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Ought We to be Watching?

A REPLY TO MR. LAING'S TRACT ON THE
"SECOND COMING OF THE LORD."

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DOUGHT WE TO BE WATCHING?

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Mr. Laing's Tract on the "Second Coming of the Lord."

IN a day like the present, when (true or false, as it may be) the cry is being so widely issued, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh," and when almost all sections of Christendom are in a greater or less degree responding to it, he assumes a position of no ordinary responsibility who comes forward to oppose himself to this growing expectancy, and to assure men that alarm on the one hand and hope on the other are equally unfounded. This is the position Mr. Laing has taken. It is not merely details of prophetic interpretation, such as he has chosen to link with this announcement of the coming of the Lord, that he sets himself to oppose. He has chosen deliberately to say, "My Lord delayeth His coming." He has undertaken to assure men there is no need for taking in earnest the exhortation to "watch," because they know not the hour the Lord doth come (Matth. xx. v. 42). His comfort to the careless is, "There is no danger." His rebuke to the watchers is, "There is no such hope as ye dream of; if we know not the hour, we know at least Christ cannot come in our time. The 'blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He cometh shall find watching,' cannot apply to *you*."

For, I say again, this is no mere question of the accuracy of details of prophetic interpretation, important as these are in their place. We have not first to determine the consistency of any views held by so-called "Plymouth Brethren," or any others. The primary question is not so intricate as

he would represent; and his making the two things one, is, I fear me (whether he intend it so or not) to daunt men by the apparent intricacy, if not indeed also to bring the full weight of ecclesiastical prejudice against "Plymouthism" to bear against the nearness of what the apostle styles "that blessed hope."

I do not want to avoid the issue which he raises. I hope to meet it fully presently. But I do want it to be understood, that the question first of all is, "Is there for us any sense or meaning in the Lord's words, *Watch*, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come?" It is vain to say that the prophecy of these chapters (Matth. xxiv., xxv.) speaks, as Mr. Laing seems to assume (p. 58) of the destruction of Jerusalem long ago. His own words (p. 53, 54) are in opposition to this, which indeed bears its own folly upon its face. Did the Lord *then* come with the clouds of heaven and all the holy angels with Him, and was there then any going forth of virgins to meet Him, or any separation of sheep from the goats? Evidently this is future, and as evidently it is not death, but a real personal coming of the Lord from heaven. It is thus as to this coming that the Lord says "*Watch*." Ought we to be watching then? I cannot watch for what I *know* cannot come for a thousand years yet. *Wait*, I can, and must, of course. *Watch*, I cannot. Watching is based on the uncertainty of when He may come. According to Mr. Laing, it is certain He cannot come in our time. As to that then we may go to sleep, as we list; watching is in vain.

Thus does Mr. Laing at the outset contradict God's testimony. But I desire to follow him now, though briefly, through the various points to which he objects, seeking to show the Scripture doctrine, as the Lord may enable. It should matter little to any child of God, whether man has baptized at "Plymouthism" or aught else.

"The fallacious definitions on which the theory rests refer," says Mr. Laing, "(1) to the Church; (2) to the Kingdom of God; (3) to the personal coming of our Lord; (4) to the Judgment; (5) to the Resurrection; (6) to the Millennium."

1. THE CHURCH.

A quotation of Mr. Laing's own will shew the view he objects to :

"It was not till after the death and resurrection of Jesus that the Church began. In the purpose of God, it existed before all worlds. But as to its actual existence on earth the Church was formed by the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. Those who till then had been individual believers, disciples of Christ, were by the descent of the Holy Spirit incorporated into one body, which has existed ever since, and is the Church of God. . . . It has its existence on earth between the day of Pentecost and the descent of the Lord Jesus into the air."

Let us look first at the proof of this from Scripture, and then it will not be hard to apprehend the character of Mr. L.'s objections to it. He should know that it is no question of the meaning of the word translated "Church." It would be better every way if the true word "assembly" were substituted for this in every place in the New Testament. "Assembly" all admit to be the meaning, the same word as that applied to the riotous heathen mob at Ephesus (Acts xix. 41) and to the Jewish "*church* in the wilderness" (Acts vii. 38). The use of the mere word argues nothing, and is not the question, as Mr. L. should have known; and his whole argument as to this (p. 29) is pointless. The real question is as to *that* Church (or assembly), which is called *Christ's* "My Church" (Matth. xvi. 8); "His body" (Eph. i. 22, 23); and "the house of God" (1 Tim. iii. 15). The real question is, when was *that* body formed and how, and is it distinct from all other bodies of saved people, whether Jewish or millennial.

Now the Lord's own words, "Upon this rock I will build my Church," should assure us that this was a *future* building of which He spoke. He was going to build it, not had been, or was, building it. Nor is the Jewish church ever claimed to be Christ's or God's house. Notoriously, so far from the truth is this, that His house was (while Judaism lasted) a separate thing from the people, viz., the tabernacle or the

temple. Never was it once said to them, as now to Christians, "Ye are the temple of God." Nor as much as once are they called (as we) even "living stones," out of which a temple might be built. The assembly which is the "house of God" is the Christian assembly alone.

As to the "Body of Christ" the same thing is, if possible, plainer. Where, I would ask Mr. Laing, does he find that those who constituted the Jewish assembly were members of the body of Christ? It is very plain that the Jewish body was not even an assembly of believers, or of the true children of God even at all. It was a nation, one of the "families of the earth" (Amos iii. 2), among whom true children of God were scattered. Only as the fruit of Christ's work after it (Jno. xi. 52) were these scattered children of God to be gathered together in one. And the body of Christ, it is evident, was only formed by that baptism with the Holy Ghost which John the Baptist predicted in his day as the then future work of Christ, and which was accomplished at Pentecost for the first time. "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost," says the risen Lord to His disciples, "not many days hence" (Acts i. 5). "By one Spirit" says the apostle to the Corinthians, "are we all baptised into one-body" (1 Cor. xii. 13). If then by the baptism of the Spirit the body is formed, it was not formed till Pentecost, there being no such baptism before, if we are to take Scripture as the guide at least. Nor could there have been a body on earth until there was a head in heaven, and that was not till Christ as man sat down there, as it is written: "He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, and put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i. 20-23).

That this church, His body, is also the Eve, the bride of the last Adam, is plain from the fifth chapter of the same epistle. It is so plain indeed, I need add no words of mine; and the union between Christ and the church is said to be a great mystery, as I agree with Mr. Laing in believing to be the interpretation of the last verse but one.

Mr. L. must needs also agree, (because in so many words the apostle says so) that there was a mystery made known to him, "which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God," until revealed in New Testament times by the Spirit. This he calls (Eph. iii. 4) "the mystery of Christ," and states it to be "that the Gentiles should be joint heirs, and a *joint* body *"—(I give it literally, however harshly in English)—"and joint-partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel" (ver. 6).

Mr. L. maintains that this merely refers to the bringing in of the Gentiles into the Jewish blessing! His words are: "Christ came to take away the middle wall of partition, to make both Jew and Gentile one, not by setting up a new body, or giving a new promise, or obtaining a new inheritance; but by putting the believing Gentile, without his becoming a Jew, into the body of God's people or church, and bestowing on him an interest in the Jewish promise and Jewish inheritance" (p. 32).

How far this is from the fact we can already in some measure understand. For the Scriptures we have considered do certainly prove that Christ *has* formed a "new" body; or rather, that the body of Christ began at Pentecost with the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and never existed before. Thus the mystery of Christ in this respect was that Gentiles should be jointly, or together, a body—His body. It is not "the same body," still less "of the *Jewish* body;" nor is there one word about this "without his becoming a Jew" so important for Mr. L.'s purpose. For of course a Gentile might have come into the Jewish body by circumcision at any time; so that the only point here, the thing unrevealed, according to Mr. L., was that a Gentile might *now* come in without submitting to Jewish ordinances! That there is not one word of this in the text does not seem even to suggest itself to him! and this is what he thinks brings out to the principalities and powers in heavenly places (ver. 8-10) the

* "A co-body:" i.e. *jointly* a body.

manifold wisdom of God—that Gentiles should come into the Jewish body without submitting to Jewish ordinances!

But is then the joint heirship a partaking with Jews in the Jewish inheritance? I ask Mr. Laing to produce, if he can, the Old Testament text which promises the Jew “an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved *in heaven*” (1 Pet. i. 4), or “spiritual blessings in *heavenly* places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. i. 3). I ask any reader of this to produce one if he can. No doubt Abraham looked forward, and others also, to “a better country, that is, an heavenly,” and will obtain it. But only in the New Testament do we find this as to them. It was no Jewish promise or Jewish hope. The Jewish hope was of blessing on the earth, the very blessing which we call millennial, and which Christians, to their manifold loss, have appropriated to themselves. Not in the Jewish inheritance are Gentiles ever joint-heirs. Let those who think otherwise, compare “the promises” which do belong to Israel still, as the Apostle witnesses* (Rom. ix. 3).

Thus it is no participation of Gentiles in the Jew’s inheritance that is the “mystery,” and the Apostle himself tells us that it is the “promise in Christ by the *Gospel*,” not Israel’s promise by the *law*, that he is speaking of. The conclusion is directly the contrary therefore of Mr. Laing’s, that there is the formation of “a new body,” the “giving a new promise,” and (so far as the written testimony is concerned) “the obtaining of a new inheritance.”

Moreover, if during the millennial age, the Jews as Jews appear upon the scene and receive their own peculiar promises, this plainly gives us the limit upon the other side, of the existence of the Church, Christ’s body, upon earth. And this leads us to what, in order to understand prophecy, it is absolutely necessary to remember, that there are thus *two* spheres, and for eternity, in which the redeemed among men

* Especially, Isa. lx. 9-12; lxi. 4-9; Mic. iv. 1-3; Zech. viii. 23, etc.

are to have part—heaven and *earth*. God is now gathering for *Heaven*. The Father's house, Christ's own eternal abode, is ours also (Jno xiv. 1-3). We are "heavenly" as is Christ "the Heavenly" (1 Cor. xv. 48): looking for that "heavenly country," for which Abraham and the saints of old also looked, and where they with us also will have their place. This has nothing to do with belonging to the Church, Christ's body; but they will be saved, and in heaven, as much as we; children of God also, kings and priests to God. When the heirs of heaven are gathered up at the Lord's coming, then will be the gathering time for heirs of *earth*, where Israel and the Gentiles will have their place according to Old Testament prophecy. Moreover, after the millennium there will still be (what many forget, while some forget all else,) a "new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. iii. 13; Rev xxi. 1.)

Before we leave this, let my reader compare Heb. xii. 23, and note how "the church of the first-born" is distinguished there from "the spirits of just men made perfect." These are two bodies evidently, and while the saints of the Old Testament times alone could be characterized as "spirits"—departed—"made perfect" by resurrection of the body (comp. Heb. xi. 39,40), the church of the first-born ones does not, as such, sleep, but waits for her Lord.

Mr. Laing's objections will now need only a very brief review. His first point, (p. 10) that Israel is said also in the prophets to be "married" to Jehovah, is true, but not an objection. It is not the *saints* who were thus married, but the *people* (see e. g. Jer. xxxi. 31, 32) and the *land* (Isa. lxii. 4). This will be true again for Israel, now divorced (Hos. ii. 2) in the millennium, and in that earthly sphere of which any one may convince himself that the Old Testament ever speaks. The New Testament bride is a *spiritual* people (Eph. v.) or a *heavenly* city (Rev. xxi). A very little study of Scripture will prevent one confounding these.

Mr. Laing's second objection (p. 31) we have sufficiently examined. His third, as to 1 Cor. x. 32 (p. 33), is of so little importance that I may leave it with the remark, that while those belonging to the "Church of God" might, of course,

be addressed individually, (and often are) as Jews or Gentiles, the Apostle's words clearly show that he is looking beyond the Church; and clearly those beyond were Jews or Gentiles. I cannot even understand Mr. Laing's object in disputing that there were (and are) three divisions under which all men ranked. Nay, more, (I appeal to Scripture for the proof,) while an address to Jewish or Gentile believers as such might have its special force and take its shape from what they had been, I maintain that they are never spoken of as having Jewish or Gentile duties or privileges any more, when once they had come into the "Church of God." Judaism and Gentilism had alike then passed away for these, and cannot be put upon the same footing, with relationships (such as marriage) which God still sanctioned.

Mr. Laing's one positive proof text that "the Church under both dispensations is one and the same glorious body united by the Holy Spirit and faith to Jehovah-Jesus as its head" (p. 35) is found in Rom. xi. It is a signal proof how little he can find in the Word of God what he desires to have it say. For clearly there is in that chapter not one word about "church," or "body," or "union by the Holy Spirit," (union by *faith* is not in Scripture at all), or Jesus being "head:" for a very simple reason, that a "tree" has no "head," and is not a "body," nor even a figure of it, it is a thought essentially and perfectly distinct, nay, opposed. The tree is a figure of a people responsible to bring forth fruit, where fruitless branches are removed, and others may be grafted in. In a body, still more the body of Christ, this is not possible. The body would be maimed if it lost one member. Nor could fruitless (*i. e.* lifeless) members be found. Does Mr. Laing seriously believe that the Jewish branches, broken off for their rejection of Christ, were ever members of the body of Christ? Yet, if the olive tree and the body are the same thing, this must be true. If he says, they were professing people of God, it is quite true; and as that the apostle takes them up, but not even as seed of Abraham, much less the body of Christ. Clearly the Jews had been the professing people of God. Some, not all, had been

broken off for unbelief, and Gentiles grafted in in their place, enjoying the privileges of the place, and assuming its responsibilities. This had nothing to do with the question as to how the people of God differed in the one dispensation from those who had been people of God in a former one; and of this therefore he says nothing whatever.

What further Mr. L. adduces as "abundant witness to this fundamental unity of the Church in all ages" is brief enough (and strange enough) to be quoted in full. "The Gospel* was preached to Abraham; he saw Christ's day and was glad: he was justified by faith: they that are of faith are blessed with him, are his seed, and heirs of the promise. Jesus says that he has other sheep not of the Jewish fold; these also he must bring; they shall hear his voice, that is, believe the Gospel call, and make *one* flock as there is *one* shepherd, that is, *one* church for which the one good shepherd gave his life" (pp. 37, 38). This is Mr. Laing's "abundant witness." To what? To Abraham's being justified by faith; to our being his seed, and blessed with him; to Jews and Gentiles forming now "one flock." If Mr. L. can extract out of this a denial of the present Christian church being exclusively the body of Christ, the Eve of the last Adam, he must make this plainer than he has at present.

But the last point under this head is the gravest for him, as, with the knowledge that he claims of the views he is opposing, one can hardly acquit him of intentional misrepresentation. "Once more," he says, "the Plymouth assertion, that the Holy Ghost was not given unto men till the day of Pentecost, and will be withdrawn again from the earth when the church is taken up, alike does violence to Scripture and to the analogy of the faith. . . . The theory which we oppose confounds these two things,"—a dispensation of the Spirit and the work of the Spirit,—“and asserts that because

* The gospel preached to Abraham was, "In thee shall all nations be blessed" (Gal. iii. 8), as that to Israel in the wilderness (Heb. iv. 2) was about Canaan. God's gospel (or good news) was different at different times from what we now above all call the "gospel."

at Pentecost the spiritual dispensation began, therefore the work of the Holy Ghost, as the Spirit of grace, was unknown before that time" (p. 38).

This is absolute (and, I trust, may not be wilful,) misrepresentation. He should know well that the so-called "Plymouth view" is that the "conversion and sanctification of individual believers," which he specifies as what he means by the work of the Spirit, were always necessary to salvation; always by the operation in grace of the Spirit of God, and always being accomplished from Abel or from Adam even until now, and always will be to the end of the world. But that Scripture makes a difference between the *work* of the Spirit, which was from the beginning, and the *coming* of the Spirit at Pentecost, and His *indwelling* in believers ever since. Let my reader note but a few Scriptures as to this, and he will see that in the Word of God what took place at Pentecost was not merely the bestowal of some miraculous gifts, but the "coming" of another Comforter who should "abide for ever" with the disciples, in the place of Him who had left them for the Father's house (John xiv., 16). A coming of such inestimable value to His saints, that it was "expedient for them that He should go away" from them, that that Comforter might come (John xvi. 7). Being come, He was not only to "dwell *with*" them, (as Christ had dwelt), but to be "*in*" them, as He had not been (John xiv., 17). "*At that day* they should know that He was in the Father, and they in Him, and He in them" (ver. 20): knowledge never possessed, never hinted at in Scripture before.

Thus in the epistles we find (as never in Judaism) that the very bodies of believers (1 Cor. vi. 19) are the temples of the Holy Ghost, wherein He dwells. And, as the result, "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God;" and by the "Spirit of adoption we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. viii. 15, 16). Search the Old Testament through, you will never find a believer, as that, uttering that cry. God was saying then, "I am a Father to *Israel*," not to saints as such; and believers, although children of

God, as the apostle tells us (Gal. iv., 1-6), differed nothing from servants, being under tutors and governors (under the law as schoolmaster, chap. iii., 24) until the time appointed of the Father. Thus under the law the children never cried, Father. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to *redeem them that were under the law*, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father."

It is this inestimable privilege of the in-dwelling Spirit which believers obtained therefore at Pentecost; not "conversion and sanctification," as Mr. L. represents the view he combats. And *union* with the Lord is (not by faith but) by one Spirit: "he that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit" (1 Cor. vi. 17). Hence the baptism of the Holy Ghost forms the body, the church, after the Head has taken His place in heaven.

I pass on now briefly to consider

2. THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

And here again the simplest way is to present first the Scripture view, and then to look at Mr. Laing's objections. It is certain from Scripture that the throne of the Lord was in Jerusalem in time past, and that it shall be again in millennial days (Jer. iii. 17). He dwelt in glory among them; as claiming "all the earth" at Sinai, He promises that Israel, if obedient, shall be to Him "a peculiar treasure above all people" (Ex. xix. 5). As supporting this claim "the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth" passes over Jordan (Josh. iii. 11) to give Israel their possession. So identified were they indeed with His plans and purposes on earth, that "when the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deut. xxxii. 8).

We know well the history of this chosen people till Lo-

ammi (not my people) was written upon them. Ezekiel sees the glory remove from the temple, and the King of Babylon carries them away captive. At this point an instructive term is used: it is no longer the "God of all the earth" of whom we hear, but the God of heaven.* It is as if God in a certain sense had abandoned the earth, and the Gentile power (in Nebuchadnezzar) receives from Him the throne of a *universal* kingdom. Here the times of the Gentiles manifestly begin, and last according to Daniel's vision, until the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of Heaven (Dan. vii. 13).

To a remnant returned from Babylon the Lord Jesus presented Himself, announced beforehand by the Baptist, as King of God's kingdom: the kingdom of God was at hand. Christ was rejected by his own, and the title He claimed was put up in derision over His cross: "This is the King of the Jews." The prophecies are not silent as to what that title implies (Isa. ix. 6, 7; xi.) But His rejection by Israel was the occasion of the display of Divine counsels hitherto hidden. The cross laid the foundation of blessing both for Israel eventually and for the Church of God (Jno. xi. 51, 52). The suspension of the fulfilment of Israel's promises, and of the earthly blessings, gives room for the gathering of a heavenly people, who are to share in the rule of the Son of man, over the earth in a day fast hastening. Until the broken thread of the Old Testament prophecy is resumed, the "mysteries of God" (Cor. iv. 1.) have their place, and among these the "mysteries of the kingdom also" (Matth. xiii. 11). These 'mysteries' are not things in their nature mysterious, but, according to the acknowledged meaning of the word, secrets not revealed before, and now made known to the initiated only. The kingdom in its present form was thus (Matth. xiii. 35) among the "things kept secret from the foundation of the world." This should assure us that the

* It is found 2 Chr. xxxvi. 23; Ez. i. 2; v. 11, 12; vi. 9, 10; vii. 12, 21, 23; Neh. i. 4, 5; ii. 4, 20; Dan. ii. 18, 19, 37, 44. And only twice I think beside in the Old Testament, Jon. i. 9; Ps. cxxxvi. 26.

Old Testament knows nothing of it, and that *to take the kingdom in its present form as being the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy must needs be an entire mistake.* Let the reader carefully mark this.

There is a kingdom now. Christ *does* reign; but He reigns, where none can reign with Him, Son of God upon His Father's throne; and not till He takes His own throne as Son of man, will He have a throne He can share with His people: "To him that overcometh will I give to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcome and am set down with My Father on *His* throne" (Rev. iii. 21; Col. i. 13). His throne as Son of man is the Old Testament throne, and not His present one, as we have seen. King as He is, He is now rejected, and His people too are suffering; but the express promise is that if we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him. This coming kingdom is "in inseparable connection with Israel's restoration and supremacy, and with the blessing of all nations: in a word, with the millennium."

Mr. Laing objects to "the idea of God transferring *His* kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar, rightly enough, but he does not tell us exactly whose it is; that God committed the power of a universal kingdom to Gentile hands is indisputable, and that this began the times of the Gentiles equally so. It is quite true that the phrase only occurs, Lu. xxi. 24, but it is plainly there the time of Gentile domination over Jerusalem, which will last till she rises again from the dust. But this began with Nebuchadnezzar, so that it is not so "far-fetched" to begin them there. As to the "fulness of the Gentiles," which Mr. L. arbitrarily connects with these, he alone is responsible for *that* idea.

The next objection is singularly feeble. He refers to John the Baptist as fulfilling Malachi's prophecy of Elias before the day of the Lord. He quotes the Lord saying, "This *was* Elias which was for to come," incorrectly, for He says, "*If ye will receive it, this is* Elias, which was for to come" (Matth. xi. 14)—a most important condition, for, as the Lord goes on to show, they were rejecting John and his Lord together. John therefore, who came as Elias, could not actually be Elias

to them; he did *not* "turn the hearts of the children to the fathers, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just," and instead of saving the land from curse, their rejection of Christ brought it down. Can Mr. L. contend that John saved the land from a curse?

Again, the time *was* fulfilled, and the kingdom *was* at hand, but I have shown that the kingdom of God had to come (because of their unbelief) in a way not contemplated in the Old Testament. The mysteries of the kingdom were opened instead. But the apostle Peter's own account should have made Mr. Laing aware how "some" of those who stood there saw "the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark ix. 1). Peter refers to the transfiguration scene which followed as that in which they were eye-witnesses of Christ's glory—"the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"—"in the holy mount" (2 Pet. i. 16-18). It was the (still) future coming they saw, as it were, in sample.

Moreover the kingdom of God is never in nature *earthly*, as Mr. L. puts it, it is the kingdom of *heaven*; nor is it ever a kingdom of this world to be established by warfare, as the Lord truly assures us. He does *not* say, it was to be "established by witnessing for the truth," but that *He* was born to be such a witness.

Again, when the apostle says, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven," that was true for the people he was addressing, and he goes on to shew we are to be raised or changed therefore to enter into it. This proves surely that there is a future kingdom which remains to be entered so. How does it consist on the other hand with Mr. L.'s idea that we have the kingdom *now*, in the way he puts it?

The next passage, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof," does *not* show that they already had the kingdom except in promise, nor that it has been taken from Israel without possibility of restoration. With such prophecies as Micah iii. 9—i. 7 before one's eyes, he is bold enough at least, who will deny such restoration. Clearly the Gentiles had not God's kingdom, I agree with Mr. L.

Then as to Matth. viii. 11, 12, it shows the bringing in of Gentiles into the place of cast out Jews, and it shows nothing more, except the poverty of the cause which needs such a support.

We come now to

3. THE COMING OF THE LORD.

It is remarkable as to this, that Mr. L. does not examine so much as *one* of the passages which are believed to teach directly the pre-millennial coming! He prefers to base the truth or falsity of it on the further question as to the identity of the coming and day of the Lord. This I shall look at presently, but in the meanwhile must produce one or two of these omitted Scriptures.

As one of these we may take Zech. xiv. In the midst of a siege of Jerusalem, which has been already partially successful, the Lord comes with all His holy ones; His feet stand on the Mount of Olives (no words could more plainly speak of a personal coming); the mount cleaves asunder at His presence; He delivers Israel, destroys their enemies, the land is blessed and safely re-inhabited, and the Lord is king over all the earth.

Then take the apostle's words: "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, *then* shall be brought to pass that which is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. xv. 54). Where is this written? Turn to Isa. xxv. 8, and you will find that this takes place at the time that the Lord punishes the host of the high ones on high, (comp. Rev. xx. 1—3), and the kings of the earth upon the earth (Rev. xix. 19—21), and when they have been gathered as prisoners in the pit, and shut up in the prison (Rev. xx. 3), to be visited after many days (after the millennium, at the judgment of the great white throne, see Rev. xx. 10—12). It is then,

* I leave the question open, whether saints or angels; it does not affect the point.

when the Lord of Hosts reigns in Zion and before his ancients gloriously (chap. xxiv. 21—23); when he has brought down the noise of strangers, and abased the branch of the terrible ones; when He destroys the veil spread over all nations, and wipes away the tears from off all faces, and takes away the rebuke of His people from off all the earth. *Then* it is that the resurrection of the saints shall bring to pass the saying, Death is swallowed up in victory.

Mr. Laing insists that we are not to watch for the Lord, because Peter and Paul knew they were to die first. But we have no evidence that they knew it any length of time before their death. When Paul first speaks of it, the time of his departure was already "at hand" (2 Tim. i. 6). And when Peter speaks of his, he was "shortly" to put off his tabernacle (2 Peter, i. 14). John's gospel was written after Peter's death, and therefore he could interpret the Lord's saying as signifying "by what death he should glorify God," without its being so clear that he knew at the time what was meant, for the Lord does not say distinctly he should die (John xxi. 18, 19); nor was Peter then young ("when thou wast young,") so that if he did know, it would put off the Lord's coming of necessity but a little way; and no one else would know that *he* must die. Nor does John say of himself (as Mr. L. seems to intimate) that Christ would *not* come before he died, but that the Lord had not said he would (verse 23).

For the rest, all the New Testament is full of the imminency of His coming. The same virgins who go out at first to meet Him seem in the parable (Matt. xxv.) to welcome Him back. The same with the servants in the parable of the talents. Watchfulness as to it is continually enjoined, "lest, coming suddenly, He find you sleeping" (Mark xiii. 36). "We which are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord," says the apostle (1 Thes. iv). "Behold I come quickly" (Rev. iii. 11). "He that testifieth these things saith, *Surely* I come quickly" (xxii. 20). And if that *evil* servant shall say in his heart, MY LORD DELAYETH HIS COMING, and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the Lord of that servant

shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. xxiv. 48—51). How solemn, in the face of such words, such arguments as we are reviewing !

But I turn to the question as to the coming and day of the Lord. Scripture, with that precise accuracy which belongs to it, distinguishes much more minutely than we are apt to believe. The "coming" of the Lord is the general term, and does not define whether *for* or *with* His saints ; the "coming of the *Son of Man*" is always His appearing, when every eye shall see Him. The *revelation* of the Lord is of course His appearing also.

The "day of the Lord" is in contrast with a thought only once expressed in so many words in the New Testament, and found in the margin of 1 Cor. iv. 3, "man's day." Man's day is the time in which he has the world to himself, just as the "day of the Lord" is when He takes it into His own. Thus the day of the Lord begins with judgment for the earth necessarily, and is in near connection with His coming, but it is not the same thing ; nor does it end when He is come, but goes on right through the millennium. This explains the passage in 2 Peter iii., which many are perplexed about ; for it is hence easily seen how "the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night," and how in it "the heavens pass away," etc., without it being necessary that this final act take place *as soon as* the day comes. Confounding the *coming* of the Lord with this of course narrows all to a point of time, but it is a mere mistake. The apostle merely puts before us the suddenness of the coming of the day of the Lord, in connection with its final issue, to assure men on the one hand how speedily His long-suffering would reach its limit, and on the other, to give effect to his admonition, "seeing then that all these things are to be dissolved."

As to the difference again between the coming of the Lord *for* and His appearing *with* the saints, it will not take long enquiry to settle it. The appearing is that which the Old

Testament is full of necessarily, because then it is that He takes up the earth to bless it. But the New Testament, which adds the heavenly side of all, is precise, that "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also *appear with Him* in glory" (Col. iii. 4). This is what is seen in the vision of Rev. xix., the armies in heaven following the Lord to earth, clothed in the "fine linen" which is the "righteousness of the saints" (comp. verses 14 and 8).

But, to appear with Him when He appears, we must have been with Him before, and the passage in 1 Thess. iv. teaches us how: we are caught up, the dead in Christ and the living, raised or changed, to meet Him "in the air," before He comes to earth at all. How soon before is not indeed stated there, but we have elsewhere what assures us that there is indeed a considerable interval. In the Book of Revelation, which is God's unfolding of the future as He declares, the *directly* prophetic portion, in which we find the threads of Daniel's and other Old Testament prophecies resumed,* is prefaced by a vision of saints in heaven. I do not insist upon the truth, which is plain to many, that the epistles to the seven churches have a prophetic bearing, and give us the history of the general church as God's light-bearer upon earth, until Christ removes His saints to heaven. In this way, however, we shall better understand the constant testimony to His coming (ch. ii. 25, iii. 3—11) and the solemn spuing out of Laodicea at the close. From that time the Spirit's warning voice to the churches is heard no more, and the fourth and fifth chapters show us the apostle *caught up to heaven*. *The point of view is altered*; and he now sees around the throne of God four and twenty thrones,† occupied by those who, in chap. v., sing the song of praise for redemption; and anticipate their reign over the earth (v. 10). These, then, are saints throned and glorified; and now mark a sign of change: the Lamb slain is presented as "Lion of the tribe

* All acknowledge this, as to Rev. xiii. and xvii. for instance.

† So really the word translated "seats," chap. iv. 4.

of Judah"—king of the *Jews*, that is—even as the "rainbow" round about the throne reminds us of His covenant with *creation*. The world is to be judged, but the earth blessed; Israel's cause is come up in remembrance before the Lord; and so it is that while the church does not appear in the following visions till the marriage of the Lamb, ch. xix., Israel and Jerusalem are there all through, and along with them Gentiles too, subjects of blessing but always distinct. Let the reader compare the sealing of the tribes of Israel (ch. vii.) distinct from the company of Gentiles further on, who have all come out of "the" great tribulation (literally, the tribulation, the great one). So the woman of the 12th chapter is not the church, for how is Christ born of the church? but Israel, out of whom He plainly came. Chap. xi. 8 shows us that the scene of the witnesses' death is in Jerusalem. I cannot pursue this further, but I am persuaded that any honest, earnest student of the Word will find sufficient proof there that Rev. vi.—xix. give us indeed the interval between the Lord's coming for and His appearing with His saints. This interval is the time of ingathering for earthly blessing—earth's harvest—(xiv. 15); and thus is explained how, when the Lord comes on with his saints to earth, He finds the earth not empty of saints, but a people in Israel expecting Him, and Gentile "sheep" among the nations also, to be put upon His right hand, and to inherit the kingdom. The difference also between the Church's hope of the "morning star" (Rev. xxii. 16, ii. 28), and Israel's and the earth's hope of the "sun of righteousness" (Mal. iv.) finds here its full significance.

In this statement Mr. Laing's objections have been met already, save one, and that needs no lengthy answer. The appearing of Christ *is* always that which is connected with the reward of a saint's own work, as the coming for the saints is that which introduces them into the result of Christ's work. Crowns and rewards have to do with the kingdom and appearing; while the Father's house is the place for children, which He, not we, prepares for his own.

2

This is a truth of great beauty and value for the soul, and no ground of valid objection at all.

4. THE JUDGMENT.

The Lord's own words are (as is well known to readers of the Greek text)* that "he that believeth on Him that sent Him shall not come unto *judgment*," not merely "condemnation." The difference is plain, for the current belief of of Christendom is that they *shall* come unto judgment, but, they hope, not to be condemned. The Lord's words assure us that as to the saint of God, no question will ever be raised as to him personally. He will give account of himself to God; he will appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, and receive reward according to what is manifested there; but he will *not* be "judged according to his works," as they will who stand at last before the great white throne (Rev. xx. 12). Who could escape, if judged according to his works? "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified" (Ps. cxliii. 2).

And it is plain there can be no question as to the acceptance of those who go up, raised or changed, in His own likeness to meet the Lord in the air and be ever with Him. It is plain they are not left in a common crowd with sinners, to be picked out when the Lord has come. On the contrary, when He comes to execute judgment they come with Him. Does Mr. L. think to set aside these plain and positive statements of Scripture by the quotation of such a verse as 1 Cor. v. 10? Does he not see that it is a simple statement of a general truth which takes in all mankind? All shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ. True: but at different times and under different circumstances. The two classes will be as in John v. 29—"those that have done good" and "those that have done evil," and "we all" shall receive accordingly. Does Mr. Laing really believe that a

* Alford and the Bible Union both give "judgment" in John v. 24, 29, instead of "condemnation" and "damnation."

saint will be *punished* for his sins, after Christ's dying for them? Or what else does he mean?

Next, as to the judgment of the nations in Matt. xxv., it is a judgment of the living nations at the coming of Christ, not of the dead before the great white throne at the end of the millennium. There is no word of "the dead," or of resurrection, throughout; nor are the dead spoken of any more as "nations." That it is not a judgment of Christians, as Mr. L. would have it, should be clear from the very fact of its *being* discriminative, a separating of good from bad: such a separation by judgment, we have seen already, is not for Christians, who are separated, *before* judgment, from all others by being caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Again, it is not, as the judgment at the great white throne will be, an exact apportionment according to men's works, but a simple separation of two classes according as they had honored or not the "brethren" of the King. How could this apply universally as a test, where the heathen were in question? All this shows conclusively it is not the general judgment which has been supposed. It *is* the judgment of those who in the interval between the Lord's taking up of His saints, and His coming with them, have had the gospel of the kingdom preached to them (by Jewish "brethren," I doubt not), and have thus received or rejected Christ in the person of His saints.

I am sorry that I cannot credit Mr. Laing with either candour or courtesy in his treatment of this subject, which, for its importance, should have had more serious attention than he bestows upon it. When he quotes, "then shall He"—the Son of Man—"sit upon the throne of His glory," and adds, "as King—meaning He was not King before this," he should know well that, as I have before said, Scripture makes a difference between His kingdom now as Son of God upon His Father's throne, and His kingdom as here, Son of Man upon His own (Rev. iii. 21); and that those whom he is opposing own His "kingdom and *patience*" to be now, though not His "kingdom and *glory*" (Rev. i. 9; I Thes. ii. 12).

Again he says (p. 58) : "Observe, then, that the parallel passages in Luke and Mark put it beyond doubt that the destruction of Jerusalem, spoken of by Matthew, was that which took place under Titus, before the generation who saw Jesus had passed away ; not the assault of Antichrist, which, it is said, shall take place between the comings."

It is dangerous to assume passages to be parallel without ascertaining first how far they are so. That Matth. xxiv., xxv. and Luke xxi. are in general the same prophecy is plain, of course ; but that there are great differences also is evident upon any careful examination. Luke *does* speak of the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus, and note, that the sign is there, "when ye shall see Jerusalem *encompassed with armies*, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let those which are in Judæa flee to the mountains, and let them which are in the midst of it depart out," etc. Now, suppose we add some words from Matthew : "Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house"—that is, flee away *immediately*. How could a dweller in Jerusalem do that, when Jerusalem was encompassed with armies ? He could not ; nor had he need. For when Cestius Gallus withdrew his army panic-stricken from Jerusalem, plenty of opportunity was afforded for leisurely escape. The words of Matthew are thus not found in Luke, nor would they be suitable, for the two passages are *not* parallel. Matthew mentions *no* destruction of Jerusalem, but the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place. Nor does he speak of an "assault" on it even, Antichrist's or any other. Mr. Laing is every way outside of the truth in this.

Luke therefore gives an interval between the destruction of the city and the coming of the Lord:—"Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Matthew connects the tribulation at Jerusalem closely with the Lord's coming : for we have first, the abomination in the holy place ; *then* great tribulation such as never before or since, but *short*, or no flesh would be saved ; and then "*immediately* after the tribulation" the signs of the

coming Lord. Thus Matthew does *not* speak of Titus, while Luke does, and they are not, so far, parallel.

The old mistake as to "this generation" has often been set right. In many languages the word is often used not in a *time* sense, but for a race or set of people with certain characteristics. "O generation of vipers;" "a wicked and adulterous generation." In Philippians ii. 15, it is the word translated "nation." In Ps. xii. 7, "Thou shalt preserve them from this generation *for ever*." I do not doubt it refers to Israel here. Else see the enormous and inexplicable difficulty; for Christ must have come in the clouds with His angels, and gathered His elect before thirty or forty years passed. Moreover, as it is clearly the same coming all through, the Bridegroom must have come and the judgment of the sheep and goats taken place! Does Mr. Laing believe this?

As to the judgment of the "wicked servant," there is no difficulty. It is a parable, not a history, and groups together, for the sake of the principle, the believing and unbelieving. This does not show that the award will be at the same time to each.

The last objection is again more serious for Mr. Laing than for any other. He should know well that those he opposes maintain the very opposite of his assertion, that with them the doom of everlasting fire means, that they "shall be destroyed by desolating judgments from the face of the earth." They believe, fully as much as he, in "everlasting punishment" being really that. On the other hand, does Mr. L. really believe that applying the blessing there awarded to nations upon earth "robs" the Christian of his own heavenly hope, and of everlasting life?

As to "sessional judgment" I must be more brief. But Mr. Laing, I must say, perverts Scripture. He puts these passages together as if one: "'We,' Christians, the Apostle tells us, as well as sinners, shall stand before the throne of Christ; in the *day* when God shall judge the secrets of men; and 'that day is, when the Lord shall be revealed in flaming fire,'" etc., (p. 61). Would it be believed that his first text, Rom. xiv. 10, says nothing about the *day* at all; that the

second text (Rom. ii. 16) says nothing about *Christians* at all; and that his third quotation, "*that day is, when*"—does not exist in Scripture; and that the passage in 2 Thes. i., which he quotes from, says nothing about our standing before the judgment seat then, but of *rest* recompensed to Christians in the day of the judgment of others!

No one supposes that "the saints shall judge the world" in the "*same sense*" as when God judges the secrets of the heart, so far as I know. But they shall "judge," for Scripture says so, and to this Rev. xx. 4 refers. As to the rest, what Mr. L. says is only his own confounding things that differ. Tyre and Sidon will not be judged at the time of which Jude, quoting Enoch, speaks; nor does he mean to say that the very individuals existing in his day would be judged then either. "These," spoken of by Jude, alas, still exist, and will be judged then surely.

As to the judgment of the great white throne, the passage itself limits it to the "dead" and not the living; and, there having been a resurrection of the saints a thousand years before, it manifestly does not include these. Thus there is no restricting or adding to God's word, but subjection to it, in so teaching. Moreover, the judgment of the "world" is not the judgment of Christians who are "NOT of the world." In Matt. x. 33 nothing is said about the time when; while Mark viii. 38 speaks only of those of whom he will be ashamed. "They also who pierced Him" are the *people* who did so (Israel, who had the chief guilt of it), and not the individuals, as a glance at Zechariah (xii. 12) will show; for they will mourn their sin and find cleansing from it, which Caiaphas will not (ch. xiii. 1). Did Mr. L. ever read this prophecy of Zechariah seriously?

Again Rev. xi. 15 is the anticipation of what is coming, nothing more. If it be, where is even Mr. L.'s millennium? Nor is the order one of time plainly. The "time" for all these things is the day of the Lord, and they will all take place on that day, but there is no further synchronism.

I might apply Mr. L.'s own language (p. 22) with great truth to this collection of texts on his part. I leave it, how-

ever, in the assurance that the least intelligent student of the Word will not be at a loss to know what is truth amid it all, and to discern the spirit which is at work in it. As to

5. THE RESURRECTION.

I must agree with Mr. L. that "there is not a hint of any difference in time between the resurrection of Old and New Testament saints," nor did I ever hear that any thought so.

The proofs of the First Resurrection of the saints are not only to be found in Rev. xx., 4-6 as he seems to suppose. To quote against it that Paul believed (what we all believe) that "there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust," is childish. The quotation of Jno v. 28, 29 is more rational; but there also it is the general statement, and the "hōur" may, as we see from verse 25, embrace a long lapse of time. Nothing can be really argued from such expressions as "day" or "hour," as they are used in all languages in a very wide sense. "The last day" is an instance, which is that which succeeds the present, or man's day, without particularizing exactly when. Scripture does not fail to supply us with the means of interpreting aright all such expressions, in doing which we must explain the indefinite by the definite, and not reverse the rule as Mr. Laing does.

Scripture is precise, that the "order" of resurrection is "Christ the first fruits, afterward *they that are Christ's* at His coming (1 Cor. xv. 23); not the Church only, as Mr. L. asserts is taught, I know not by whom; and *not*, as he asserts for himself, the wicked dead as well. If this were so, there would be no meaning in the apostle's words. Look at the chapter, reader, and see how plain it is that it is a resurrection only of saints he has in mind. For when he says, "it is raised in incorruption," "it is raised in glory," &c., it is evident that this could not apply to the wicked at all; and we have already seen by comparing verse 54 with Isa. xxv. 8, that this takes place at the time when the veil is removed from the nations and the offence of God's people taken from the earth.

Again from Rom. viii. 19-23, we learn that the "whole creation" groans, waiting with ourselves for the "manifestation of the sons of God" at the "redemption of the body," expecting then to be "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory (so the Greek) of the children of God."

Again, take the Lord's answer to the Sadducees (Lu. xx. 35; 36): "they which are *accounted worthy* to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead"—how could one speak of being accounted worthy to obtain a general resurrection, which nobody could lose?—"neither marry nor are given in marriage, neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto the angels; and *are the children of God, BEING the children of the resurrection.*" This is either Universalism or Premillennialism. For if people are children of God as being children of a *general* resurrection, the wicked too being children of the resurrection must be also children of God. The first part—"they which are accounted worthy"—shews it is not this; therefore the other must be the truth: it must be a "first resurrection" of saints alone.

Now, compare with this the passage in Revelation (xx. 4-6) upon which Mr. Laing spends all his strength: how like is this "they are the children of God" etc., to that "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection;" and "neither can they die any more" to "on such the second death hath no power." And observe, these words in the Apocalypse are *not* part of the vision, *but* the interpretation* of the vision. First, there are seen thrones, and people sitting on them, to whom judgment is committed, then another company of martyrs under the beast, slain after the saints of the past and present had been caught up to meet the Lord. These might have been supposed to have thus been too late for a place with the rest of the heavenly saints, they are therefore here distinctly joined to the other throned saints, as

* These interpretations occur all through the book: take for instance, xix. 8, "the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints;" xx. 2 "that old serpent, which is the devil and Satan," etc.

partakers also, though distinct in time with these. Then comes the explanation: "This is the first resurrection." This is, therefore, no part of the figure, it is the reality. The vision of resurrection is the vision of a *fact* (for a vision is not necessarily symbolic), and we get into a region of indisputable plain speaking, and not symbol at all.

Thus Mr. L.'s shafts fall powerless. It is not because a theory compels us, but because reverence for the Word of God requires it, that we believe the first resurrection to be literal, not spiritual. Nor does this oblige us to take the visions previous to it with the gross literalness which he holds up to ridicule, *while he knows perfectly well that no one holds it*. That the visions of chaps. xix, xx, do not follow in the order in which confessedly they are given, lies with Mr. Laing to prove: the "assumption" is plainly his. As to the interpretation of them, there is little difficulty, save only that they clash with his own theories. First, the marriage of the Lamb surely should be clear, and who the Bride is not doubtful, when we see her clothed with the fine linen, which is "the righteousness of saints." The armies which follow the rider on the white horse are clothed with that same fine linen. *His* name is given us plainly—"the Word of God." The binding of the great Adversary naturally connects itself with the overthrow of the kings of the earth, as in Isa. xxiv. The first resurrection and rule of the saints is only, as we have seen, in perfect harmony with other scriptures, but *is not* parallel to Dan. xii, 2, 3, which (like Ezek. xxxvii, and other prophecies) is the *political* resurrection of the Jewish people. To deny that a *first* resurrection implies a second, especially when it is said "the rest of the dead lived not again till the thousand years were finished, and when at the close of that time another confessedly literal resurrection *does* take place, is bold enough at any rate, even for Mr. Laing. I leave all that with entire confidence to the judgment of the simplest saint of God. Mr. Laing says little as to

6. THE MILLENNIUM,

and the Scriptures examined have already furnished us with

sufficient light as to it for our present purpose. Mr. L. has plainly not perceived that its being literally a thousand years results from this period being found in the *explanation* of the vision, and not merely in the vision itself. It is to be noticed how little is said even in Revelation as to the earthly blessing. This is left to the Old Testament prophets, and is their common theme. The New Testament adds the reign of the saints and the vision of the *heavenly*, as Ezekiel of the *earthly*, city.

Here then I close. It is not my intention to follow Mr. Laing through his further arguments as to the tendencies of the doctrines in question. Nor, if he has allowed himself to indulge in charges of which he himself must know the falsehood, shall I do aught but refer it, as I safely may, "to Him who judgeth righteously." I must ask, however, those who would do common justice to the holders of the views in question, to take these from their own books, and not from Mr. Laing's statements. For instance, that they "claim for themselves the exclusive name of 'the Brethren,' the Church, the alone Bride of the Lamb" (p. 23) is simply a false assertion. And there are many other statements in his book as unreliable as this one.

But I have done. Reader, eternity is before us, and fast hastening on is the time when (too late alas, for many) the full truth will be known. Meanwhile the words of the Living Truth Himself are, "Behold, I come quickly." Can you respond, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus?"

F. W. GRANT.

Toronto, April, 1877.