

"THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES."

A L E C T U R E

ON THE ABOVE SUBJECT,

DELIVERED AT SUNDERLAND AND AT CLEVEDON,

IN APRIL, 1864,

BY

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AND

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

"CAN YE NOT DISCERN THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES?"—*Matthew.*

"While thou visitest the nations,
Thy selected people spare;
Arm our cautioned souls with patience,
Fill our humbled hearts with prayer."—*Wesley.*

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“THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES.”

It may be laid down as a maxim, that God never strikes without a premonition of the blow. Nations, churches, and individuals are forewarned, in one way or another, that disaster is drawing nigh; but it does not follow that the warnings will always be observed. On the contrary, as a general rule, they are either not noticed at all, or they are entirely misinterpreted. To this mournful conclusion we are guided, both by Scripture and experience. Analogy, therefore, would warrant us to expect no ordinary harbingers of a destruction, to which there has been no parallel; albeit it has often been foreshadowed by terrible, though partial calamities.

I refer to the general, sudden, and fiery destruction which shall bring the present dispensation to a close. But, I submit, we are not left to mere analogy. Our Lord and his Apostles repeatedly foretell the signs of the second advent, and exhort believers to take note of them. And as the formal close of the old economy by the destruction of the holy city, bore a striking resemblance to the end of the new dispensation, so the tokens foreboding the former bear a marked similitude to the tokens foreboding the latter. In truth, the moral and physical aspects of both periods are so speakingly like each other, that, in our Saviour's last prophecy, they are inseparably interwoven; to teach us, I apprehend, that the events preceding the downfall of Jerusalem would be almost exactly repeated, but on a vastly larger scale, and in a terribly more intensified degree, before the destruction of apostate Christendom at Christ's return.

But if God gives warnings He intends them to be observed and understood. “Can ye not discern the signs of the times?” is the Lord's reproachful question to the unobservant, whilst he encourages the watchful by the assurance, “When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.” Paul, too, admonishes the Hebrew believers to attend more and more to mutual exhortation in proportion as they saw the signs that the day was approaching.

Notwithstanding, there never were, and there never will be, signs of such a character as to *force* conviction on the obstinate and the blind. There always was, and there always will be, room for the questions of scepticism and the solutions of philosophy.

Moreover, as "there is no new thing under the sun," so the signs of the last days will not be absolutely unprecedented, and therefore the conviction of their true character will not be purely argumentative; it will be *moral* as much as intellectual—the combined result of the secret testimony of the Spirit, the study of prophecy, and the observance of passing events. This conviction will be the morning star of the approaching sun—Christ rising within the watchful believer's heart, as the harbinger of His glorious appearing to the world.

Still the premonitory signs will have something peculiar about them, not so much in kind, as in the phase they put on, and in their simultaneous appearance, so that wherever there is neither inveterate doctrinal prejudice, nor gross carnal indifference, there will be a conviction, amounting to moral certainty, *that the day is at hand*.

I have not adduced chapter and verse to verify these statements, because I take it for granted that their truth will be at once obvious to all who have a general acquaintance with the subject, and who "despise not prophesyings."

The question which we are to consider to-night is this, Are the phenomena of these days, moral and physical, political and religious, of such a character as to warrant the conclusion that they are, in all probability, the dust-cloud, stirred up by the chariot wheels of our approaching Lord? My answer to this enquiry is in the affirmative, and I now proceed to give you the reasons why.

I am indeed well aware, that as the nearer an object is, the larger it looms in our eyes, so the events of our own time are apt to assume disproportionate importance from their very propinquity; and therefore it is necessary, when we are measuring the phenomena of the present, to adjust our standard by a comprehensive view of the past.

But we must not allow this propensity to over-estimate what is going on around, to frighten us from observing and weighing the signs of the times; otherwise, we should always have an excuse for disregarding them, and up to the latest hour should be blind, on principle, to every warning. We must be cautious, discriminating, and prayerful; and if, after all, the suspicious noises in the yard should *not* turn out to be the footsteps of the thief, no harm is done, but rather much spiritual good, for we have been obedient to God's word, "in keeping which there is great reward." Besides, the thief *will come* at last, and those who watch to the end will be prepared to meet him.

In estimating the value of present signs, I shall pass slightly

over the less important and dwell upon the more weighty. I shall also follow the order already laid down, and begin with the moral. The tokens of this class are specified at length in the 2nd Epistle to Timothy, the 3rd chapter, and the first five verses :—" This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God: having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."

Here you will perceive there is scarcely one of those social crimes which figure in the police reports. We don't find murder or robbery in the list, and they seem to point to a time when mental vice should be open and rampant, but sensual sins kept more out of sight, a state of things which is remarkably prevalent in our days. Now, it is not to be denied that these vices have, from the beginning, more or less characterised mankind; but the apostle means us to understand that, in the last days, they shall be raised to the "bad eminence" of perfection; and, shocking to say, among the professors of religion, for to whom else could he point when he said "having a form of godliness." By this designation, then, the subject is considerably narrowed. We are not obliged to waste our time by running round the globe in search for the original of the picture. We are confined to the visible church. It would take half a dozen lectures to go fully into the particulars of this catalogue. I shall therefore touch only a few, namely, *covetousness*, *pride*, *insubordination*, and *love of pleasure*.

First.—Covetousness. The motto of the day is, "Money makes the man," no matter *what* the man is, or *how* he gets the money, provided only he can retain it; then he is worshipped with a reverence proportioned to his wealth. If he is a millionaire, he is "a lion" whom thousands will flock to see, and hundreds to adore. What wonder, then, since man aspires to be a god, that money-hunting is the order of the day!

Second.—Pride, the Devil's darling sin, and the most inveterate in the human breast. Hero-worship is revived among us in more than heathen strength, and whilst the merely "good" are despised the *great* are idolised. Let a man be successful, either as a wholesale robber or a wholesale assassin—let it be seen that he has accomplished his design by a combination of enormous boldness, bravery, and cunning, and he will be deified at once for his achievement; but let him fail, and *va victis*; the wounded stag is gored by his sound companions, but the survivor lifts his antlers on high and stalks proudly before the herd. Had even Garibaldi (whom I believe to be a brave and honest man) been shot at Marsala or Catalafimi, thousands

who now extol him to the skies, would have denounced him as a fool and a freebooter, who got what he deserved, though he would have merited quite as much praise in his failure as he has in his success. He *did* fail at Aspromonte, and all agree in condemning that enterprise as foolhardy; but had he succeeded, had he driven the French out of Rome, he would have been hailed as the wisest and most daring chieftain of modern times. Success—not goodness, not wisdom—success makes all the difference, and in this world “*there is nothing so successful as success!*” Moreover, had Garibaldi been an apostle instead of a warrior, had he conquered Italy with the sword of the spirit, instead of a sword of steel, his reception in England would have been as cool as the metal of his blade, for the masses have no sympathy with the conquests of religion. What wonder, then, that the pride of achievement has full swing, that ambition to be great in one form or another bears despotic sway! I could point to individual illustrations, but I forbear. Among females, the chief aspect of pride is vanity, or the love of admiration, not for qualities, but appearances. This vice has always sought gratification in external adornment; dress and decoration have in every age bewitched “the weaker vessel,” but never with such power as in these times. Fashion, like the Virgin Mary, has, within the last few years, been elevated to more than her ancient glory, and her votaries reach from the throne “to the maid servant that is behind the mill.” In truth, the worship of this divinity has become the most abject bondage; for the chosen priestess has only to waive her magic wand, and, *presto*, the whole sex are transformed according to her will; nay, though thousands are immolated in flames on Fashion’s altar, there can be no change of apparel till the priestess leads the way. This is the feminine form of pride, and, I grieve to say it, professors of religion, yea, real Christians, are as much afraid of the hobgoblin of singularity as the veriest worldling, as if Christ was not singular when he bore his cross beyond the gates. And yet, if all Christian women refused to worship this bedizened idol, the very greatness of their number would avoid the appearance of being singular. It seems, however, that both saints and sinners are resolved, neither to be shamed by the indecorum, nor frightened by the destructiveness, of the present fashion. I fear, therefore, that God will be provoked to make some more terrible examples. (See Isaiah iii. 16—26.)

Third.—Insubordination—“disobedience to parents,” is the form which this vice assumes in the text, but we may be sure that where domestic disobedience prevails, it will only be a specimen of general insubordination; and verily we are, in this respect, as in others, fallen on evil times. Never were boys and girls so soon transformed into men and women as now, and never were they so impatient of control, particularly in America; never, too, were servants, as a class, male and female, more indepen-

dent of their masters and mistresses ; never were workmen more insubordinate to their employers, or subjects less respectful to their rulers. Hence the incessant, unreasonable strikes, and the violent *emeutes* and insurrections of these days.

Fourth.—The Love of Pleasure. Here let me quote an extract from a sermon preached and published by myself last year on the passage we are now considering :—

“Now-a-days, scarcely an evening sets in—spring, summer, autumn and winter—which does not offer music for the million, singing for the million, pictures for the million, lectures for the million—sounds and sights of all sorts, within the bounds of common decorum (always excepting the statues of the Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition), allure us night after night, at the cheapest rate, from our families and our homes. And I do not hesitate to affirm, that as the irreligious around us are, by these attractions, withdrawn farther and farther, from a sense of their own misery, and of their need of God’s help, and also from the sobering and saving influences of the means of grace ; so, real Christians, by too frequently nibbling at these baits, acquire a vitiated spiritual taste, whereby they but faintly relish the duties of the household, the closet, and the Church ; just as he who is always sipping spirits in and out of meal times, finds his taste for pure water grow dull. At last exorbitant love of pleasure becomes a *habit*, then follows divine chastisement, to embitter the world, and renew the appetite for better things.

“Many a Christian has experienced, that by absence from home, night after night, for a few weeks, to listen to sweet music, or enchanting song, or to hear the strains of eloquence, ‘thoughts that breathe, and words that burn,’ on science, in any of its branches, or even religious themes, has found, at the expiration of that time, that his soul was leaner than at the beginning ; he has felt, and this is the criterion, that his enjoyment of solitary communion with God has been diminished.

“Beware ! when Christendom shall be marked, not so much by the grosser vices, as by those mental passions which are in close alliance with what Paul calls ‘the spiritualities of wickedness’ (Ephesians vi. 12—Greek), that is, with Satan in his more proper character. ‘From such turn away.’ What does this mean ? Go with the crowd to every raree show ? run with the stream of sight-seers to every spectacle, funny or fantastic ? be caught, like moths, by every illumination ; hear all sounds ; see all sights ; mix with all societies ; and join in all processions ;* and, in the meantime, neglect the domestic hearth, ‘the secret chamber,’ and the public means of grace ? Make pleasure paramount, and duty, which ought to be pleasure, subordinate ? ‘Oh, tell it not in Gath,’ this is the practical interpretation

* Paul and Peter expressly forbid to *Christians* the *comus*, i.e., the festal procession.—Romans xiii. 13 ; 1st Peter, iv. 3 (Greek). (See Liddell and Scott’s *Lexicon*.)

of Paul's caution, 'Turn away.' Look around you at most Christians now, yes, even true Christians, and compare their position, character, companions, amusements, and influence with the following precepts, 'Come out from among them, and be *separate*, saith the Lord, and *touch not* the unclean thing;' 'What communion hath light with darkness?' 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers;' 'We command you to *withdraw* from every brother that walketh disorderly;' 'Love not the world, *for all that is in the world* is not of the Father.' 'Who-soever, therefore, will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God.'

"Oh, how these texts would blush if they were emblazoned on white banners, and borne in procession by those Christians who, in word, have 'renounced the pomps and vanities of this wicked world,' but who, indeed, love them as much as their neighbours, if we may judge from their presence and participation in every pageant, from a village May-pole to a Lord Mayor's show."

The next in order to be considered are the Political Signs. And who has not heard, for many years past, of "wars, and rumours of wars," all over the world, foreign and civil, revolutionary and predatory, offensive and defensive, and that in spite of all the efforts of Peace Societies and Diplomacy?

At the present hour, what is the political condition of Christendom—the chief prophetic theatre of the latter day signs? It may be described in one word, and that is *CONFUSION*; the result of which is "distress of nations with perplexity." Look at America, that boasted model republic. In the annals of the world there never was such a civil war as is now raging in that unhappy land; never was there intestine and internecine strife so deadly in character, so vast in extent, and so destructive in effect, and this, too, just after a season of such general religious revival, that those who were not guided by "the sure word of prophecy," beheld in the wide-spread awakening the certain har-binger of the millenium.

And if we turn to Europe, we see with dismay "nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom," in defiance of peace congresses, international exhibitions, and State diplomacy, so that whilst the nations have been pertinaciously repelling from their lips the wine-cup of war, God has pressed it back again with the response "Ye shall certainly drink."* Another word may describe the political state of Europe, and that is *suspicion*. Every nation distrusts its neighbour, and amidst loud professions of confidence and amity, the various governments crouch, in readiness to spring, like cats and dogs, watching each other for the first move. Meanwhile the art of war is straining after perfection, and the highest premiums of honour and of wealth await the invention of the most destructive weapons.

* Jeremiah xxv. 28.

But apart from these various political signs, there is one, like Lucifer among the stars, pre-eminent in brightness, yet visible to the early risers alone, who are up and "watch for the morning."

There is on the stage of Europe an Imperial actor, who, in the deepening belief of thousands, is destined to play a terrific part among the signs of the last days.

It would demand an entire lecture of no ordinary length to go fully into this one subject. I can only allow myself time barely to touch it. What if the eighth and last head of the beast has already sprung out of the neck of the seventh! What if the last monarch of the Roman Empire is on the steps of Cæsar's throne! Of course this is a question of prophetic interpretation, on which there are certain to be different opinions; but I venture to affirm, that if the dynastic and personal antecedents of the Sovereign to whom I allude be compared with his present position and prospects, and if all these be read in the light of contemporaneous signs, intensified a hundred-fold by the illumination of the 13th and 17th chapters of the Apocalypse; lastly, if it be known and considered that thirty years or more prior to the resuscitation of the Gallic Empire, that most improbable event was predicted by several eminent prophetic expositors, such as Faber and Frere, who, in direct opposition to all political likelihood, grounded their prediction on the chapters just mentioned; then, I think, it will be admitted that the evidence is not slight that "the coming man" is at hand, who, in his sole grasp, shall gather the scattered reins of Christendom, and drive the nations to the battle of the great day of God Almighty. (Rev. xix, 19.)

And certainly the wild, delirious enthusiasm which has greeted, in this country, the brave warrior of Italy, evinces to what a pitch the spirit of hero-worship has risen, and how ready are even the most enlightened people in Europe to adore any man, who, by dint of cleverness, boldness, and unscrupulosity, who, by a combination of unexampled success, both in war and diplomacy, should wield the sceptre of universal rule. If so, then—

"Earth, what a terror lies before thee!
None like it in the shadowy past;
The sharpest thorn that ever tore thee,
Even though the briefest, and the last.

"Behold the fair moon veil her lustre,
Behold the sackcloth of the sun,
The shrouding of each starry cluster,
The three-fold war of earth begun.

"Behold the shadows of its sunset,
And wrapt in these th' avenger's form;
Behold the Armageddon onset,
But saints shall be above the storm!"

The next class of signs which are to pass in review are the Physical. And who has not heard, during the last few years,

of "great earthquakes in divers places, and famines and pestilences, and fearful sights from heaven." If all these events were separated from their various localities, and collected, with their respective dates, into an aggregate, they would astonish us by their great number, terrible character, and rapid succession; but, unhappily, we live in times when the most appalling occurrences are soon forgotten and the present is all-absorbing. A comprehensive view of things, therefore, is seldom taken, and whilst one grand sign fixes the eye, the general constellation is not regarded. It was but a few months ago that an unprecedented earthquake shook our own kingdom, yet who remembers it now? it is as if it had not been; so, with other alarming tokens, they appear, vanish, and are forgotten. "And here I would have you consider that the signs of the last days are not like one protracted and tremendous tempest, destroying all in its fell sweep, and leaving no time either to take breath or to reflect, but rather like a succession of separate storms, with intervals of calm and sunshine between. Now it is in these intervals that men forget the past, think not on the future, and are wholly absorbed in the present. Like Pharaoh, when the rod is lifted up, they are at their old work again—planting and building, eating and drinking, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, living for this world alone. Each stirring event as it comes drives its predecessor from the memory and leaves no trace behind. But when a man, enlightened by the prophetic word, takes a large and wide-embracing view of the past, the present, and the future, he beholds a long series of events, separated by intervals of various width, and sees in them the predicted tokens of the final crisis. Others have fallen asleep in the transient sunshine, but he has kept awake in calm and storm alike, and is prepared for the grand upshot."

I am also much impressed by the combined suddenness and terribleness of modern catastrophes, as if they were designed to prefigure the impending thief-like and destructive advent of our Lord. These characteristics were fearfully displayed in the wreck of the Royal Charter; the midnight fall of the seven-storied house in Edinburgh; the South Wales Colliery explosion; the live burial of the Hartley Pit; the horrible conflagration at Santiago; and the terrific Sheffield flood.*

The moral inference from these disasters is, that what happened suddenly and ruinously to a few not "greater sinners" than their spared neighbours, might, with equal justice, happen to an entire nation, or to the whole world, and since prophecy, again and again, pre-announces the sudden destruction of Christendom, under the mystical name of Babylon the Great, we may legitimately regard the calamities in question as certain foretastes and pledges of that impending woe.

* This calamity seems to have been the result of a "land-slip," and, therefore, quite beyond human prevention.

Under the head of Physical Signs, I might speak of extraordinary meteors—strange in character, and many in number—which pass and are forgotten, but which have a meaning among the signs of the times, and which less scientific ages would not ignore; but this is as the small dust in the balance compared to the other tokens I have named.*

I will only further observe on this head, that as the material earth and the atmospheric heaven, participated in the effects of man's fall, so it was natural to expect that they would indicate, by extraordinary phenomena, the great moral stages of His history; for the earth, "which God hath given to the children of men," is a sort of body to the general soul of mankind, and as the individual body of flesh and blood sympathises with the individual soul, so the great globe has a fellow feeling with all that it inherits. Nay, Paul assures us "that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, and earnestly expects the manifestation of the sons of God." What wonder then, if the political confusion and ripe moral evil of the last days should be associated with great physical derangements? No marvel, if, to use the words of Cowper—

The old
And crazy earth has had her shaking fits
More frequent, and foregone her usual rest.
She seems
To toll the death-bell of her own decease,
And, by the voice of all the elements,
To preach the general doom.

The last class of signs are the religious, and on these I shall expend the bulk of my lecture. I shall divide them into good and evil, because the last days will be characterised by both in full maturity. First.—The good signs. It is notorious that, for several years, there has been a more extensive religious awakening than at any previous period of the Christian era—not excluding Pentecost itself. In America especially has this revival prevailed, and it was natural for those who witnessed it in that great country, but who were not guided by the light of prophecy, to see in it the clear tokens of an incipient millennium. In England, Scotland, and particularly Ireland, the same spiritual movement has taken place. On the Continent, and even in India, there has been an unwonted interest in vital religion, and the result is that tens of thousands of precious souls, who were walking in darkness, are now the children of light. Multitudes too, who were already Christians, but who had lapsed into lukewarmness, have been quickened by these "seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord," and, as the natural effect of this re-conversion, both individual believers and collective churches have been exceedingly active, zealous, and energetic in promoting the cause of God.

* Some have noticed the singular confusion of the seasons during late years.

But, in connection with the other signs of the times, what is the scriptural inference from this revival? Is it that the conversion of the world is at hand? So many think, and I doubt not that when the disciples beheld the wondrous and wide-spread awakening on and after the day of Pentecost, the early rain of the Spirit, they regarded it, at least some of them, as the pledge of universal regeneration. But what was the fact? It was the prelude to the rejection of the Jews, and the destruction of Jerusalem. In like manner, the latter rain of the Spirit is, I believe, the prelude to the rejection and destruction of Christendom. It is the gathering of Noah's elect family into the ark, a long, but thin procession, before the deluge descends. This was the belief, grounded on prophecy, of numerous watchful Christians, at the very commencement of the revival, and how strongly their belief has been confirmed by subsequent facts, we shall see anon. The local Pentecost preceded the local destruction, and, I fear, that the world-wide Pentecost precedes the general destruction.

But the best religious sign is the increasing attention to prophecy, with the consequent increasing expectation of the Lord's advent. For thirty years this momentous subject has fixed the regards of numerous Christians, and the fruit of their studies, lectures, and publications is, that amongst all denominations there are not a few who are lovingly and longingly waiting for their Lord. Latterly there have been conferences of Christians, of the most opposite persuasions, to discuss this stirring question, and to provoke one another to moral fitness, for the great approaching day. In truth it would seem that Christ Himself, in His character of the morning star, has arisen in many hearts, as the harbinger of His glorious sun-appearing. His spirit seems to testify to the spirit of watchful Christians, in every land, that they shall, as a generation, not taste of death till they see the Lord's Christ. And does not analogy lead us to expect such a secret voice? Do we forget that though for ages before the first advent the word of prophecy had ceased; yet when the Messiah was about to be born, the prophetic spirit burst forth anew in inspired songs and revelations? Do we forget that one old man was singled out by the Holy Ghost, and assured by Him that albeit he was on the brink of the grave, he should not descend into it till the hope of Israel appeared? If, then, after such protracted silence, there were divine premonitions of the *first* coming of Christ, might we not reasonably expect that, though during the long night of the Lord's absence, the voice of inspiration has been hushed, yet, in one form or another, it would break forth again to admonish the watchful that the second coming is at hand? But, of course, this heavenly voice would differ in kind from that of the Old Testament; it would not be an *afflatus* from without, seizing the mind, and forcing the lips to utter:—"Thus saith the Lord." It would not speak to us as it spake to Simeon, making infallible prophets of its

organs; it would gently rise from within, in connection with the study of prophecy, the observance of the signs of the times, and close communion with God; nor would it be confined to a single saint or two in this or that favoured locality, but would spread itself amongst expectant Christians of every people, kindred, tribe, and tongue. Moreover, the very worship of these saints would be characterized by their blessed hope; their prayers, their hymns, their teachings would strongly savour of their expectation. Such a preparedness we should look for from analogy, and such a preparedness we see in fact. Who does not know that thousands of Christians, in all countries, feel a conviction, amounting almost to certainty, that their Lord is at hand? Who does not know that, as a general rule, these loving expectants are the ripest saints? that they are the least conformed to this present evil world, and the most consistent in their daily walk? Then look at their second Advent Hymns, take Sir Edward Denny's and Horace Bonar's, for example. For poetic beauty, for scriptural accuracy, for bride-like love to Christ, and for heavenly aspiration, they are unequalled. They seem to be the fulfilment of that last prophetic word, "and the spirit and the bride say, *Come!*" To these spiritual songs most other hymns are flat and dull, whilst many of them are positively unscriptural in their desires and hopes. These divine odes are "the old wine which no man having drunk, straightway desireth new, for he saith the old is better." The relish is spoiled for Brady, Tate, and Watts, when Bonar and Denny have been tasted. Numbers of Wesley's hymns also, are pre-millennial.

The result is that there is a vast array of virgins, newly awakened by the midnight cry, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh," and, with fresh-trimmed lamps, they are advancing to meet the Lord.

It is now time to turn the tables and look at the bad religious signs. Who could have dreamed eight years ago, in the midst of the American revival, that it would immediately be followed "by blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke?" that the chariot of the Prince of Peace, careering joyfully through the land, was the forerunner of the God of War, with a blazing torch in the one hand, and a glittering sword in the other, driving his bloody car through city and field, over mangled heaps of the slain? Where now is the American revival? Christians, instead of breaking bread together, are ranged in hostile ranks to stab, to cut, to shoot each other down, and to offer cross-prayers for the victory of their respective sides, whilst New York, the capital of the Republic, is the theatre of pleasure run mad. Never in the history of the States were fashion and amusement so outrageous, and thus, in that vast country, so recently revived, we have, at once, the extremes of merriment and of woe.

Then look at Europe, and especially England, the Palestine

of Europe, and first fix your eyes on the National Church, gaze intently, and, if I mistake not, you will see, in the latter half of the 19th century, a scandal that would not have been endured at any previous period of her history; you will see the sun gone back on the dial of the Establishment; you will behold, with dismay, her bulwarks levelled to the ground by the hand of her own defenders; you will see, with half incredulous eyes, her high places filled by avowed infidels, who have been stationed and sanctioned there by the Church herself;* you will see thieves in the garb of shepherds, yet known to *be* thieves by the brand on their brow, entering into the sheepfold by the lawful door, admitted by the lawful porters, and *not* "climbing up some other way."

Ah, should not the orthodox clergy stand up as one man, and protest, that if this infidelising process be not reversed, they will wash their hands of all participation in its guilt, by abandoning their position? Should they be content with the *brutum fulmen* of an empty declaration of faith—a document which in itself has no legal or moral weight whatever? Hear Dr. Goode, the Dean of Ripon, on this futile protest—"No clergyman, consistently with the oath of supremacy which he has taken, can, in his public ministrations, affirm *any doctrine to be contrary to the doctrine of the Church of England*, which the judgment of the Privy Council has pronounced *not to be contrary*. * * Criticism upon this judgment is useless, because, whether right or wrong, it is decisive and final. Protests against it are worse than useless, because we have no right to make them." The result, I fear, will be this, that the ox and the ass will continue to plough together in an unequal yoke, on condition of mutual forbearance.—(2 Cor. vi. 14.) "Shall not God visit for these things, and shall not his soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

When nations are to perish for their sins,
 'Tis in the church the leprosy begins;
 The priest, whose office is, with zeal sincere,
 To watch the fountain and preserve it clear,
 Carelessly nods and sleeps upon the brink
 While others poison what the flock must drink.
 His unsuspecting sheep believe it pure,
 And tainted by the very means of cure,
 Catch from each other a contagious spot,
 The foul forerunner of a general rot.
 Then Truth is hush'd that Heresy may preach,
 And all is trash that reason cannot reach;
 A blot that will be still a blot, in spite
 Of all that grave apologists may write;
 And though a bishop toil to cleanse the stain,
 He wipes and scours the silver cup in vain."

Then turn we to Dissent. It is well known that when Non-conformists "wax fat and kick;" in other words, when they become rich and worldly, it often happens that the religion in

* By its representative, the Privy Council.

which they have been brought up is too vulgar for them, and they betake themselves to the aristocratic establishment. But this is a trifle in comparison of the movements of the general body; for to what quarter are they tending? A straw tells which way the stream runs. Much more *pointed* is the index of a dissenting steeple—literally it points to heaven, morally it points in a very different direction—and the present rage for steeples (particularly in the South of England) is a sad token that the Puritanical spirit is dying out of Non-conformity and being replaced by the spirit of Babylon; that is, the real is being substituted by the showy and the sham. Nor are they any longer contented with the name of “chapel;” they will stand as high as the Establishment in *names* as well as in steeples; they will have their meeting-houses called “*churches*.” Ere long they will demand altars, stained windows, and liturgies. Nor will they rest there. Who would be satisfied with a slice when he can so easily “go the whole hog” by seceding to the National Church, or even to Popery itself? Already, we are informed by Mr Bayley (a seceding Baptist minister, formerly one of Mr Spurgeon’s students), have hundreds of “dissenting teachers”—so he calls them, not “*ministers*,” a title which I presume his new-born churchmanship forbids him to grant—“hundreds have, within a few years, returned to the good old ark of the Church of England.” But he does not tell us how many hundreds of the clergy, nobility, and gentry have, within the same period, forsaken “this good old ark,” as a sinking ship, for what they deemed the far safer vessel of Popery. Nor does he tell us how much the Popish tendencies of modern Dissent have had to do with the perversion of these Non-conformist “teachers.” Alas! for this retrogression after such a revival of religion in our land! Another bad religious sign is the general lack of principle, even where there is some true piety. The question amongst multitudes of Christians is not what is right, but what is expedient. Particularly is this the case with reference to church-fellowship and public worship. The constitution, discipline, and devotions of a particular church are nothing—convenience is everything—and hence we continually see transitions between churches of the most opposite principles, not because one is seen to be more or less scriptural than another (that question is never discussed), but because the conveniences of marriage, business, or locality so determine.

Meanwhile, if I do not greatly mistake, there is, all over the country, and over the world, a far more general indifference to religion than there was a few years ago. Certainly the attendance at places of worship by no means keeps pace with the increase of population and accommodation, whilst the inducements to spend the Sundays in pleasure are becoming increasingly cheap and attractive.

Mr Spurgeon, in the New Year’s address of his almanack, writes thus :—

To the People of God in Great Britain and Ireland.

DEAR FRIENDS,—The present state of most of our Churches fills me with alarm. The gracious revivals of the last few years were indications of the Lord's readiness to work in the midst of our land. As a watchman on Zion's walls, I must utter my warning note. * * * It is true that in many quarters there is more Christian industry, and more gracious success than of old. The watered gardens are not few, and the rain which the Lord has given them has not been scant in measure. But with all these exceptions, the rule of our church condition is far from pleasing. The church was asleep ten years ago, and godly men knew it; she is asleep still, but the glory of a few local awakenings has dazzled the eyes of the saints, and they imagine that the whole body has been aroused. "Having a name to live while we are dead," is becoming more and more our true portrait. Communities which despised the revival are confirmed in their sin by its manifest subsidence. Persons and companies slightly affected by it have returned to their ordinary lukewarmness; and even those upon whom it had an overpowering influence are forgetting their first love. England's opportunity is gliding away. Soon, soon will it be said, "the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."

If we pass from England to the Continent, matters are still worse there. Mariolatry amongst the devout Papists is at its climax, whilst both in Catholic and Protestant States, rationalism, in plain English, infidelity, has taken firm hold of the more intellectual. Renan's work on the Life of Jesus, which out-Strauss's Strauss, is immensely popular with the *élite*, in reference to which an honest reviewer observes:—"We are bound to speak the truth, and our clear conviction is, that the deepest secret of the success of this book is, that it teaches the fine gentleman and ambitious blue-stockings of Europe to look down with admiring pity on Jesus Christ. An excellent, interesting creature, no doubt he was, whom one can venerate in spite of his delusions, but whom you must look down upon from the sublime intellectual elevation of the nineteenth century."

In my judgment, the combined influence of Renan and Strauss on the Continent, and of Colenso and the Essayists in England, is preparing the way for that universal apostasy, which shall find its terminus in the worship of Satan incarnate. Our country, headed by princes and prelates, has just been prostrate at the feet, not of holiness, but of intellect and courage, in the persons of Shakspeare and Garibaldi; and so fervent have been her devotions to these demi-gods that, should Anti-christ arise in his predicted form—a man of towering mind and dauntless bravery, a sovereign of world-wide renown and universal influence, acquired by his own personal qualities and achievements; a human spirit satanically inspired and possessed, and

on the ground of supernatural wonders, demoniacally wrought, claiming divine allegiance to himself, though destitute of all real goodness; should this great personage now appear upon the stage, the boxes of England, the pit of France, and the galleries of the rest of Europe would rise as one man, and greet the hero with thundering applause, "for God," in righteous judgment, "would send them strong delusion to believe a lie, because they received not the love of the truth."

Before I advance to what I would designate the *most* portentous religious sign of the age, I would point to a few miscellaneous tokens of minor certainty and importance. Amongst these I am struck with the nearly equal duration of the times of Israel, counting from the call of Abraham to the birth of Christ, and the times of the Gentiles, counting from the birth of Christ to the present day, namely, about 1900 years. Then there are the prophetic dates of Daniel and John, respecting which I confess I am not satisfied; but which, according to numerous eminent expositors, will find their boundary in the course of a few years. There is also the increasingly prominent position occupied by Jerusalem, and the Jews, simultaneously with the growing debility of "the sick man," or the Turkish Empire. God's ancient people have long been looking for their deliverer, but now their expectation is unwontedly intense. Here is a hymn of theirs, in the *Hebrew Observer*, published a few years ago:—

REDEMPTION DRAWETH NIGH.

Lift up your heads, ye pilgrim bands!
Hark! hear ye not the cry
Which sweeps across the desert sands,—
His voice, who heaven and earth commands?
Redemption draweth nigh!

Lift up your heads! The Crescent wanes
In yonder Eastern sky,
Beneath whose beam Oppression reigns,
Beneath whose beam Pollution stains:
Redemption draweth nigh!

Lift up your heads! Euphrates' stream
Is spent, its course is dry;
The Prophet's vision is no dream,
His burden is no idle theme:
Redemption draweth nigh!

Lift up your heads, ye Eastern Kings!
Ask ye the reason why?
Who bore you erst on eagles' wings,
You to your land in triumph brings:
Redemption draweth nigh!

Lift up your heads! The nations quake,
Who raised their horn on high;
See how their ancient pillars shake,
While from a dream their monarchs wake!
Redemption draweth nigh!

Lift up your heads! The Moslem's fane
 No more provokes a sigh;
 Lo! Israel's Lion shakes his mane!
 I see Him stalk athwart the plain:
 Redemption draweth nigh!

Lift up your heads! for Canaan's soil
 Is yours. Ye shall not buy.
 Long has it yielded, as a spoil,
 Its corn, its wine, its fruit, its oil:
 Redemption draweth nigh!

Lift up your heads! Your Temple dome
 Shall once more kiss the sky!
 Jerusalem shall be your home,
 From which her sons no more shall roam:
 Redemption draweth nigh!

Lift up your heads! Lift up your voice!
 Ye heralds, quickly fly!
 Bid Israel's exiled tribes rejoice;
 Israel, the people of His choice:
 Redemption draweth nigh!—BEN JAPHET.

There is another remarkable coincidence of date in the chronology of Fynes Clinton. That learned man, without any prejudice about prophecy, has, after great research, arrived at the conclusion that the commencement of the seventh millenary of the world is close to the present year.

One more sign of the minor class. All who are acquainted with the rudiments of prophecy are aware that the lowest portion of Daniel's prophetic image is composed chiefly of iron, and that this division symbolises the Roman Empire, or European Christendom in its last stage. Now, whatever else may be pre-signified by the baser metal, whether deterioration in morals, or in form of government, it surely is remarkable that the days in which we live are emphatically, and literally, *the iron age*. In truth, iron, within the last few years, has changed the face of the entire world. Iron railways alone have revolutionised travel and commerce; iron ships have revolutionised naval war; and iron telegraphs have revolutionised correspondence. Then there are the iron tubular bridges; the iron locomotives, that, like supernatural living creatures, rushing and puffing along the ground, without weariness, swifter than the wind, draw thousands at a time to their destination; the monster iron guns; and, in a word, the countless iron engines of every sort and size, combined with the enormous rapidity and extent of modern building, chiefly out of burnt clay, or brick; all this strongly marks the present time as literally the age of clay and iron, the compound materials of the extremities of Daniel's prophetic image.

I now come to the Sign of Signs. In reading the New Testament, it is impossible not to be impressed with the fact, that demoniacal possession was marvellously rife in the days of Christ; as if Satan had come out from behind the scenes to con-

front the woman's seed in person. In the Old Testament, we do indeed hear of wizards and witches, who, I am simple enough to believe, were no impostors, but genuine dealers with familiar spirits; but we meet with nothing like the crowds of demonized who everywhere encounter us in the Gospels and even in the Acts.

Analogy, then, would lead us to expect a similar Satanic outbreak in the last days. We might warrantably look for an infernal revival to counteract the heavenly revival of the second Pentecost, and to pre-occupy the stage of Christendom, before the advent of the Son of Man.

Accordingly, what do we behold? Under the softened designation of "Spiritualism," we see the resurrection, in fifty-fold magnitude, intensity, and boldness, of old Pagan demonism, and Jewish witchcraft; a sin which is more severely denounced in the Bible than the grossest sensual crimes, and which, in the present dispensation of the spirit, must be regarded by God as an infinite affront to the Holy Ghost. I do not wonder, therefore, that America, the modern cradle of this abomination, worse, tenfold worse, in God's sight, than slavery itself—that America, the source and strength of this demonism, where millions in open day practise its black arts, should now be the theatre of universal devastation, bloodshed, and woe.

Under the scientific name of *mediums*, we see thousands of veritable necromancers and soothsayers, damsels possessed with spirits of divination, and men inspired by the god and prince of this world.

I know that this statement will encounter incredulity from some, and contempt from others; but little do such sneerers imagine the amount of evidence they are ignoring. I have studied this subject for many years. I have read, and still read, numerous writings on the question, and the conclusion at which I have arrived is this, that there is infinitely greater evidence to establish the *facts* of Spiritualism than there is to establish the facts of Christianity; for the witnesses are infinitely more numerous, and thousands of them quite as trustworthy, as the first spectators of the Christian miracles. For my part, therefore, I meet incredulity with pity, and contempt with a counter-smile. My feeling is, *poor people!* your unbelief is the child of ignorance, and your contempt the fruit of pride.

As to the vast spread of this fearful system, hear the well-known and extremely clever author, William Howitt, one of its chief apostles (see *Spiritual Magazine*, November, 1868):—

"During ten incessant years, the whole of North America has been in motion and in excitement with the wonderful outburst of spirit-life. The whole of that vast continent was thrown into a ferment like one gigantic hive of bees at swarming time. Scarcely did Jerusalem and Judea, and the astonished world of Greek and Roman wisdom exhibit a more agitated condition

when the first dazzling day of Christianity broke upon them, than did America at this *second advent* 'in spirit and great power.' Like the first revelation of Christ's eternal religion, *this second birth of it* was in an obscure spot and amongst simple people.

" 'From that humble home in Hydesville,' says Uriah Clark, in his excellent *Plain Guide to Spiritualism*, which has just reached this country, and which both the informed and the uninformed should read—'as humble as Nazareth, the tidings spread with a joy and wonder akin to the angel tidings over Bethlehem.' The news that the chambers of death were again rent open—that all which generations of Humes and Voltaires, of physical and metaphysical philosophies had done to lay the restless human spirit in the ice caves of inanition; to bar up the doors of heaven, and to persuade the living that they had no kindred gone into the infinite, no loving souls who were not merely awaiting them there, but seeking them here, was rendered vain; the news that the spirits of the departed not only lived but loved, that they were sent down to confound deadly philosophies and more deadly theologies; this news flew not on the wings of the winds, but of spirit, and a joy and wonder burst forth unparalleled since the day when the saints were drunk with the news at Pentecost, and were thought to be drunk with wine. People ran wildly to and fro to assure themselves of the truth; they sat down here, there, everywhere, and called on their spirit friends, their lost parents, wives, brothers, sisters, children, and they came joyous as themselves at the recovered intercourse. They rapped their gladness on walls, ceilings, floors, furniture. They lifted tables and chairs, and rung bells, and played on instruments in their heavenly delight. They wrote on paper, they spoke through alphabets, they spoke out often audibly and with their old, beloved voices, and the great land and all its populous cities, was one rapturous, thrilling delirium of joyous affection and re-established assurance of immortality.

" In the cities, in the country, over the vast prairies, through the vast forests, along the mighty lakes the Divine news flew amongst the astonished population.

" There are now, in the United States, Mr Clark tells us, 500 public mediums, who receive visitors; more than 50,000 more private ones; 500 books and pamphlets have been published on the subject, and many of them immensely circulated. There are 500 public speakers and lecturers on it; and more than 1,000 occasional ones. There are nearly 2,000 places for public circles, conferences, or lectures, and in many places flourishing Sunday Schools. The believers, the decisive believers, number about 2,000,000; while the nominal ones are nearly 5,000,000. In the eastern continent the number may be reckoned at 1,000,000. The whole number now on the globe, supposed to recognise the fact of spiritual intercourse, cannot fall short of 20,000,000.

"In Paris and in different parts of France, the manifestations have been of almost every kind and of the most decisive and distinguished character. Great numbers of persons have been healed, by therapeutic mediums, of diseases and injuries incurable by all ordinary means. Some of these persons are well known to me, and are every day bearing their testimony in aristocratic society to their cures by spiritual agency. Many persons have been called to life when pronounced perfectly dead by their medical attendants. Deaf and dumb persons have been gifted or re-gifted with speech and hearing, either by mediumistic manipulation, or by direct prayer. A most extraordinary case of this latter kind is that of the youth, Gigott, of Briac, attested by the doctors themselves, in the *Revue Spiritualiste*, Tom. 1, p. 322. But, in fact, a very large volume of spiritual cases of what is called the supernatural, might be selected from the volumes of the *Revue Spirite*, and the *Revue Spiritualiste*, certified by names of person, places, and witnesses. The direct spirit writings obtained in hundreds of instances by Baron Guldenstubbe, and various other distinguished men, are familiar to all who know anything of Spiritualism. Spirit drawings are equally well known in France, some of which have been engraved, as the remarkable one of the 'Maison de Mozart.' The musical demonstrations have been and are equally singular.

"The one great fact, however, stands prominent as the Alps on the bosom of Europe. Spiritualism, the *great theologic and philosophic reformer of the age*, the *great re-quickener of religious life*, the great consoler and establisher of hearts, the great herald of heaven to the wanderers of earth, starved upon the husks of mere college dogmas, and loaded with a sore pilgrim's pack of Materialism, is marching calmly onwards, amid the nations, and on all sides rejoicing souls are flowing towards it. The stone cut out of the mountains without hands is rolling on its way and promising ere long to fill the whole earth!"

If the facts of this article be true, and it would be mere obstinacy to dispute them, what have we here but another Jesus, another Gospel, and another spirit? Yea, another heaven and another hell, which have no connection with faith and unbelief in Christ. In truth, the Bible utterly disappears and is replaced by demoniacal or necromantic oracles. Add this to the influence of the polite and critical literature already mentioned; add both to the manifest religious decline in America and Europe; add the extreme probability that the terrific judgments of the new world are the sufferings of "the green tree," as a prelude to the final punishment of the "dry," on this side of the Atlantic; the old decayed nations of Europe, weighed down by the accumulated guilt of 1,500 years; the guilt of Popery; the guilt of Protestantism; the guilt of the great whore of Babylon and her daughters; add all these to the moral, political, and physical signs we have already reviewed, and then determine whether

there is any verisimilitude in the conclusion that "The Judge standeth at the door."

But it may be objected, surely the signs of the second advent will be so portentous that they *cannot* be disregarded. No! they cannot be disregarded. Earthquake, famine, pestilence, war, tumult, revolution, physical derangements, above and beneath, must be very impressive, so impressive that men's hearts will fail for fear; but there will be intervals of repose, and during these, nature will resume its sway, philosophy will explain, and credulity will believe, so that there will be a cry "of peace and safety" when destruction is at the door. For, I repeat it, God will not force conviction; he will always allow room for possible, though not for reasonable doubt. There will be evidence enough to produce *moral* certainty, but not such irresistible demonstration as would produce *mathematical* certainty; and since moral conviction, however adequate the evidence to produce it, will be effectually hindered by passion or prejudice, as was the case with the Jews at the first advent, there will be scoffers to the very end, enquiring, "where is the promise of His coming?" But worse than this, there will be unfaithful stewards of the household, who shall say, "My Lord delayeth His coming," and what wonder if the servants are unprepared when the overseers show them the example.

Peter intimates, in his Second Epistle, that the ostensible ground of scepticism in the last days will be, that, in all ages, things have continued much the same; that is, there have been from time immemorial great convulsions of nature, and great commotions amongst mankind. They will, however, willingly ignore the fact that, once at least, the whole world was overtaken by a supernatural disaster, namely, the deluge, and that Christ has forewarned us that "as it was in the days of Noah, so it shall be when the Son of Man cometh."

Many, too, who will not be scoffers, will owe their disbelief to a traditional system of Biblical interpretation, and to hopes of religious progress which Scripture does not warrant; hence, the most portentous occurrences will be regarded by them as tokens of coming prosperity.

Whether the boat of Christendom is on the rapids, and rushing towards the cataract, I leave you to judge. For myself, I believe it is, and so believing, I shall conclude this lecture with a word of exhortation to three classes of persons.

First.—The Unjustified and Unsaved. How could you abide the day of Christ's appearing? Can stubble endure the contact of flame? The very first outcome of the supernatural would discover your moral nakedness, and drive the blush of shame to your cheek, or, rather, consternation would turn it pale! How would the strange, articulate thunder, the rumbling of Christ's chariot wheels, elicit the echo of self-condemnation from your heart; and the living lightning of His wrath hurry you into the

clefts of the rocks for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty?

Oh, be wise! and ere the sun sets in sackcloth, and the moon is turned into blood, ere the stars fall from heaven as drunken sentinels from their watch tower, "be ye reconciled to God."

As yet the city of refuge is accessible to the homicide; flee into its shelter! As yet

"The blood is on the mercy-seat,
The priest is on the throne,
And heaps of incense, pure and sweet,
Are on the altar strown."

Flee to the intercession of Jesus! and flee at once, for if the strange noises we hear in the outer court are indeed the footsteps of the thief, if the last days are really upon us, dangers and delusions will rapidly increase, Satan will more vehemently rage, and, oh, terrible retirement! God will gradually withdraw his grace.

While, then, it is called to-day, repent! while it is called to-day, believe! Be reconciled to God; watch, pray, and be ready for any event.

Second.—The Justified, but Unwatchful. Alas! how many there are of these. It is heart-saddening to see multitudes of Christians, of all denominations, striving to make the best of both worlds, to grasp the one bird in the hand, and, at the same time, to catch the two in the bush; to hear them sneering at the cry of other saints, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh," but joining in the chorus of the world, "There's a good time coming."

Ah! awake, ye sleeping virgins, and trim your expiring lamps, or it may be that your closed eyelids shall be forced open by a glory you cannot bear. How this may be I know not, but I cannot believe that an utter disregard, if not contempt, of Christ's warning to watch for His return, accompanied with a backsliding heart and an inconsistent life, can meet with impunity. "Watch and pray, then, at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Third.—Let me admonish and comfort those who accept as probable the interpretations I have given.

Beware of a mere *notional* concurrence in these views; for if they do not solemnize and sanctify, if they do not wean you from a world so near its doom, they are as worthless to you as the truths of the Gospel are to a believing fiend. If you sincerely think that the signs of the times are as ominous as you say, then you will be distinguished from careless professors, and from backsliding Christians, by your subdued temper, your serious frame of mind, your moderation in all lawful indulgences, and your entire abstinence from those which are forbidden. You will be plain in apparel, homely in food, unostentatious in furni-

ture, chastened in amusement, and mortified in carnal desires ; but, at the same time, buoyant in hope, and longing in expectation of the Lord's return.

My wish is not simply to make you *second adventists*, but "a people prepared for the Lord." To you, who are thus prepared, I say, cheer up, your hope is not the unscriptural, selfish hope of a happy, solitary departure from this life, while your brethren are still left to toil in the vale of tears. You look for the common hope of the saints, for what Paul terms "that blessed hope," "even the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ." And should the trump of the archangel sound this night, what music would it be in your ears ? or, should any supernatural tokens give proof that your Lord was just behind the clouds, how would your drooping hearts revive, and your glad spirits be ready to burst the bonds of the flesh, and fly to meet him in the air.

Meanwhile, let us pray :—

"Hope of our hearts, oh Lord, appear!
Thou glorious star of day
Shine forth, and chase the dreary night
With all our tears away!
Strangers on earth, we wait for thee;
Oh leave the Father's throne;
Come, with a shout of victory, Lord,
And claim us for thine own."

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