 1), till, in chap. xix., his enemies are made his footstool. Till Christ leaves the right hand of God, the church cannot be taken to him, and when taken to him, judgment follows at once on the wicked. And in harmony with this plain and consistent outline, we find in the Revelation that, so long as *God* is acting, he uses the ministry of angels *only*; that when *Christ* comes forth, saints and angels are both with him. When once the saints shall be raised, and taken to heaven, they will enter on the full exercise of their royal and priestly functions. But we find angels (whether symbolically or literally) alone employed in the greater part of Revelation, both in priestly ministrations in heaven, and in the execution of judgments on earth. Is it likely that an angel would be seen ministering at the golden altar (viii. 3—5), or that angels would serve in the symbolic temple (xv. 5—8), the very sphere we shall occupy, as the risen priesthood of Israel, if the church were actually

then in heaven? It is not only an inconvenience attending this supposition, that it removes the church from the earth when its testimony would seem to be most needed, but that it introduces it into heaven years before it exercises any official functions,—taking no part, save in worship, and being simply spectator of the great things transacted.

The designations applied in the prophecy of Daniel to those who witness and suffer during the antichristian period, are almost as decisive as those just quoted from the Revelation. They are called “saints of the Most High, (or, of the *high places*—vii. 18, 22, 25, 27; compare Eph. ii. 6,) to be distinguished apparently from the *people* of the saints of the Most High” (ver. 27), which seems to mean Israel; as also, in viii. 24, “the mighty ones, and *the people of the holy ones*” (or, of the saints). In viii. 10, the ‘host of heaven,’ and ‘the stars,’ are symbols of those whose standing and calling is heavenly; and who, if Jews, as is probable, must belong to the church (compare xii. 3). In xi. 33, are mentioned ‘they that understand;’ ver. 35, ‘them of understanding;’ xii. 3, ‘they that be wise;’ xii. 10, ‘the wise;’ (all being, in the original, the same word,) who, though Israelites, must belong to the “remnant, according to the election of grace” (Rom. xi.), that is, form part of the church: and they are distinguished from ‘the people’ (xi. 33); ‘thy people’ (xii. 1), *i.e.* the nation of Israel generally; and from ‘the wicked’ (xi. 32, xii. 10), or the antichristian party.

The second question we have to attempt to answer is, Will the translation of the church be secret? This has in part been anticipated in some of the Scriptures already cited. There is no idea of secrecy in the state-

ment that the tares shall *first* be gathered together, that the "*angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just.*" (Matt. xiii. 49.) Nor in this: "*As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even to the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*" (Matt. xxiv. 27.) Nor in the following: "*With a great sound of a trumpet*" (Matt xxiv. 31); "*Waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Cor. i. 7); "*The last trump*" (1 Cor. xv. 52, the *first* was at Sinai); "*The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God*" (1 Thess. iv. 16); "*The epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ, which in his times he shall shew,*" &c. (1 Tim. vi. 14, 15); "*To all them also that love his epiphany* (2 Tim. iv. 8); "*That blessed hope, and epiphany of the glory of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* (Tit. ii. 13.) If, therefore, such Scriptures as these reveal the coming of the Lord to gather his church unto himself, the notion of *secrecy* is exploded.

In proceeding now to examine some of the considerations brought forward on the other side of this question; it is well to observe, that they are not always a fair sample of the merit of the works from which they are taken; nor do they afford a fair criterion of the powers of their writers. As there are few errors in support of which things more or less plausible have not been advanced, there can be no hesitation in attributing the want of a fair semblance of argument in this instance, simply to the inherent weakness of the position: a precarious one, even supposing but *one* of the above independent passages could be brought against it; more than precarious, when confronted with their combined, and often interlacing testimony.

The idea that the knowledge of signs would neutralize the power of the expectation of Christ may summarily be met by inquiring, Has not God been pleased to give signs? If so, whatever we may think, *the expectation of Christ can only be rightly held in connection with them.* But this idea is also contrary to the analogy of common life. "A friend is not the less earnestly waited for, because a letter is first expected to intimate his approach. Summer is not less certainly expected, because the fig-tree must first put forth its leaves." There is also a wide difference between the knowledge of events which *may* be fulfilled in the life of any one generation, and the interposition of a spiritual millennium. "Moreover, the events themselves are not such as could draw away the Christian heart from the Lord and his appearing, or be in anywise substituted for it; because they are events in the growth of *iniquity*, and the course of its ripening for judgment. A spiritual millennium, on the other hand, would form a precious hope, had it been revealed by God for the hope of his church; and, when expected, must engage the affections of the soul, and so interfere with the revealed hope of the church, in the personal appearing and reign of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But Christian affections cannot be fixed on the development of antichristian evil and blasphemy. Rather does the revelation and expectation of the latter serve as a dark moral contrast to our blessed hope, enhancing its preciousness and its glory."

The following extracts are from *The Church at Thessalonica*:—"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 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 the 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."*

Analogies of this sort are always unsafe, without some direct evidence be first produced. They may then *illustrate*, though they cannot *prove* a point. As to the above, we can indeed regard Enoch, by himself, as a type of the living who will be changed at the Lord's coming, and previous to the judgment; but we cannot take Noah, one of the household of faith (compare Heb. xi. 7), as a type of the remnant, who will not have faith in Christ till they see him (Zech. xii. 10; xiii. 1); nor have we authority for grouping the translation of Enoch, and the flood (650 years apart) in one typical tableau. Rather is Noah a type of *the church* already saved *in* Christ (1 Pet. iii. 20, 21); and which will be safe *with* him before the outpouring of judgment. (Matt. xxiv. 38.) Noah, once shut up in the ark, was as really removed from the judgment as Enoch; and virtually, though not locally, he ceased to belong to its sphere. The author's (unproved) application of Matt. xxiv. cannot be conceded (see above); and it seems rather a low view, both of the understanding and the faith of the Thessalonian saints, who

are said to be *in* God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ (i. 1, ii. 1), to suppose that the 'terror' of the day of the Lord* was a source of 'anxiety' to them.

"As to *corruptions* within the church, they [the apostles] certainly anticipate them; but still they guard that generation against them, speaking of corruptions even of the *last days* as having *already* appeared."†

That many of these corruptions were already incipient, when the apostles wrote, is plain; but it is equally so, that they spoke prophetically of the 'last days' and the 'latter times,' when they should abound and be matured.

"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.*"‡

Against so ideal a distinction as this, one is puzzled how to bring argument; but it may serve as illustration of what, with the advocates of this view, not unfrequently supplies its place; and upon the strength of which, a half apologetic tone warms into the expression of strong self-persuasion; as if the reader were intended to be partly coaxed, partly overawed into acquiescence. Such, assuredly, is not the way in which the valued author of this paper would commonly defend the precious truths he holds on other subjects.

* "The Church at Thessalonica," p. 8.

† Ibid. p. 12.

‡ Ibid. p. 15.

"The first stage...is the ascent of the saints...to meet the Lord as he reaches the air, in his descent from heaven...the next stage...will conduct us to the Father. (1 Thess. iii. 13.) ...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. 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 in 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.)*

The passage in John xiv. evidently expresses the *full result* of Christ's work. It behoved the author to shew that the words, "I will *come again*," do not refer to the *glorious* advent, as doubtless they do; and the Son's receiving us to himself, that where he is, *there we may be also*, can only refer to our eternal dwelling with him in the Father's house; as Bengel remarks† on this place: "The Father's house is the Son's also;"‡ and the text in Thessalonians is equally general, and equally unsuited to demonstrate such stages as the above. Yet these are the grounds on which it is so confidently declared, that the saints are in the Father's house before the Son of man receives his kingdom! a

* "The Church at Thessalonica," pp. 15, 16.

† Gnomon. ‡ *Patris domus, Filii domus*, cp. xvi. 15.

statement contradicted also by Luke xix. 11—27 (see above) and Ps. cx. 1. Nor can Rev. v. by any means synchronize with Dan. vii. In the former, the Lamb opened the sealed book 1800 *years ago*; but he received no kingdom then: nor will he, as appears both in Daniel and the Revelation, till the close of the period of the beast, and the sounding of the seventh trumpet. (Rev. xi. 15.) The ‘book,’ moreover, relates to the actings of *God on behalf of Christ*, not to the day of Christ’s own power; and the Lamb took it and opened it, in order to give its instruction to the churches. The song in heaven was occasioned by the Lamb’s having taken the book, his being about to open its seals, and his temporarily assuming that mediate place between the throne and the creature, which will be abidingly his in the next age. *When* the living creatures and the elders (both symbols of the whole company of the redeemed, v. 9), seen *anticipatively* in heaven, will be *really* there, has been already shewn. That they cannot be there at the time contended for in the above extract, is also apparent from verses 8, 10, 13, upon which more will be said presently.

“Then, in due season, the third stage.....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.’”*

* “The Church at Thessalonica,” pp. 16, 17.

The former stages being proved merely visionary, this 'third' one resolves itself into the one open coming, of which alone Scripture speaks. That the apostles knew of none other, is plain enough, from the passage in Thessalonians referred to.

"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...then he brought them in and presented them as *his brethren* to *Pharaoh*...and then he led them forth into *the scene of his power and glory*," &c.

The reconciliation of his brethren to Joseph may be a foreshadowing of that of *Israel* to Christ; but it is an unfortunate reference to the church, which stands in no position analogous to that of Joseph's brethren, but is rather represented by his wife and children. But even otherwise, the illustration does not suit; for Joseph's brethren were publicly taken into his house, and *this*, not his making himself known to them, would be the parallel to the taking away of the saints.

The following is from *Plain Papers on Prophetic and other Subjects*:—"Clearly, then, 'the day' cannot come till the Man of Sin has come. But the apostle does not say that *Christ* cannot come till then. He distinguishes between 'the coming' (*parousia*) of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the brightness (*epiphany*) of his coming (*parousia*). It is his *parousia* that gathers the saints in the air. It is the *epiphany* of his *parousia* that destroys the Man of Sin. The day commences with the *epiphany* of Christ's coming—that is, with his appearing to the world. The day therefore comes not till the Man of Sin has come. But we have no warrant to say this of the *parousia* of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to him. That may be any

day, any hour. Nothing that has been considered presents any necessary obstacle to that.”*

It may well be thought, that so forced and unnatural—not to say, absurd—a distinction as the above, would never have been attempted, except under the pressing exigencies of a pre-formed and precarious theory. Let any unbiassed person read chap. i. 7—10, and say whether ‘that day’ (ver. 10), the day of deliverance to the saints, and of punishment to the wicked, be not the same as the ‘day of the Lord.’ (ii. 2.) The coming (*parousia*) is of course the early part of the day. “What shall be the sign of thy coming (*parousia*), and of the end of the age?” (Matt. xxiv. 3, compare verses 27, 37, 39.) This alone is a refutation of the assertion, that the *parousia* ‘may be any day.’ That the church is concerned with ‘the day,’ is clear from such passages as these: the Corinthians waited for the “coming (*revelation*) of our Lord Jesus Christ;” they would be blameless “*in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” (1 Cor. i. 7, 8.) God would perform the good work in the Philippians, “*until the day of Jesus Christ.*” (i. 7.) The apostle prayed that they might be without offence, *till the day of Christ.* (i. 10.) Peter writes,—“Looking for and hastening unto the *coming of the day of God.*” (2 Pet. iii. 12.) As to ‘epiphany,’ let the passages already quoted be remembered, (1 Tim. vi. 14; 2 Tim. i. 10, iv. 8; Tit. ii. 13,) in all of which the epiphany is the very hope of the church. The word was sometimes employed by the Greeks for the *dawn* of the day. The phrase here is properly ‘the appearance of his coming;’ and, as Bengel observes, “the *appearance of the coming* is before the *coming* itself, or, at all events, it is the first shining forth of it” (*appa-*

ritio adventus ipso adventu prior est, vel certe prima ipsius adventus emicatio). According to all propriety of language, it *cannot* signify a *later* period than 'the coming.' The above statement, however, makes it *years* after the coming! It might indeed seem superfluous to point out to a reader of plain sense, that in the sentence, "shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the appearance of his coming:" 'appearance' is as much an emanation of 'coming,' and as inseparable from it, as 'spirit' is an emanation of 'mouth,' and inseparable from it. (Compare 'epiphany,' or '*appearance of the glory*.' Tit. ii. 13.) Lastly, on the understanding of the necessary revelation of Antichrist before the *parousia*, the instruction which follows is very appropriate, as well as the apostle's language in ver. 13; where he thanks God for having chosen them from the beginning (compare Rev. xiii. 8); and in ver. 15, where he exhorts them to stand fast.*

* It is perfectly evident, that the words *parousia* (coming), *epiphany* (appearing), and *apocalypse* (revelation), when used of the return of the Lord, relate to *one* advent. Thus, the *parousia*, or 'coming' of Stephanas (1 Cor. xvi. 17), of Titus (2 Cor. vii. 6), of Paul (Phil. i. 26), was in each case a single definite event. The word is literally, *the being* or *becoming present*; and so in 2 Cor. x. 10, and Phil. ii. 12, it is translated *presence*: the notion of continuance being there, and not of arrival only. As Christ, after returning to receive his saints, and destroy his enemies, will go back to heaven with the former, we speak of his 'coming' to us, not of his 'presence' with us. This 'coming' is compared to the lightning (Matt. xxiv. 27), sudden, all-pervading, and conspicuous. Those who remain unto the 'coming' (1 Thess. iv. 15,) will hear the shout of the Lord, &c. (ver. 16.) A representation of the power and 'coming' of the Lord was given at the transfiguration. (2 Pet. i. 16, 17.) Scripture, then, testifies that the *parousia* of Christ will

The same inadmissible distinction between 'the coming,' and 'the day,' is asserted in *The Hopes of the Church*:* "I beseech you by† the coming [presence, see Greek] of the Lord, and by our gathering together unto him (which will precede that day), I pray you not to be troubled (as if we were already in it). This day will come upon the wicked one, and not upon you; you will already have been caught up to him, and you will accompany him personally in that great day when he will return."

Had this been the apostle's meaning, he would doubtless have expressed it in some such summary and plain terms. But (1,) as already shewn, 'the coming,' and 'the day,' cannot be thus separated. And (2,) instead of telling them that they will already have been caught up to the Lord, as a reason why the day could not have already come (a very good reason, if the thing in question were true), the apostle says, the day itself shall not come, except there come the apostacy first, and the Man of Sin be revealed. On any other supposition than that the church will be on earth at the commencement of the day, his words would be irrelevant; and what he is made to say in the above extract would be quite to the purpose. Paul assigns a good reason why the Thessalonians were simply premature in thinking the day *was come*.‡ The author

be at one time, and that it will be *sudden, visible, and transient*. The first *epiphany* (appearing) of Christ has already taken place (2 Tim. i. 10), and we shall not be removed from the earth till the second. (1 Tim. vi. 14.) The '*revelation*' of our Lord can just as little as the *epiphany* be subsequent to his '*parousia*.' (See 1 Cor. i. 7; 2 Thess. i. 7; 1 Pet. i. 7, 13, iv. 13.)

* p. 55. † A mistranslation. See above.

‡ The emphasis lies on this word; not on 'the day of the Lord.'

of 'The Hopes,' &c. assigns a good one, on the supposition that they were wrong in imagining they had any thing at all to do with it. A supposition plainly uncountenanced either here or any where else ; and which, if it requires so arbitrary a paraphrase as the above, the sooner given up the better.

The following extracts are from 'Apocalyptic Interpretation' in *Plain Papers*, &c. (pp. 353—360.)

"This last division begins at chap. iv. John, having on earth received the instruction of chapters ii. and iii. as to the professing body, its successive states, and its final doom, along with the most varied and ample encouragement for the faithful, including the assurance to all such, that they shall be removed ere 'the hour of temptation' arrives, 'which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth,' is called up to heaven to see 'the things which must be after these.' Then in chapter iv., the writer sees in the crowned elders, the symbol of the redeemed *actually* in heaven. 'Though the translation of the church is not historically mentioned, there is this promise to the faithful at Philadelphia.....I also will keep thee from (literally 'out of,' not *in* or *through*, but *out of*) the hour of temptation.....To us it is evident, that this promise will have been fulfilled in the translation of the church, ere 'the things which must be after these,' begin to take place.....There are saints on earth during the period embraced by chapters vi.—xix. of the Apocalypse. It is this which has led so many to suppose that the church remains on earth throughout that period." And the writer thinks they are the Jewish remnant mentioned in the Old Testament, 'broken hearted on account of sin, zealous for God's glory, and desiring the advent of Messiah;' together

with some Gentile saints; and he refers to the slain under the altar (chap. vi.); the 144,000 sealed in chap. vii., and the innumerable company come out of the great tribulation; the remnant of the woman's seed which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ; the saints in chap. xiii., victims to the Beast, which are identical with the 'evidently Jewish martyrs of Dan. vii. ;' ch. xiv. 12; chapters xv. and xvi.; and chap. xx., where 'these martyrs of the crisis, being precluded by their death from the earthly hopes of blessing under Christ's millennial reign, are advanced to the far higher dignity of sharing with Old Testament saints, and with the church, the privilege of reigning with Christ a thousand years.'

Neither the symbolic vision itself (i. 12—20,) nor the fact of the co-existence of the seven churches, is in favour of the idea that seven '*successive* states' of the church are indicated. The writer indeed considers this as proved (p. 348), but the considerations he advances (pp. 254—6) amount to any thing but proof. To mention only a few instances where the theory breaks down. On the supposition of the removal of the true church in the (supposed) Philadelphian epoch, how are verses 19—22 to be understood? They plainly prove that even Laodicea *might* yet 'be zealous and repent;' and that even *there* some might be found to hear the Spirit's voice, and enjoy communion with Christ. Laodicea cannot stand as the representative of a stage of exclusive and hopeless corruption; nor would the gold, and white raiment, and eye-salve be still offered to such a body. The author of *Plain Papers* says, "Laodicea is the last stage of the professing body upon earth.....so utterly nauseous to Christ,

that he declares, 'So because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.' The threatening first addressed to Ephesus is, after the most marvellous long-suffering, executed on Laodicea. But the terms of this solemn sentence would not imply more than the utter rejection by Christ of that which bears his name on the earth. What becomes of it, when so rejected, is the subject of other portions of the prophetic word." (p. 256.) But how can this 'utter rejection' consist with the continuance of both wheat and tares till the end of the age? As the author himself before stated; "both were to grow together till the harvest—and at the harvest, angel-executioners of judgment were to do the work prohibited to the servants." (p. 230.) It must be observed, moreover, that the expression on which so much stress is laid (Rev. iii. 10), 'keep from,' is by no means evidence of a removal from the earth. We have precisely the same in John xvii. 15: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest *keep them from* the evil." Clearly therefore, this is not by removing them from the sphere of the evil, but by preserving them from injury by it while in its sphere. And where in the New Testament are we led to expect that the *last* stage of the church's earthly history would (at least, in some important respects) be better than the *first*, or (supposed) Ephesian stage? For Ephesus is reproved; while Philadelphia is commended only. Is there no danger, besides, of highmindedness and blindness in claiming the Philadelphian condition as *our own*? Laodicea *said* she was rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing: but what said the faithful and true Witness of her? The idea of these successive

stages of *church* condition to be passed through, before the coming of the Lord, would, until comparatively recent times, have been certainly destructive of the expectation of his return *any day*, if not indeed any *century*. It is, moreover, an idea not likely to have occurred to the early christians, who, nevertheless, were told to keep the prophecy, for the time was at hand. Upon this view, they must have wanted a most important element for the correct system of its interpretation; one too, which an indefinite period of time could alone supply. But supposing this idea had suggested itself to them: instead of looking for the Lord, guided by such signs as he had given them, they would have had to study the successive phases of Christianity; and always with the uncertainty whether they were right or not in their particular application of these epistles to them. Against this, then, a similar general objection holds good as against the year-day system. Both deprive the original readers of a *bonâ fide* interest in the prophecy, by making the *lapse of time essential* for finding the right key to the interpretation of it. And even *now*, when the advocates of this view employ such phrases in setting it forth as, "Was it not, *as very many who have studied prophecy judge?*" &c.; and, "*As I for one cannot but conclude,*"* it is evident that they feel that it cannot be *proved*. Yet upon a theory in itself improbable, and assuredly incapable of any thing like demonstration, materially rests the whole system of Apocalyptic interpretation, which involves in the sequel such startling results.

If chapters ii. and iii. cannot prove that the church is translated, chap. v. is positively adverse to this idea; for the universal millennial song supposes Israel to be

* "Eight Lectures," p. 190.

already in full blessing. "Thou hast made *them* unto our God a kingdom and priests: and *they reign* on the earth"* (verse 10); for this can only refer to Israel. It has been well asked, "How could Israel be spoken of as made priests and kings, and reigning, at a moment when they will be in the extreme hour of their direst tribulation and judgment?"† The author of *Plain Papers*, &c., indeed says, that the redeemed are heard by the apostle, anticipating the reign of those who are yet at this time suffering on earth. (p. 356.) But in verse 8, the former are seen actually presenting the prayers of Israel, as their risen priesthood, which supposes Israel fully reconciled. Nor can there be a doubt that verses 9 and 10 must relate to the *same* time. Both must be either actual or prospective. It is quite arbitrary to make the former represent a present, and the latter a prospective scene.

Such are some of the contradictions in which we find ourselves involved on the very entrance into this path of Apocalyptic interpretation. Our difficulties increase as we advance. We are required to identify, as well as we can, all the groups of martyrs in the following visions with Jews, of whom the best that can be said is, that they are "broken hearted on account of sin, zealous for God's glory, and desiring the advent of Messiah." Now it is by no means clear, that till about the close of the antichristian period, even so much as this will be true of them: but supposing it is, let it be compared with the repeated and unmistakable characteristics of the Apocalyptic confessors already referred to: that 'noble army of martyrs,' with whom any of us might well esteem it an honour to stand in

* "Revelation from Ancient Authorities." Tregelles.

† "Thoughts on the Apocalypse." p. 79.

the closest relationship, and strictest brotherhood. Can they indeed be the same as that remnant of Jews, which at an early period, speaking the words of impatience and querulousness (Ps. xliv. 12), nay, of self-ignorance and self-righteousness (verse 17), and gradually becoming more chastened and subdued, are yet only *converted* at the appearing of the Lord. (Isa. x. 12, 20—22; Zech. xii. 10, xiii. 1, 8, 9; Zeph. iii. 8—13.) And must we believe that the countless multitude out of all nations (chap. vii.), who have “washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,* are not the church, but persons converted, and gathered to Christ after its removal, and during the last few years of the dispensation?† Truly, this system makes modest demands on our credulity! If no other evidence of its erroneousness were forthcoming, the

* It is doubtful whether we should render ‘*the great tribulation.*’ (Rev. vii. 14.) Dr. Tregelles says, “The articles in this passage are of doubtful authority; but even if genuine, little could be rested on the insertion: for *θλψις*, like *ἰσχυρομένη*, and all similar words, would take the article in Greek, when we should not insert it in the English.” *Rev.* p. 16. (Compare 1 John ii. 25; James iii. 7; Mark vii. 21; Titus i. 9.) “John in Patmos, knowing ‘the tribulation, and kingdom, and endurance in Jesus,’ indicates the place of faithful Christianity, when the Scripture closed.... The whole period of the testimony and service of the redeemed, hitherto, has been an ‘evil day’; and the intensity of sorrow at the end is but the amplification of what, in principle, it has ever been.—*Thoughts on the Apocalypse*, pp. 117, 118. Moreover, it is not persecutions or deaths that are specially mentioned here as characteristic of this multitude, but wilderness privations, hunger, and thirst, and heat of the sun (ver. 16): and even if we render ‘the great tribulation,’ it may be understood of the whole period from Abel to the end, during which the people of God have more or less suffered affliction. (Heb. xi.; John xvi. 33; Acts xiv. 22.)

† “Plain Papers,” p. 359.

extravagant conclusions it leads to are enough to condemn it.

That the coming of Christ *may* consist of two stages, is endeavoured to be proved by Isa. lxi. 2, compared with Luke iv. 20. It is urged, that in Isaiah two successive clauses, which seem to relate to the same period, are in reality separated by 1800 years; "and if in this instance there was room left in God's precious word for the whole of the present dispensation to come in between the two clauses of a sentence, who will be so bold as to affirm, that in our Lord's second coming there will certainly not be an interval of a few years between the first stage of it and the next? between his coming into the air to receive the saints, and his coming with all the saints to execute judgment, and reign on the earth?"*

The author might also have referred to Isa. ix. 1—7, comp. Matt. iv. 15, 16. But there are not wanting Scriptures which indicate the unbroken continuance of the acceptable year, from the time of our Lord's gracious ministry until our own day, and onward to the 'day of vengeance;'—the "great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by them that heard him." (Heb. ii. 2.) And the apostle of the Gentiles declares, "Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. vi. 2.) The end of this day of mercy, and the simultaneous outbreak of the day of vengeance, we have already seen in 2 Thess. i. But even supposing such a break in Isa. lxi. 2, it would avail nothing to establish the hypothesis it is advanced to confirm. That the unbelief of Israel has caused the thread of various prophecies to be broken, which

* "Eight Lectures," pp. 185-6.

will be united again in the millennium; whilst, meanwhile, there is a partial application of millennial Scriptures to the church, is very evident. (See also Ro. xv. 9—12.) But we could not venture, even supposing Scripture were silent on the subject, to derive from this an argument for regarding the ‘coming,’ as made up of two epochs with an interval of years between them, and not, as it sounds naturally, a single, definite event. We have seen, however, that Scripture is entirely opposed to the above theory; the rejection of which, therefore, requires no special ‘boldness.’ Moreover, as it supposes the church to be taken to heaven by Christ, at his first descent, we have, in fact, two distinct comings, rather than two stages of one coming; and “the descent of Jesus into the air, and his *coming onward* to the earth in judgment,” is not a true statement of this theory.

The author next endeavours to shew, that not only there *may*, but that there *will* be such an interval, and to give proof, “not in the form of an exact quotation from Scripture,” (a thing, as we have seen, very rare with the advocates of this view,) but by presenting “several considerations,” which, he says, “satisfy my own soul.” The first is gathered from the imprecatory language of the Jewish remnant in the Psalms and Prophets; concerning which he observes, “You can neither suppose the church to utter such language, nor to be still on earth, while the Spirit of God leads the Jewish remnant to utter it, without confounding those things which the Holy Spirit in Scripture has been most careful to distinguish from each other.” (p. 186.)

Too sweeping statements concerning the use of imprecatory language should be checked, by remembering that He by whom came ‘grace and truth,’ uttered the

terrible words of Matt. xxiii. And, again, by such a passage as 2 Tim. iv. 14, so different to ver. 16. Also, by the remembrance that there is a sin *unto death*, for which we are taught not to pray. (1 John v. 16.) The circumstances of those who find themselves surrounded and persecuted by those who have taken the mark of the beast, and for whom there can be no salvation, will be solemnly peculiar: and can we say, that concerning such the Spirit of God would indite *no* imprecatory language? But, admit that the church cannot utter such language, as little can we suppose the Christian sufferers in the Revelation can use it; who yet, according to this view, are either the remnant or converted Gentiles contemporary with it. The confusion, then, if there be any, equally belongs to the author's theory.* But we *do* believe the church and the remnant to be on earth together, and yet perceive no such confusion as we are told is involved in this. Why may not God, while the church is still on earth, begin to educate and discipline that body of Jews which is to form the nucleus of the millennial nation? *Some* analogy to this may be found in the disciples during the earthly ministry of Jesus, and till Pentecost. We may in-

* It does not appear how the author can avoid this dilemma. On the supposition that the remnant 'have the testimony,' and 'keep the faith' of Jesus, they cannot, according to his view, be the parties who use the imprecatory language in the Psalms. On the other hand, if the testimony and faith of Jesus are kept by Gentiles, he has no alternative but to believe that Christian men, guided by the precepts of the new covenant—men who would suffer martyrdom with the dying prayer of Stephen on their lips, *do* co-exist on earth with a Jewish party under leadings of the Spirit of a very different character to their own: an alternative which, with his extreme view of imprecatory language, would make the 'confusion,' which he thinks belongs to our position, even 'worse confounded' in his own.

stance, too, Simeon and the shepherds, and the wise men ; John's disciples in the gospels, and those mentioned in Acts xix. twenty years at least after Pentecost. In fact, both in the Acts and the Revelation we may recognize a sort of border land, partaking, in various respects, of the characteristics of two dispensations—the ending and the opening one. Not to say, that in so unparalleled a period as the few last years of this dispensation, one would not be surprised to find some features unique and unprecedented. It is curious, however, to observe how variously this theory presents the Jewish remnant, according as the exigency of the case requires. When it is wanted to introduce them into Daniel or Revelation, they are shewn up at their very best : we then hear of their contrition, zeal, and hope in the Messiah, &c. When, again, they are wanted as a contrast to the church, we are reminded how largely they deal in imprecations and curses ; how continually they breathe out hatred and revenge. No doubt there is truth in both representations ; but not such as in either case fulfils the purpose intended. Indeed, as to the latter, the greater the dissimilarity between the church and the remnant, the less difficulty one would feel in believing in their contemporaneous existence. If there were two separate bodies of divinely acknowledged and accepted worshippers co-existing, one might marvel at contradictory sentiments proceeding from them ; but Rev. xi. 1, 2, is alone sufficient to prove that no worship is then acknowledged by God, but that which is *heavenly*. To whatever source or sources we attribute the mingled and varying utterances of the remnant,* this body must, in any

* Whether *every thing* said by the remnant must be regarded as the leading of the Spirit, is more than questionable. One

case, till the end of the age, be classed among the 'outer-court,' and disowned worshippers. No atoning blood has yet purged *their* consciences; no new and living way has yet been consecrated for *them*. So far, the only thing brought in proof of the 'interval' in question, is an inference of the author; who, having begun with hypothesis, goes on with assumption in place of demonstration, and concludes by assuring us that without we accept it, "all is one inextricable mass of confusion!"* We may fully give credit to him generally, for 'deep and real subjection to the word;' of the importance of which he speaks a page or two before, without, at the same time, accepting the above as affording a particularly happy illustration of it.

The next consideration advanced is from Rev. xi. 3—6, on which we have the remark, "How entirely must the dispensation have changed, and how evident that the church must have been removed from the scene, ere a testimony such as that of the sackcloth witnesses in Rev. xi. can be raised up." Much of what has just been observed may equally apply to this 'consideration.' But we are tempted to ask, Has the writer 'heard the secret of God,' that he so confidently speaks of what accords, or otherwise, with his dispensational arrangements? Was he 'made before the hills'? Does he 'restrain wisdom to himself'? (Job xv. 7—9.) The two verses immediately preceding those he quotes are enough to prove that the dispensation has *not* changed, however wonderful and novel be the testimony of the witnesses. Confined, however, as it will probably be, to the Jewish remnant, might almost as well attribute *all* that Job and his friends said to the same source.

* "Eight Lectures," p. 189.

and limited in its sphere to Jerusalem or Palestine, from which the people of God will previously have fled, we need not suppose that these ever come in contact with it. Certainly they will not be shielded by its miraculous accompaniments. When the Pharaoh of the latter day shall again oppose Jannes and Jambres to Moses; when the prophets of Baal and Jezebel shall once more confront the Tishbite; whilst the sealed remnant shall pass unscathed through these conflicting fires; no preter-natural deliverance awaits *them*: they are still 'accounted as sheep for the slaughter': unresisting they will endure captivity and the sword (Rev. xiii. 10); their 'patience and faith' (compare 2 Thess. i. 4) bear witness to their companionship with John, and with ourselves, in the 'kingdom and patience of Jesus'; and, despite of every attempt to depreciate their standing, they afford plain and unimpeachable evidence of a dispensation yet unchanged, and a church yet unremoved.* In the next place,

* A remarkable specimen of the inconsequential reasoning frequently met with in writers of this school, is afforded in a paper called, 'The Waters of Noah.' The writer tells us, "Seven years I held with tenacity that 'the saints,' and 'the kindreds, tongues, and nations,' mentioned in Revelation and Daniel, must include 'the church.' I have now seen cause to question this upon the ground of the dispensational changes connected with that time. *Now* it is neither 'Jew nor Gentile,' *then* it is 'Jew and Gentile;'
now it is 'suffering,' *then* it is 'self-defence;'
now Satan is in the heavenlies, *then* he will have been cast out."

In support of the first point, the sealed 144,000 out of Israel in chap. vii., proves, it is said, a "distinct recognition of *Jews* as servants of God, and consequently there is the setting of Gentiles as such apart by themselves." And chaps. xiii. and xv., he thinks, prove that a "remnant of Gentiles as such pass through the great tribulation, and are taken up to the Lord." (*How* they prove it is not said.) The recognition of the sealed Jews no

‘direct and conclusive proof’ is endeavoured to be obtained from the ‘entire structure of the book of Revelation.’ Having already adverted to this, it will only be necessary to add a few remarks. The writer is mistaken in supposing that the third division of the book begins with chap. iv. The fourth and fifth chapters are simply introductory to what is properly future (the *μετὰ ταῦτα*) which begins with chap. v. The chronology of chapters iv. and v. is clearly indicated by the *opening of the book 1800 years ago*, which was the *very occasion* of the song of chapter v. being sung. These chapters cannot, then, describe a “transitional state, an interval between the present dispensation.... and the millennium”: and therefore there is no room for the question, “Where is the church during this interval?” to which we are told, “the only answer afforded by the book of Revelation is IN HEAVEN.” “The vision of the throne,” as has been observed,* “must be more sustains the inference that there is a Gentile *Christian standing* other than the present church standing, than James’s writing to the ‘twelve tribes’ (Jas. i. 1,) is capable of proving that there was such a thing in apostolic times. The writer also identifies the sealed remnant with those (chap. xii. 17) who “keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus!” and he says that the actings of the two witnesses (xi. 5) “give a peculiar light to the position of these enlightened Jewish servants.” The work of God, in connection with them, is not “actions of long-suffering grace, but of holy avenging power;” and he thus arrives at the conclusion, that ‘self-defence’ is a feature of the Christianity of those times! As well might we say, that such acts of holy avenging power as the smiting of Herod (Acts xii.), the death of Ananias and Sapphira, and the punishment of Elymas, were evidence of ‘self-defence’ in the early church. He concludes, “May the saints weigh these things.” Delicate balances, indeed, are wanted to find any appreciable weight in such incoherences.

* “Thoughts on the Apocalypse,” p. 75.

regarded as peculiarly belonging to our *present* dispensation, and is only *indirectly* prophetic, when the symbols are abstractedly considered, as indicating glories by-and-bye to be possessed by those who shall reign with Christ." How much of instruction and comfort we should have lost; had such prophetic features not been attached to the throne! The writer is correct when, referring to the 'lightnings and thunders' (iv. 5), he says, it can neither be the throne of grace, nor the millennial state: but we are not therefore shut up to the alternative of the 'interval' above mentioned. It may be regarded as the eternal throne of the Divine government, here beheld "in connexion with certain circumstances and symbols which will not, *in the same manner*, attach to it when the present dispensation terminates."* The Lamb will not then be hidden in the throne, nor will the thunderings, and lightnings, and voices, indicating the yet unreconciled condition of Israel and the earth, continue to proceed from it. Such is at least a likely view of the case: but let it be only a *possible* one, and it is enough for the present purpose; since it behoved the writer to shew that none but his own can possibly be true. Whether he has made it appear either a likely or a possible one; and whether he is borne out in the conclusion, that in the structure of the Revelation we find 'the most definite, positive evidence of the fact, that the church is taken up, prior to the judgments under the seals, trumpets, and vials,† may now be left to the reader's judgment.

It must be added, that it by no means follows that the church is already married to the Lamb, when it

* "Thoughts on the Apocalypse," pp. 74—5.

† "Eight Lectures," p. 189.

comes in his train to conquer.* (Rev. xix. 11, 14.) Those who have noticed how common it is in this book for allusions to *later* events to *precede* the details about prior ones, (see *e.g.* vi. 2, xiv. 8,) will not be surprised at the reference (for it is no more) to the marriage (xix. 7—9,) out of its chronological place. Thus, in chap. xii., when Satan is expelled from heaven, three years and a half *before the end*, a loud voice in heaven says, “*Now* is come the salvation, and the strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ.” In fact, the first ten verses of chap. xix. are *introductory* to the chapters which follow; just as chap. xiv. is an introduction to chaps. xv.—xviii;† and it appears that the translation of the saints takes place at the same time as the final destruction of Babylon, (compare also chap. xvi. 15 with verses 17—19,) though the express mention of the first resurrection is not found till chap. xx.

Let us briefly review our reasons for rejecting the view which has been discussed. We object to it, because it deprives us of our direct interest in considerable portions of the New Testament, and those the very portions designed for our guidance in the last days. Because it makes distinctions in Scripture, which are either arbitrary, improbable, or erroneous. Because it is opposed to the positive statements of not a few Scriptures; as, for example, Matt. xiii. and xxiv.; Luke xix.; Rom. xi.; 1 Cor. xv; 2 Thess. i. and ii.; Rev. *passim*—many other scattered passages—and the entire

* “Eight Lectures,” p. 192. How can this system account for the deferring of the marriage of the Lamb for three years and a half, or more, after the translation of the church? Must not his wife have ‘made herself ready’ *then*?

† Thoughts, &c., p. 344.

current of the prophetic teaching of our Lord and his apostles. Because it affords such a specimen of interpretation as would be extremely dangerous, if consistently carried out. Because it asserts a plurality of second advents, and first resurrections. Because, by taking from us the knowledge of necessarily intervening events, with an assumption of spirituality, it really degrades, rather than elevates, our position. Because, in laying down the principle, that the knowledge of such events would deaden the moral power of expectation, it contradicts the experience and analogy of human life, confounds the *perversion* of knowledge with the possession and legitimate use of it, and regards those entrusted with it, more as persons in the flesh than in the Spirit. Finally, because that, while so much can be brought against it, and so little be said in its favour, it is, moreover, a novelty of recent days, and indebted, it is believed, for the currency it has obtained, more to deference to the authority of a few leading minds, than to anything like general and independent conviction of its truth, produced by reading the Scriptures themselves.

It is one, however, which numbers among its adherents many who are worthy of all honour and esteem for their own and their work's sake. And it would have been a more congenial work to the writer of this paper to have dwelled on the subject of the 'blessed hope,' of which, through grace, he partakes with them, in another than a controversial manner. The interests of truth, however, sometimes require us to sink personal considerations: nor could the earnest solicitations of several who desired a fresh review of the question be conscientiously disregarded. He has sought to bring forward the best arguments employed on the

opposite side, and such as are unaffected by differences of opinion on minor details. If there are better, they have eluded his search for them. Apart from the direct textual evidence that has been produced, it may be observed, that it is an error to make the moral power of the hope of Christ's return rest so much on the element of *time*; which is, in fact, to lower rather than to elevate it. Let such a chapter as the 11th Hebrews be considered; and it will be seen that *faith*—the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen—enabled the patriarchs to realize the hope of the far distant heavenly inheritance set before them, (ver. 13; John viii. 56,) in all its experimental force and practical influence on their earthly life. With *us*, to whom the fulfilment is comparatively so near, is the hope divested of this vitality, because we believe that certain events must necessarily come to pass beforehand? As if purposely a check against attaching undue importance to the question of time, (see 2 Pet. iii. 8, 9,) the first preacher of the second advent we read of was an *antediluvian* prophet. (Jude 14, 15.) Our faith may well rest on the comforting assurance, that 'yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry,' (Heb. x. 37,) without accepting the doctrine that his coming may be *immediate*. And our hope may joyfully cleave to his own promise, 'Behold, I come quickly,' and yet not be paralysed by the only fair construction that can be put on the words which follow: "*Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.*" (Rev. xxii. 7.)

It is difficult to find any error in religion, that has not found, at some time or other, more or less respectable advocates. Were this not so common, one would

be surprised that the view that has been here discussed should have obtained the assent of persons of superior understanding, spiritually taught, and well versed in Scripture. For let it be remembered what is required of us to believe: that at *any moment*, without any pre-monition, all the sleeping saints may be raised, and, together with all the living ones, be taken up to heaven; and this (as many, at least, hold) *silently* and *secretly* as regards the world, who will suddenly find a vast number of persons disappear from the midst of them (as Enoch disappeared from his generation), without any apparent cause. Countless sepulchres and graves will also be found mysteriously vacant. After this, in the space of only a few years, and that a period distinguished by consummated ecclesiastical corruption and apostacy, by antichristian blasphemy, and unprecedented Satanic delusions, conversions will, nevertheless, take place in more than pentecostal abundance: very many out of the remnant of Israel (and the nations) will have their faithfulness "rewarded by a martyr's heavenly crown; and, in this respect, will resemble the church itself, and be associated therewith. But as to their standing, calling, experience, trials, prayers, and hopes, *while on earth*, they have part with their brethren who survive the tribulation, and enter on the earthly blessedness of the millennial reign."*

The martyred remnant, it is suggested, "may make more rapid progress than their brethren." The spared remnant who, while it is stated, will repent and be converted, when they look upon him whom they have pierced (Zech. xii. and xiii.),† are yet described as 'quickened by the Spirit of God,' when refusing alle-

* "Plain Papers," p. 325.

† Ibid., p. 310—11.

giance to Antichrist,*—these will be delivered by the coming of Christ with all his saints.†

There may be some who, after careful weighing of the subject in all its details, have really brought themselves to believe all this, and more too; but they should not be surprised, if, with the exceeding small shew of proof advanced in its behalf, not a few continue to withhold from it even the most qualified assent. To a merely cursory view, it presents a startling mass of improbabilities of no common description. On a closer inspection, it will be found impossible. A complete examination, it is believed, will justify our calling it extravagant. Still, like other extravagancies, it may have its day: esteemed a gem of spirituality by some; while tending with sober-minded Christians generally to bring discredit on the important, and still by many greatly neglected, subject of unfulfilled prophecy. To the unconverted, it is likely to be anything but salutary. To the lovers of sin and of the world—to such as put off repentance and faith to a more convenient season—it would be agreeable to reflect, that years before Christ's coming to judgment, an event will take place which will afford them warning of its approach. "Supposing we miss," they might say, "the special privileges of the church, we may yet belong to the countless multitude which will be saved after the church is gone." And thus, like a person who lays his head on his pillow, trusting to be called at a certain hour, the sinner might easily find in this belief one more source of perilous self-delusion.‡

* "Plain Papers," p. 300.

+ Ibid., p. 310.

‡ To such lengths, however, will a false system sometimes lead its advocates, that this probable evil has been represented as only the *abuse* of a doctrine full of comfort to believers re-

Exception may be taken to various other views presented in the *Plain Papers*. About 'The Church,' for example,—'The Martyred Remnant,' and 'Babylon'; but it is not within the scope of this paper to examine them. And the impartial reader, it is believed, has had sufficient placed before him in the preceding pages respecting their unconverted relations. We read in a tract called *The first Resurrection, preparatory to the Personal Reign of Christ*,—"That a period of time peculiarly characterized by judgment will follow the rapture of the saints of this dispensation, and precede the millennial reign of the Lord, is not, that I am aware of, denied by any whose views of prophetic truth are at all enlightened; but that this period of judgment will also be tempered with mercy throughout the world, and interspersed with fresh gospel, is, I believe, not so generally acknowledged" (pp. 13, 14). Just remarking the cool presumption of the first part of this, we pass on to pp. 43—45. "Again, many Christians, who otherwise could not only have looked for, but earnestly wished for, the coming of the day of God, have thought of near and dear relatives still unconverted to God, not having received Jesus as their Saviour; and have felt that its sudden arrival would deprive them of every hope, whilst delay would afford opportunity for repentance; may, in the realization of these truths, see that such fears are not well founded, but that though the present door of mercy were closed, the Lord's arm would not be shortened that it could not save, nor his ear heavy that it could not hear; and they might still be gathered during the period of judgment and visitation, and placed in eternal safety, before the time when the angels shall go forth and gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and do iniquity." Peter tells us of the 'long-suffering' of the Lord, as a reason for the delay of the coming, because he is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance:" and this long-suffering is very precious to all who desire the salvation of sinners generally, and of their own relatives and friends in particular. They are willing that the Lord should yet tarry, if so be that these, by his grace, may be saved. The above '*enlightened* views of prophetic truth,' which present '*fresh gospel*' after the '*present door of mercy*' is closed,

to render superfluous the caution, that the writings of this school, fully as much as any other, require to be read in connection with an open Bible. To the same test he is invited to bring the remarks that have been here submitted.

seem at all events not to have occurred to the apostle, and indeed to be somewhat irreconcilable with what he *does* say. "Even admitting," the writer continues, "that the sinner might thus pervert this doctrine, as he does many others, to his own destruction, it is no proof that it is not according to truth." It is true that various doctrines of Scripture may be, and have been perverted; but we can hardly conceive of any doctrine of which the abuse would be more likely to be the rule, and the use the exception, than in this case. And only *suppose* it turn out to be (what there is no doubt it is,) a fiction: what responsibility will then have been incurred by such as have propounded it! What follows is at once so perverse and audacious, that it is transcribed here with some reluctance. "And if man could now operate on the mind of his fellow-man, by means of the denial that such a hope remained to the world; the time will come when the devil and his instruments may handle the same weapon; and taking up the falsehood which will have thus been previously used by others, persuade men, that having neglected the mercy offered in this our day, and that door of mercy being closed, as it will then be, there can remain no further hope; and thus by driving them to despair, ensnare them in the evils which will then be abroad in the world." Did Paul then use a weapon suited also for the devil's purpose, when he wrote, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation....?" (Heb. ii. 3:) or is not rather the author of these extracts in this predicament? And after the world shall have rejected the present gospel, does the *Revelation*, of all the books of the New Testament, afford ground for a 'further hope' to them? Let us hope that the writer has since seen cause to regret having penned such passages as the above.