

COMING EVENTS ON EARTH AND IN HEAVEN.

W W Fereday.

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The Blessed Hope.

The outlook for the world is of the gravest possible character. Its advanced civilisation, of which has been so complacent, has utterly failed to preserve from the most colossal and the most barbarous conflict of the ages. The world's vaunted civilisation has, indeed completely broken down, and its priests and prophets can only bewail its ruin. From the present mighty upheaval a new order of things must needs emerge. A reconstruction practically every department of human affairs will take place. But what the result of it all will be—how it will operate—no one can say. There is ample room for anxiety on the part of rulers and statesmen everywhere.

It is no part of the duty of the Christian to occupy himself with the immediate future. The Spirit of God would concentrate our attention upon a certain fixed point in the purposes of God, when everything will reach its climax. We refer to the great Day of the Lord, which will be ushered in by the public manifestation of the Lord Jesus from Heaven. Of that Day prophets and psalmists have spoken and sung in ages past. That Day will bring about a total reversal of the order of things which it will fill here. It will bring to an abrupt termination "Man's Day"—this period of human pride and self-will—in order that the will of God may prevail. When "the world kingdom of our Lord and His Christ" (Rev. 11: 15) established, righteousness, peace, and blessing will fill the earth. Until then the anguish must needs deepen day by day.

The Day of the Lord, however near it may be, will not open just yet. Many prophetic events (which will doubtless be crowded into a very short space of time) must be accomplished before its inauguration. But there is a preliminary event (inseparably connected with the "Day") which may take place at any hour—the Lord's descent into the air to call up to Himself His Heavenly elect. It is the divine intention to bring forth "the saints of the Heavenly places" in the same glory with Christ when He appears. He will come "to be glorified in His

saints, and to be admired in all them that have believed, in that Day" (2 Thess. 1: 10). In order that this may be, He will first gather up His own and fit them for the great display.

This is what the Apostle in Titus 2: 13 calls "the Blessed Hope." The Church is to see the Lord as "the Bright Morning Star" before Israel and the world behold Him "as the Sun of righteousness" (Rev. 22: 16; Mal. 4: 2). This will be the fulfilment of the Saviour's promise to His disciples on the eve of His departure: "I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there ye may be also" (John 14: 3). That there is no thought of death in this familiar passage is sufficiently proved by John 21: 22, 23.

Our feeble minds can scarcely comprehend what is told us concerning our Lord's return. He will descend, His mighty voice will be heard, sleeping saints will be raised, and living ones "changed in a moment" (1 Thess. 4: 16, 17; 1 Cor. 15: 51, 52). In the morning occupied with our usual toil; in the afternoon at home in the Father's house for ever. What an expectation!

The question may arise with some: "Will every saint be taken?" Unquestionably. It is "the Hope of righteousness" (Gal. 5: 5). God has connected the Hope with the righteousness with which He has invested us in the risen Christ. He whom God has "justified" must needs be also "glorified" (Rom. 8: 30). It would be a dishonour to the work of the Lord Jesus if one of His saints were omitted in the Day for which we wait. Even to the ill-behaved Corinthians the Apostle wrote: "We shall all be changed" (1 Cor. 15: 51).

The expectation of Christ should mightily influence us during "the little while." The Spirit brings it before us in Scripture in connection with all the circumstances of daily life. It is an incentive to holiness. "Every man that hath this Hope on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3: 3). It is impossible to cherish the thought that we shall be conformed to His image presently without longing to be more like Him morally now. The Apostle in his prayer for the Thessalonians, in 1 Thessalonians 3 11-13, looked forward to the Lord's Coming as the consummation of a blameless and holy walk in them. It is

2. Comfort in Sorrow. Thus to the perplexed and the, bereaved, the Spirit, in 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18, present the hope for their comfort and encouragement. The Old Testament believer looked for reunion with departed one in the realms of the dead (2 Sam. 12: 23); the New Testament saint looks to meet in the air, in resurrection life, and glory, all those to whom he has said farewell in the faith of Christ.

3. Cheer in Persecution. The Hebrew believers had suffered much, both in property and person, for the Name of the Lord Jesus. The Apostle earnestly desired that their faith should not droop by reason of their afflictions Accordingly he says: "Yet a little while, and He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry" (Heb. 10: 37) The loss would soon be over, and then the everlasting gain

4. Support under Oppression. To those who were enduring tyranny, whose good service was neither appreciated nor rewarded by those who held them in bondage, James wrote: "Be patient therefore, brethren unto the Coming of the Lord . . . the Coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (James 5: 7, 8). His eye sees all that comes upon His own during their pathway through the world, and He will adjust their every wrong at His return He is a righteous Lord.

5. Encouragement in Service. Thus we read in 1 Thessalonians 2: 19, 20: "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His Coming? For ye are our glory and joy." Does the tired heart of the worker sometimes feel overcharged by the unbelief and waywardness of those amongst whom he labours? Let him encourage his heart with the happy thought that the full fruit of all true service for Christ will be seen without fail when He returns.

Above all things, the Spirit of God would produce in our hearts longing to see the Saviour's face. To work for Him is good, and will receive its reward; to wait for Him is better, and the reward is correspondingly more wonderful, as Luke 12: 35-38, 42-44 testifies. May our hearts be so completely detached from everything here that in response to His "Yea, I Come Quickly," we may be able joyfully to respond, "AMEN, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22: 20).

The Elders In Heaven.

The history of the professing Church having been unfolded before him in the epistles to the seven assemblies the Apocalyptic seer next heard the call, "Come up hither," and immediately he found himself in spirit before the throne of God. John is here the representative of us all. The same Voice that saluted his ears in Patmos will presently be heard by the whole household of faith, and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we shall find ourselves, not in spirit merely, but in person, in the midst of Heaven's glories, in the presence of God and the Lamb.

Grouped around the throne of the Eternal, John saw four and twenty thrones (not "seats" as in the A.V. of Rev. 4: 4), with four and twenty elders sitting upon them, clothed in white raiment, with crowns of gold upon their heads. From the first mention of them in chapter 4: 4 until the last in chapter 19: 4, the book of Revelation represents these elders as characterised by spiritual intelligence. They understand the divine purpose in connection with creation (Rev. 4: 11), they give interpretations to the Apostle in Rev. 5: 5; Rev. 7: 13, 14, they sing with appreciation of the Blood of the Lamb in Rev. 5: 9, 10; they celebrate the divine assumption of the Kingdom in Rev. 11: 16; and they acquiesce in God's judgement of the great whore in Rev. 19: 4. Who are these favoured ones?

Let it be distinctly understood that chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation do not give us a picture of what is, but of what will be. Heaven, at present, wears; no such aspect as that which is portrayed in these chapters. Not until the present

enterprise of God's Spirit is completed will Heaven thus prepare itself for the work of judgement. It is important to keep this fact in mind if we would understand what beings are shown to us in the enthroned and worshipping elders.

Note, first of all, that they are a representative company. The elders, both in the Old and New Testaments, stand (or act) for the whole company of God's people (Ex. 4: 29; Deut 31: 28, Acts 11: 30). The number corresponds with the divisions of Israel's priesthood in 1 Chronicles 24 and 25. The twenty-four chief priests were representative of the whole priestly family. The elders of the Revelation are manifestly priests; their robes (Rev. 4: 4) and censers (Rev. 5: 8) indicating this. They have also a royal character, for they are both crowned and enthroned. They are not angels, for the angelic host is everywhere shown as a company apart (e.g., Rev. 5: 11); and, moreover, angels are not called to occupy thrones, rule being no part of their office (Heb. 2: 5). Nor are the elders the spirits of departed saints awaiting the resurrection, for their number remains the same throughout—there is no increase. Who then can the elders be but the whole Heavenly priesthood, viewed under this representative symbol? By the Heavenly priesthood we mean all those who are glorified at the moment of our Lord's descent into the air—the saints of the Old Testament dispensations, and the Church "which is His Body" (Heb. 11: 40). All these, whatever differences there may be in their position and relationships in other respects, can unitedly and joyfully sing: "Unto Him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. AMEN" (Rev. 1: 5, 6). I find myself amongst that holy throng !

These kingly priests are all seen enthroned in peace and rest in the presence of God and the Lamb, before God "arises to shake terribly the earth" (Isa. 2: 21). And "not the earth only, but also Heaven" (Heb. 12: 26). Not until chapter 6 of the Revelation does the Lamb commence to break the seals of the fateful book. But the judgement is manifestly preparing, for "out of the throne proceeded lightnings, and thunderings, and voices" (Rev. 4: 5) The elders are seen in holy calm: Not even the thrice "Holy" of the living creatures dismays them, as a similar cry distressed Isaiah so long ago (Isa. 6: 5). They are in the presence of God on the ground of redeeming Blood, and they know it. Judgement there must needs be, for the long-suffering of God is now ended, but judgement means nothing for those whose hope and confidence is the Blood of the Lamb.

What a scene is described to us when the Lamb takes the Book out of the right hand of Him that sitteth upon the throne! John was weeping sorely because no one in Heaven or earth was found competent to open (or even to look upon) the book, in answer to the angel's challenge. Told of a Lion—the Lion of the tribe of Judah—he looked, and behold a Lamb, and He bearing the marks of having been slain. It is the same glorious Person as the Son of Man of Daniel 7: 13, 14, who is there seen approaching the throne of the Ancient of Days in order to receive the investiture of the Kingdom; in Revelation 6:6, 7, He takes into His hands the book of the divine counsels as the only One in Heaven or

earth capable of carrying them into effect. The book is completely filled—"written within and on the backside"; no purpose of God will ever require revision or addition. All that is required is One to put everything into execution.

The Lion speaks of irresistible power; the Lamb of redeeming grace. God's ultimate object is blessing. Accordingly, when judgement has done its work, redemption will be known in earth below even as in Heaven above. We get the celebration of this in verses 13, 14 of our chapter. When Judah's Lion rises up "Man's Day" will be brought to a close, and the Day of the Lord will set in.

The sight of the once-slain Lamb in the midst of the throne moves all Heaven profoundly. The elders rise from their thrones, and with the living creatures they fall low at His feet and chant His praise. The songs of earth wax old; Heaven's "New song" never. God will never weary of listening to His redeemed proclaiming the worthiness of the Lamb; both to Him and to them that song will have eternal freshness. The language of the new song is not correctly given in our Authorised Version It should run thus: "Thou art worthy to take the book and to open its seals, because Thou hast been slain, and hast redeemed to God by Thy blood out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and made them to our God kings and priests; and they shall reign over the earth" (Darby's Translation). The language is not personal, but general. They speak not so much of those who derive benefit from the Redeemer's work, as of the work itself. Its wondrous value is their theme. It goes without saying that they are themselves blessed in virtue of it, and so, likewise, are the saints who are suffering at that time upon the earth; but, we repeat, it is the work, rather than the beneficiaries thereof, which they proclaim before the throne of God.

The angels then express themselves. The elders sing to the Lamb; the angels speak of the Lamb. With a loud voice they say: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." All Heaven is thus in sympathy with the heart of God; every tongue proclaims the worthiness of the One who died. At last a Person has been found to whom power and riches can be safely entrusted, and who will use them for God and His glory.

But the circle of praise expands yet further, until Heaven, earth, and sea, in glad unison, say: "Blessing and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." It is a prophetic anticipation of the complete deliverance of the whole creation (so long groaning in bondage) as the fruit of the Redeemer's work. The four living creatures respond with their deep "Amen," And the four and twenty elders fall down and worship.

Wonderful thought ! we may find ourselves in the midst of all these glories ere another day dawns.

The New Empire and Its Head.

As a result of the world's conflicts and disorders, a new federal Empire will arise in Europe. Its extraordinary characteristics will excite universal wonder and admiration. In men's eyes it will be incomparable, and its might irresistible. More than human wisdom will be required to bring it to perfection; but when it is established, it will represent the climax of all that men have been striving after from the beginning.

The idea of such an Empire is running strongly in men's minds to-day. The British Premier (Mr. H. H. Asquith), speaking in Dublin early in October, 1914, described his own aspirations thus: "A real European partnership, based on the recognition of equal rights, and established and enforced by a common will."

About the same time the following remarks appeared in The Glasgow Herald: "What a consciousness of strength it would give us, and what a splendid watchword for the struggle, if we could say, with our Allies, that we are fighting for a federated Europe, better still, if we could say we were fighting for a federated world!"

The Daily Mail of 21st December, 1914, hailed the agreement of the three Scandinavian monarchs, as possibly heralding "the beginning of the realization of the old idea of the formation of a nucleus United States of Europe." A prominent writer on military matters, referring to the fear of some that Russia may become the terror of Europe if the German power is broken, has suggested that the surest way of counteracting that danger, should it arise, would be the federation of the Western powers, even naming ten which, in his opinion, might advantageously draw together. All these statements, a few out of many that might be quoted, are interesting as showing the drift of things in our time. [Written in 1915. The idea of "a League of Nations" has made great advances since then.]

The new Empire, when it appears, will be, after all, an old one revived. Destined to be destroyed by the Son of Man at His second coming to earth, it is the same power that used violence to Him at His first coming. It is the Roman power, but in a form different in many respects from anything known in the past. Thus the Beast, which John saw rising up out of the sea in Revelation 13: 1, was in appearance like a leopard, its feet were as those of a bear, and its mouth as that of a lion. These creatures represent the world-empires which preceded Rome— Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece (Dan. 7: 4-6). The Empire of the future will thus combine Alexander's rapidity of action with the Persian greed of conquest, and Babylon's tyrannical despotism.

Moreover, the Beast has ten horns. These, we are told both in Daniel 7: 24 and Revelation 17: 12, are ten kings, who will federate for mutual advantage under one powerful head. Nothing of the kind was seen in the Empire which the Goths destroyed! while powers of both past and future are divinely characterised as wild beasts. That is, they have neither conscience nor heart. Their dominion is founded on rapacity and brute force. Remarkably, the states of this intermediate period, while the Roman Empire is in abeyance, have voluntarily accepted this

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THE FOUR PHASES OF THE EMPIRE are indicated in Revelation 17: 8, it was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition." During some twelve centuries it "was." Under this power, John himself was suffering. In A.D 476 its last remnant was extinguished.

Accordingly, at the present time it "is not." Presently, it will "ascend out of the bottomless pit," which means that it will be revived by the energy of Satan. Finally, it "will go into perdition," being consigned to eternal doom by the Lord Jesus Christ at His appearing.

All the power of the resuscitated Empire will be centred in its distinguished chief. Thus, doings which are attributed to the Beast itself in Revelation 13: 5-7, are attributed to the horn upon the Beast in Daniel 7: 8, 11, 25. His confederate kings will "have one mind, and will give their power and strength unto the Beast" (Rev. 17: 13). For all practical purposes the Emperor is "the Empire." He wields its mighty power autocratically. The beginning of his prosperity will be the subjugation of three European Kingdoms (Dan. 7: 24). Then (the need of a strong hand being generally recognized) seven others will combine with them under his headship for mutual advantage. The archer upon the white horse who goes forth under the first seal is, in all probability, this victorious leader in the first stages of his career (Rev. 6: 2). He is "the prince that shall come" of Daniel 9: 26.

1. Religiously, the Empire will be infidel. Though it will be for a time in closest association with, and even dominated by, that which calls itself "the Church" (Rev. 17: 1-8), this will be a political arrangement only, involving no respect whatever even for Babylon's caricature of Christianity. [Religion tends more and more to become a mere matter of political convenience. Even Great Britain is not ashamed to pass as the patron of Mohammedanism when the political situation renders it advantageous to do so.] God will no longer be acknowledged even in the formal language of State documents. He will be openly blasphemed (Rev. 13: 6). The principle of Romans 13: 1-6, will no longer have any application: the civil power will be in avowed apostasy. An image of the Beast will be set up, which the mass will readily worship, and also the

Dragon, as the source of the Beast's power and authority. All who refuse to bow will be persecuted. These are not the saints of the Church period, who at that epoch will all be in the Father's house, but the fruits of the latter-day preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom. The blood of these faithful ones, Jews and Gentiles alike, will be shed like water. The cries of the agonised sufferers of the Jewish race may be heard in the prophetic language of many of the Psalms (e.g., chaps. 9, 10, 44, etc.). Some of the brightest testimonies that have ever been rendered to God in this evil world will be rendered during the dark hours that will precede the Millennial dawn.

2. Economically the Empire will be the most burdensome despotism the world has ever known. Everything will be centralised. The Government will gather up all the cords into its own hands. Since the Government of that day will be an autocracy, it follows that one tyrannical hand will control the whole vast machinery of human affairs. This is the point to which the present craze for association, co-operation and nationalisation will ultimately land men. Every person will be required to carry a mark—either the name of the Beast or the number of his name. He may wear it in hand or forehead, as he may choose; but carry the mark he must, or be crushed out of existence, since none will be permitted to trade without it. Class distinction will exempt none from this iron rule; "small and great, rich and poor, free and bond" must alike submit (Rev. 13: 16). Wielded by his malignant lieutenant, the false prophet (the Antichrist of 1 John 2: 18-22), the power of the Beast will penetrate into every quarter. In their mad rage against all ancient authorities, men will produce a perfect welter by their revolutionary violence (Rom. 6: 12-17; Luke 21: 25, 28). This will create the need for a strong hand to intervene, and the opportunity for the Emperor of the future will thus arise. Men will be thankful for him until they prove by bitter experience that they have committed themselves to a more galling tyranny than they have ever known before. They will be "scorched" by their own boasted luminary (Rev. 16: 8).

This reign of terror will be ended by the abrupt appearing of the Lord from Heaven. The Beast and the false prophet, at the head of their hosts, with all the satellite kings in attendance, will make war against the Lamb; and these two leaders will be seized, and consigned forthwith to the Lake of Fire (Rev. 19: 19, 20). Without experiencing death and resurrection, these—earth's greatest transgressors—will be summarily judged at least a thousand years before the Great White Throne is set up

The earth's only hope is Christ. Oh, that men perceived this! Every scheme devised by men for the rectification of their wrongs, every device to place human affairs upon a sound and satisfactory basis, is doomed to disappointment. Christ is the Man of God's purpose. He, and He only, is able to make the rough places plain, and the crooked things straight. All this He will accomplish in His Day.

The Casting Down of Satan.

The greatest rebel in the universe, the prime instigator of all evil both above and below, is Satan. During many ages his insolent opposition to all God's will has been tolerated in divine forbearance, but the moment has been already fixed when His forbearance will end. Then the exalted transgressor will meet his doom.

Popular theology seems vague as to the present whereabouts of Satan. Some persons speak of him as if he were already in Hell; others appear to limit the sphere of his operations to the earth. That he has not yet been cast into Hell is sufficiently proved by his own words in Job 1: 7. Appearing before Jehovah amongst the sons of God on a certain occasion, the Creator inquired of him: "Whence comest thou?" To which he replied: "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." It is most certain that when Satan or any other transgressors are once cast into Hell there will be no coming forth again to walk to and fro in the earth. Hell's woeful prisoners will not be permitted to roam about at will.

The truth is that Satan and his hosts have not yet been expelled from the heavenly places. Hence they are called in Ephesians 6: 12 (margin), "wicked spirits in Heavenly places," and in Isaiah 24: 21, "the host of the high ones that are on high." Satan himself is described in Ephesians 2: 2 as "the prince of the power of the air." Daniel 10: 11, 12 shows that evil spirits are even able (when permitted by God) to impede the journey of an angel, sent from above with an answer to prayer. Some have thought that the presence of rebels in the heavens accounts for the omission of the words "it was good," in connection with the work of the second day in Genesis 1: 6-8. The omission is certainly remarkable.

Romans 16: 20 assures us "the God of Peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Let us repeat to ourselves the word shortly." The career of the great disturber is nearing its end. Christ will soon "undo the works of the devil," according to the divine purpose (1 John 3: 8). The first of all prophecies—the word spoken in Eden—will then be completely fulfilled: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head" (Gen. 3: 15). The saints are to be associated with Him in His mighty victory, hence the Apostle says "your feet" in Romans 16: 20.

Scripture indicates three steps in the overthrow of Satan. The first is found in Revelation 12: 7-12; the second in Revelation 19: 1-3; and the third in Revelation 20:10. Created originally "full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty," set upon the holy mountain of God as the anointed covering cherub (thus Prime Minister of the Universe, guardian of the rights of the divine throne), Satan will finish in the Lake of Fire (Ezek. 28: 12-17). Not as king will he be sent thither, but as the principal offender and greatest sufferer. It is a hymn, not Scripture, which has addressed him as "Satan, thou king in Hell." The fall of Satan, from heights to us inconceivable, to depths unimaginable, is appalling to contemplate.

In Revelation 12 the veil is drawn aside that we may behold wonders in Heaven. First we are shown the divine purpose concerning Israel (the sun-

clothed woman), with Satan's opposition thereto; then we are permitted to witness a mighty struggle waged in Heaven between Michael and the Dragon, each the leader of angelic hosts. The result of the war is that Satan and his armies are cast out into the earth, never again to have a footing on high. This issue the Saviour saw in prophetic vision when the seventy returned to Him in Luke 10: 17, 18. The triumph over demons through His Name was to Him the earnest of the final victory.

The duration of the Dragon's sojourn upon earth is definitely stated—1260 days. From this we learn that the expulsion from Heaven takes place in the middle of the last of Daniel's seventy weeks (Dan. 9: 27). As Isaiah 24: 21 shows, it is at the epoch of God's judgement of "the kings of the earth upon the earth." This passage indicates the order of these solemn happenings; first, the Heavenly foes overthrown, then the earthly.

The Church must needs be removed from the earth ere Satan and his followers are cast out of Heaven. Our conflict is characteristically with principalities and powers, with the universal lords of this darkness, "with wicked spirits in Heavenly places" (see J. N. Darby's translation of Eph. 6: 12). These now use their subtle influence to prevent our practical realization of our Heavenly portion in the exalted Christ. They will continue in their present position until at last our fighting days are done.

Heaven is filled with rejoicing at their expulsion. It is an important step towards the establishment of the Kingdom of God, and the authority of His Christ. "Now is come the salvation, and strength, and the Kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the Blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives even unto death" (Rev. 12: 10, 11). Three companies of saints may be discerned in these verses: the raptured ones of 1 Thessalonians 4: 16, 17 (it is they who speak); the martyred witnesses of Revelation 6: 9-11, who loved not their lives even unto death; and the suffering saints of Revelation 12: 7; Rev. 13: 2, against whom the adversary's accusations have been directed. Never again will he be permitted thus to oppose the priestly service of (:Christ in Heaven, but for a brief season he will be suffered to oppose Him as Prophet and King by means of his two chief instruments as in Rev. 13.

Satan being cast into the earth, pandemonium will ensue. "Woe to the earth and to the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath because he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (Rev. 12: 12) Horrors which are at present beyond the power of human minds to comprehend will fill the scene for an appointed period. Then the divine hand will come down upon Satan once more. Revelation 19: 11-21 presents to us in vivid prophecy the coming forth of earth's rightful King. The Beast and the false prophet are consigned to the Lake of Fire, and their hosts are destroyed. Then comes the turn of the malignant instigator of all the evil. John sees an angel coming down from Heaven with the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. In Rev. 9: 1 the key is used to

open the abyss for the release of hellish evils to operate against men; in chapter 20: 1 the key is used to close it upon the great deceiver. Identified by all his titles—"the Dragon, the Old Serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan"—he is cast into the abyss, which is forthwith closed and sealed. This is the doom which the demons of our Lord's time, notably the legion of Luke 8: 31, so greatly dreaded. He who once caused a seal to be placed upon the tomb of the Son of God (Matt. 27: 66), has now a seal placed upon his own prison. At the utmost possible distance from God, he experiences restraint during the thousand years of our Lord's glorious reign. Whatever outbreaks of evil there may be during that period cannot be attributed to Satan, for his deceptions are for the time being at an end. What a reversal of present conditions: the saints sit upon thrones, and their adversary goes into the awful abyss !

But the Millennial Kingdom being a dispensation (the last of them all), it is needful that men should be tested once more ere time gives place to eternity. Accordingly Satan is released for a little season. Unrepentant and unbroken, he makes one last great effort to regain his lost world-empire. Men in remote regions giving heed to his overtures, a vast revolt takes place. But it is earth's last convulsion. As Satan's host seeks to compass about the camp of the saints, and the beloved city (Jerusalem), fire falls from Heaven and devours them.

One last stroke then descends. "The devil which deceived them was cast into the Lake of Fire and brimstone, where the Beast and false prophet are, and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20: 10). This is that of which our Lord spake in Matthew 25: 41, "everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels." There will be a restricted area ("a lake") somewhere in the universe of God where evil will be confined and punished eternally. No activity in sin can be permitted, even though heart hatred to God and His Son must needs abide, for neither new-birth nor repentance are possible in Gehenna. Absolute subjection will be divinely enforced (Phil. 2: 10, 11). Satan and all his dupes, whether angelic or human, will be found together when the final judgement of God is executed.

The Apostasy of Christendom.

The dream of universal conversion to God as the fruit of Christian testimony, however long and widely cherished, is not destined to be realized. Attractive though the thought may be, it has no warrant whatever in Holy Scripture. Every passage which speaks of the close of the present era predicts complete disaster. Darkness, not light- judgement, not conversion, is the appointed end.

The question is sometimes asked: "Is Christianity a failure?" If by this is meant, have any divine purposes failed? the answer is emphatically, "No." No purpose of divine grace can ever fail. All that the Father has given to the Son will undoubtedly come to Him. Christ will at the last surround Himself with all His own. But if the inquiry means, has Christianity, as a system, failed to assimilate everything to itself, the answer must be, Yes. But then God's Word never gave

any one the slightest reason to expect that it would. Such a thought should never have been entertained by God's people.

Let us consider a few passages relative to the close of the present era.

1. First, one from the Old Testament. Isaiah 60: 2 describing the condition of the human family when Christ shines forth, says: "Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people." This language is plain enough, and reminds us of our Lord's words in Luke 18: 8: "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" Had we no other Scripture statement before us, Isaiah 60: 2 is sufficient to prove that Christianity is not destined to illuminate the whole earth

2. Take, next, our Lord's teaching in Matthew 13. In a series of parables He declares the course of things in the Kingdom of Heaven during His absence. Verses 24-30 show that God's wheatfield would be utterly marred by Satanic activity, rendered possible by the carelessness of the labourers responsible; verses 31, 32 indicate that the Kingdom would develop so abnormally that it would afford shelter to the very servants of the devil, verse 33 speaks of the utter corruption brought about by evil doctrine, while in His last words uttered that day He likened the Kingdom to a net, which gathered much fish only fit to be cast away as worthless. A solemn end to the present period is clearly set forth in our Lord's instruction.

3. We turn now to the teaching of the Apostles. Jude's epistle is occupied with the matter before us. In the course of his few words this writer traces the introduction and development of evil in the professing Church right on to the Lord's judgement of it at His appearing. Jude's language is stern and scathing concerning those who were diligently corrupting the most wonderful testimony ever committed by God to men. No one can read Jude's epistle without perceiving that the position was hopeless from the beginning, and that every succeeding hour has only brought matters nearer to divine judgement.

Paul has much to say concerning the close of this age

Note his parable of the olive tree in Romans 11: 16-24

The Jewish people—the natural branches—having been cut off because there was no moral correspondence between them and the root (Abraham), Gentiles, "cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature," have been grafted into their place, and are now the responsible people of God in the earth. But all such stand by faith, or not at all. He who spared not the natural branches cannot be expected to spare the grafts if they appreciate not His goodness. Hence the threat in verse 22, "thou also shalt be cut off." There is no question here of individual salvation, which cannot be affected by dispensational failure; the point is that Gentile profession, looked at as a whole, will be divinely rejected as Israel in an earlier age, if not faithful. But has Gentile profession been faithful? What need for "reformation" or "revival" if all is well? How would it be possible

for Protestant to reproach Papist, or vice versa, if "Christendom" had continued in the goodness of God? The breakdown is undeniable; nothing remains, therefore, but the divine cutting off.

Let us now compare three Pauline Scriptures, and note the stages of development indicated in them. In 1 Timothy 4:1, "the Spirit speaketh expressly that in latter times some shall depart from the faith." The verses which follow show plainly that Popery is specially intended, with its outward protestations of sanctity, and its inward moral corruption. "Latter times" simply means times subsequent to the writing of the epistle. The evils described would influence "some"; the departure would not be universal.

In 2 Timothy 3: 1-5 he goes further, saying, "This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come." Then follows a picture of wickedness strikingly similar to that of the heathen in Romans 1: 28-32: Christian profession in its last phase is thus destined to be just heathenism with a religious gloss. This is exactly what we see around us today. No hope of improvement can be entertained, for what days can follow "the last"? Moreover, the Apostle says distinctly, "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (ver. 13).

The last stage of development is found in 2 Thessalonians 2, and there we learn that ere the Day of the Lord sets in there will come the apostasy, and the revelation of the Man of Sin. "A falling away" (ver. 3), is far too vague a rendering; "the apostasy" is what the Apostle wrote. The language is terribly precise, and its significance is solemn beyond expression. It means nothing less than the total abandonment of the very name of Christianity. Individual apostates there have ever been; we have yet to behold the absolute blotting out of all profession of the Christian faith.

Obviously this cannot be while true Christians remain upon the earth. The presence of the "salt" must needs preserve the mass from utter corruption. Hence the Apostle does not say the apostasy must take place before the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him. He will first come into the air, and remove His own; then, before "the Day" shines forth, the religious mass left behind will throw off even the Name of the Lord that bought them.

It may sound strange to some that such a condition of things could ever be. That Christian lands could again become pagan seems well-nigh inconceivable. Yet the observant eye can scarcely fail to see that everything is working rapidly in that direction even while true believers are present. In recent years the leaders of religious thought have deposed the Bible from its ancient place as the Book of God to the level of a mere religious work liable to criticism as any other; Christ has been degraded from His Godhead glory to the status of a preacher (and sadly lacking even as that); His miraculous birth and resurrection have been voted myths; and His precious Blood has but the value of that of a martyr. "A modified Christ!" they say, is what the times require.

"Liberal mindedness" is the cry heard all around us By this is meant easy toleration of every form of religious error, with a frown and a word of contempt for all who hold fast the truth. "Liberal mindedness" has no kindly expressions for the truth, nor for those who still love it. The Ritualist would speak more generously of Romanists and Greeks, with all their blasphemous superstitions, than of the Evangelicals of his own communion. The New Theologian would say better things even of the Spiritualist than of those in his own denomination who preach such a gospel as the late Mr. Spurgeon preached.

The results of this attitude towards the truth are now everywhere apparent. The fear of God has well nigh disappeared. Accordingly, the Lord's Day is flagrantly desecrated in every quarter and by all classes; heathen religions are applauded; pagan practices are being reintroduced; morals become more lax year by year, and the people are increasingly difficult to govern. Floods of lawlessness bid fair to sweep everything to ruin. The prospects for the end of the age are thus grave indeed, yet not more so than the Word of God foretold from the beginning.

The Anti-Christ.

The expectation of the Antichrist is, and ever has been, universal throughout Christendom, spite of much confusion of thought as to the quarter from whence he springs, and the true character of his unholy mission.

"The Antichrist" is a title only found in John's first epistle (1 John 2: 18-22). Other titles belonging to the same transgressor may be found scattered over the Book of God. Almost from the beginning of Christianity there have been antichrists, but this does not touch the fact of a personal Antichrist yet to come, with whom no others can be confounded. Thus John writes: "Little children, it is the last time (or hour); and as ye have heard that the Antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time" (1 John 2: 18). "Antichrist" means one who sets himself in opposition to Christ, and this manifestly where Christ should be exalted. This is sufficient to let us know where to look for antichrists in our own day—not in the atheistical lecture hall, but in the Christian university and pulpit.

In like manner, when the last great deceiver is manifested his connection will not be so much with paganism, as with Judaism, and apostate Christianity.

The old Protestant idea (held tenaciously still by many) was that the Bishop of Rome is the Antichrist. This will not bear the test of Scripture; for two reasons: (1) the Antichrist is an individual, not a succession of men, nor a religious system; (2) the Romish Harlot is rather the woman of sin than "the man of sin" (compare 2 Thess. 2: 3; Rev. 17: 1-6).

We will endeavour to classify some of the Scripture passages which deal with this subject, beginning with

1. The Antichrist's relation to Israel (or more properly, Judah). Where the Christ is looked for, there the Antichrist may be expected to present himself, and certainly unbelieving Israel is still looking for the promised Christ; not yet accepting the Lord Jesus as such. Daniel 11 is an important passage in this connection. It is part of a communication beginning in Daniel 10, given for the instruction of the prophet concerning the future of his nation. Verses 1, 2 speak of the closing days of Persian supremacy; verses 3, 4 show the Grecian conquests under Alexander, with the break up of his empire after his death; verses 5-35 describe the contentions of the kings of the North and South (Syria and Egypt) two of the principal divisions of Alexander's empire, Palestine being their usual battle-ground; then, at verse 36, a new party is abruptly introduced—a King in the land—with whom both the kings of the North and South make war. The description of this Jewish King is so absolutely identical with that of the Man of Sin in 2 Thessalonians 2: 3, 4, that it is clear both passages speak of the same person. "The King shall do according to his will, and he shall magnify himself above every god," etc. Here we have the man so opposite in every way to the lowly One who delighted to do the Father's will, of whom our Lord warned His hearers in John 5: 43: "I am come in My Father's Name, and ye receive Me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive."

The formation of a Jewish state (a likely event at an early date) will create the need for a ruler. This will be Satan's opportunity to introduce the Antichrist. He will be fair spoken at the beginning; his words will be smoother than butter and softer than oil, but war is in his heart (Ps. 55: 21). From the first, the godly in Judea will recognize the Dragon's voice (Rev. 13: 11). When he judges his position secure, he will suppress the Jewish religious ordinances (by that time restored, with the temple as their centre), and persecute to the death all who venture to acknowledge God. This "man of the earth" will murder the innocent, saying in his heart: "God hath forgotten; He hideth his face; He will never see it" (Ps. 10). This "worthless shepherd will eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their hoofs in pieces." See the Revised Version of Zech. 11: 10-17. Yet the ungodly Jewish mass will be highly pleased with their new leader at first. In Isaiah 57: 9 Jehovah says: "Thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase thyself even unto Hell." The king here is the Antichrist.

His power will be twofold; kingly authority and spiritual authority will be wielded by him. Hence he has "two horns" (Rev. 13: 11). Commencing as a "beast" (a political force), he will end as a "false prophet" (a religious deceiver). Compare Revelation 13: 11; 19: 20. Like the Popes of the Middle Ages, he will be at once a temporal sovereign with limited power, and a religious leader with practically unlimited power. His religious influence will extend far beyond the limits of his own immediate dominion. His association with the Roman power accounts for this.

2. We will now consider the Antichrist's relation to Christendom. This is shown in 2 Thessalonians 2 from this epistle we learn the future of those "who obey not

the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," people who have had the truth in their midst, but who believed it not. These will be swept along by the current of antichristian apostasy. Great miracles will be wrought in aid of the great deception. There is a pointed contrast between Acts 2: 22 and 2 Thessalonians 2: 9; the first passage having reference to our Lord's works, and the other to the operations of the Man of Sin. Amongst other marvels, he will be permitted to use the very miracle that Elijah employed on Mount Carmel to call Israel back to Jehovah. Compare Revelation 13: 13 with 1 Kings 18: 24. His doings are called "powers" for they are manifestly superhuman; "signs" for they have meaning and teaching; and "wonders" for they are calculated to attract attention and admiration. Strange that an evil age which is characterised by unbelief in miracles (even the miracles of our Lord being discredited) should close with a general and enthusiastic belief in them!

It is not a long-continued evil, such as Popery, that is indicated in 2 Thessalonians 2, but the climax of insult and wickedness, with which God deals very promptly. It is, indeed, the final conflict between God and Satan before the latter is banished to the abyss. "The mystery of lawlessness" was working even in the days of the apostles, but there was then and there is still, a restraining power hindering its full development until God's time comes to allow it. The restraining power is not mentioned, but it is obviously the presence of the Spirit of God in the Church. When the testimony of the Church is ended, the hindrances will disappear, and evil will rush madly to its predicted end.

3. The Antichrist's relation to the Beast the Roman power—is dealt with in the Book of the Revelation. He is the associate and lieutenant of Europe's last mighty potentate, and will share his special punishment (Rev. 19: 20). "He exerciseth all the authority of the first Beast in his presence" (Rev. 13: 12). Like Nebuchadnezzar, the last head of Gentile power will perceive the importance of unity in matters of religion (Dan. 3). A form of religion will be devised that will suit all, Jews and professing Christians alike. The desirability of a religion so comprehensive is frequently spoken of in our time. Satan will see to it that such a religion shall be provided. The worship of man will therefore be decreed. In this connection some have experienced difficulty in the understanding of Scripture teaching. In 2 Thessalonians 2 it is the Man of Sin who exalts himself and demands worship, and in Revelation 13 he causes men to worship the Beast, or his image. To some this seems contradictory. Yet there is no more contradiction here than in the fact that our blessed Lord, when on earth, accepted worship for Himself while earnestly testifying that He sought the glory of Another. There will be a trinity of evil in the last days. The Beast, the false prophet, and the Dragon will array themselves against Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hence John saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouths of the Dragon, Beast, and false prophet (Rev. 16: 13, 14).

The king of Daniel 11: 36 is most certainly the Antichrist, for he rules in Israel's land. Comparison with Revelation 13 makes it impossible to identify him with the Beast out of the sea (ver. 1), but rather with the Beast out of the earth (ver. 11). The former is the Roman power; the latter is the Antichrist.

We venture no speculation as to the mystic number 666. It is a sign divinely given for the guidance of understanding ones when the crisis arrives, and for them its meaning will be plain. The understanding or wise ones are elsewhere referred to in Daniel 11:33; 12:3-10; Matthew 13: 23; Matt. 24: 15. They are a class by themselves—God-fearing souls, who, like the sons of Issachar in David's time, have "understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron. 12: 32). While the demon-possessed mass, as foreshadowed by the swine in Luke 8: 33, plunge wildly into the vortex of evil, they, with minds enlightened by the Spirit of God, are enabled to form a sober judgement concerning all that is transpiring around them, and in result hold themselves entirely aloof from Satan's devices. The excitement and enthusiasm with which the new order of things will be welcomed by men generally (Rev. 13: 3, 4) will not appeal to them; they will have misgivings from the beginning. Witness-bearing and suffering will be their duty and portion until deliverance reaches them by the appearing of the Son of Man from Heaven.

The Great Tribulation.

Ever since sin entered, this world has been a difficult scene for men of faith. More or less of contumely and suffering have fallen to the lot of such in all dispensations. Hebrews 11 shows this clearly. The difficulties have been rendered more severe by the rejection of Christ. Those who cleave to Him in the face of the world's hatred and scorn must expect to be reproached, and to have their name east out as evil for His sake (Luke 6: 22). The Christian period is thus peculiarly characterised by tribulation and loss. Whereas the Israelite of old was entitled to expect earthly prosperity in proportion to his fidelity, the godly now are expressly told in Scripture to expect persecution (2 Tim. 3: 12). The Lord Jesus warned His disciples on the eve of His departure, "in the world ye shall have tribulation," adding, happily, for their encouragement, "but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16: 33). The Apostle also wrote to those newly converted from heathenism: "Verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation"; and in the preceding verse, "yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto" (1 Thess. 3: 3, 4) Everywhere he and his fellow-labourers exhorted the disciples to continue in the faith, giving them to understand "that through much tribulation we must enter into the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14: 22).

But as distinct from anything yet experienced, the Word of God speaks of a time of unparalleled tribulation at the end of the present age, immediately preceding the appearing of the Son of Man in power and glory. Many passages speak more or less directly of that period (Ps. 9, 10 being examples), but there are FIVE PASSAGES IN PARTICULAR which are so specific in their reference to it that it will be well to confine ourselves to them just now. Amongst these five, Revelation 7: 9 is the most precise in its terms, the literal rendering of the words employed being "the tribulation, the great one," as if God would allow of no misapprehension in our minds concerning the period referred to.

1. But if Revelation 7 is the most precise, Matthew 24 is the most luminous of the passages which directly deal with the subject of the great tribulation. In answer to three questions addressed to our Lord by His Jewish disciples, troubled by His warnings of His own departure, and the approaching destruction of the Temple, He described to them the circumstances in which the godly in Judea will find themselves at the end, [The differences between Matthew 24 and Luke 21 are exceedingly interesting Luke was guided by the Spirit to give more particularly our Lord's reply to the question (the first of the three) relating to the overthrow of the temple; Matthew gives His reply to the questions relating to the end of the age. "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies," is the key to Luke 21: "when ye shall see the abomination of desolation . . . stand in the holy place," is the key to Matthew 24. The one is past, the other is yet to come.] adding some instructions of the highest importance for those who will be called to pass through the last dread agony there. The setting up in the Temple of the abomination of desolation, as spoken of by Daniel the prophet, is to be the signal for instant flight for all who heed the words of the Lord. No thought of clothes or any other possessions is to detain them; they must speed to the mountains. That their experiences be not unnecessarily painful, He bids them pray that their flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day. The Saviour's account of that time is exceedingly grave: "then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (vv. 21, 22). In their agitation, the refugees must be on their guard against deceivers, for some will announce His Coming to this point or that. To all such voices they must pay no heed. When He really appears they will no more need to be told of the fact than when the lightning lights up the heavens. "Every eye shall see Him." His appearing will bring His suffering ones deliverance from all their foes.

But who are the sufferers referred to in Matthew 24? Jewish saints, clearly. The Church, with its Heavenly calling and expectations, was not before the minds of the disciples when they questioned the Lord as in Matthew 24: 3. They were inquiring from their then standpoint as Jewish saints who truly believed that Jesus was the predicted Messiah. Moreover, Jewish marks are indelibly stamped upon this part of the prophecy—"the holy Place," "Judea," "the Sabbath Day," etc. Let this important fact be noted. For the Christian, suffering is a privilege (Phil. 1: 29; Phil. 3: 10). And we are nowhere told to avoid it. The great tribulation, on the contrary, is a penal infliction upon the Jewish people for their apostasy, and the godly are expressly instructed to flee from its terrors.

2. Our next passage is Jeremiah 30: 4-9, and here comment is almost needless. The same period of suffering as in Matthew 24 is manifestly referred to, for the prophet exclaims: "Alas, for that day is great, so that none is like it." It is the time of unparalleled tribulation. But for whom? Let the passage itself reply: "These are the words that Jehovah spake concerning Israel, and concerning Judah." "It is even the time of Jacob's trouble." As in Matthew 24, so in Jeremiah 30 final deliverance follows. Jehovah will break the yoke of the

stranger from off Israel's neck, and the people shall serve Jehovah their God, and David their king.

3. We turn now to Daniel 12: 1, where again we read of unparalleled trouble, "such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time," followed (as in other passages) by the deliverance of God's people. But who are the people that are contemplated? "Thy people," says the angel, by which the prophet would understand his own loved nation. The context of this passage should be carefully noted. In Daniel 11: 36-45 we have described the doings of the last Jewish Sovereign (the Antichrist), and his implacable antagonists, the kings of the North and of the South. Chapter 12 opens with the words: "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people." The archangel's interest in the chosen nation will become active at that crisis. "And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time; and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." It is thus but a remnant that will be saved, but it is their final deliverance from all oppressors. We understand Daniel 12: 1 to refer to the two tribes then returned to their land, and under the sway of the lawless king, and the following verse to refer to the ten tribes who will at that epoch be brought out of their hiding places for divine sifting in view of Millennial blessing. With Daniel 12: 1 might be linked Revelation 12: 43, or 13-17, and Isaiah 26: 20, 21, as describing God's watchful care over His tried faithful ones in Judea during the last sore trial.

Jeremiah, Daniel, and our Lord thus correspond exactly in their statements—a time of tribulation such as men have never before experienced must fall upon Israel ere the long predicted triumph and blessing.

4. Revelation 7: 9-17 speaks of sufferers out of "all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues." Let the reader observe the place given to this vision in the Apocalyptic prophecy. As already shown, the saints of the Old Testament dispensations, and of the Church period are seen enthroned in Heaven under the symbol of four and twenty elders in chapter 4. Then the Lamb takes the Book, and, as seal after seal is broken, various judgements fall upon the earth. But before the last seal is opened, there is found a parenthesis of mercy. In chapter 7 God lets us see what He is doing in the way of grace while His judgements are abroad. Israelites to the number of 144,000 are sealed, and an innumerable multitude of Gentiles are shown, clothed in white robes, and with palms in their hands. These are not partakers of the present Heavenly calling for the following reasons.

1. They are a company apart from believing Israelites, a fact quite out of harmony with Ephesians 2: 14-17; Eph. 3: 6.
2. They are distinct from the enthroned elders; and
3. They are temple-worshippers, whereas the Heavenly Jerusalem possesses no temple (Rev. 21: 22).

4. "Before the throne" may be regarded as a moral, rather than a local, position. They would seem to represent the large result of the latter-day preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom by Jewish witnesses (Matt. 24: 14). This company may well be compared with the "sheep" of Matthew 25: 31-46. In neither passage is there a suggestion that any have died, though their sufferings may have been intense. It is certain from Revelation 7 that while the great tribulation will be at its fiercest in Judea, it will be felt in a greater or less degree to the ends of the earth.

5. One passage remains to be noticed—Revelation 3: 10. Here the Church is in view, beyond all just controversy. To the assembly in Philadelphia the Lord says: "Because thou hast kept the Word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Here we meet with a new expression—"the hour of temptation" (or trial). This includes "the great tribulation," but goes beyond it. It covers the whole period of Antichristian activity at the end. During the first part of his career, the deceiver will speak with words smoother than butter, being a persecutor for 1260 days only. But from the entire period the Church is to be kept; so runs the Word of the Lord. Not preserved through the trouble, like the pious remnant of Judah, but kept absolutely from it. Enoch's portion is as suggestive of that of the Church, as Noah's is of that of Israel.

Babylon and The Beast.

There seems an intentional contrast between Babylon the Great in Revelation 17: 1 and the Bride, the Lamb's wife, in Rev. 21: 9. The language introductory to the two descriptions is practically identical. In each case one of the seven angels which had the seven vials came and talked with John, saying: "Come hither, I will show thee," etc. From this we infer that the Spirit of God would have us keep the Bride in mind while thinking of the Harlot, the one being the antithesis of the other.

Though Babylon's fall is announced in Revelation 14: 8, her judgement actually takes place under the seventh vial, and is indicated in its prophetic order in Rev. 16: 19; but such is the gravity of the matter, that, before proceeding further with the prophecy, the Spirit describes at considerable length her wickedness, her latter-day triumphs, and her doom.

The angel carried John in spirit into a wilderness to see Babylon, the great Whore; to a great and high mountain to see the Bride. This is significant. The Whore finds her home in the world, and the world is as barren and unsatisfying as a desert, let men labour to improve it as they may; the Bride, on the contrary, belongs to another sphere altogether, and John must be lifted out of this scene in order to get a glimpse of her.

What John saw in the wilderness was a gaudily-dressed, richly-jewelled woman, riding upon a scarlet-coloured Beast, having seven heads and ten

horns. This Beast has already come before us as the revived Fourth Empire. The woman's name is emblazoned upon her forehead: "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth." Sitting upon the Beast declares plainly that she rules the Empire; the State is under her guidance. She is also said to "sit upon many waters." This shows that her influence is very far reaching, for the waters are "multitudes and nations, and tongues" (Rev. 17: 15).

If the Bride of Revelation 21 is the church (as we do not doubt), it follows that the Harlot is that which has assumed her place and standing in the earth. The mystery of Babylon and the Beast is thus Satan's caricature of the mastery of Christ and the Church. The one is called "great," the other "holy." Men admire greatness; God values holiness.

[The word "great" should be eliminated from Rev. 21: 10. The best MSS. Omit it.]

The Beast is the revived political system of Rome; the woman is Rome's religious system, with whatever else she may have gathered into herself ere the Apocalyptic vision becomes a reality. She has daughters—other professedly Christian bodies, scarcely less evil than their mother; and these would seem (in some cases at least) to continue distinct until the end. The harlot is Jezebel (Rev. 2: 20) in her full and final development, after every opportunity for repentance has passed away. She is "Babylon" at the finish, characterised by pride, independence of God Worldliness, idolatry, and bloodthirstiness. Well might John marvel that anything that had ever possessed even a vestige of Christianity should be so characterised. Yet this is what both God and man will behold just before the last dread stroke falls.

Rome, ever lustful of power and influence, and at all times fertile in schemes for the attainment of these objects is clearly destined to have one brief period of universal supremacy, and to dazzle men's eyes with her meretricious Splendour before her lurid glare is extinguished for ever. Just when she has arrived at the pinnacle of glory, and the goal of her hopes, she is overthrown utterly. The head of the Empire and his subordinate kings will tolerate her pretensions for a time, finding her useful for their own purposes. But she who has ruthlessly trampled upon men in the past—kings and people alike—must yet be trampled down herself. Retributive judgement, on the lines of the great governmental principle of Galatians 6: 7, is clearly predicted for the harlot in Revelation 18: 6; Rev. 19: 2.

Events are moving rapidly towards the fulfilment of this prophecy. The great war has made it manifest that Rome has a very real hold upon the minds of men, even in quarters where it might least be expected. Not only Great Britain, but Protestant Holland also, have sent embassies to the Vatican, in defiance of the customs of several centuries; and now it has been decided that Rome is to have a part in the League of Nations. Even those who have no real love for her are being made to feel that she is a factor in human affairs which cannot be ignored. Step by step she will get into the saddle once more, and control the destinies of Europe.

Her overthrow is thus described. "The ten horns which thou sawest, and the Beast (not "upon the Beast"), these shall hate the Whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire."

She will thus be stripped of all her wealth and glory, and reduced to utter ruin. The terrible happenings in France at the epoch of the great Revolution are solemnly suggestive of how this may be brought about.

But while the woman is identified with the city in Rev. 17: 18, it is not the city itself that is destroyed, for the Beast would scarcely destroy the ancient capital of his own dominion. That which is overthrown is the corrupt religious system which has for so long had its seat in the seven-hilled city on the banks of the Tiber. This the rulers of the restored Empire despoil and destroy.

Human hatred after all only brings about the fulfilment of the divine will, even though God has no place whatever in the thoughts of Babylon's tormentors, who are all utterly infidel. "God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will, and to agree and give their kingdom unto the Beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled."

In the course of a fresh vision in Revelation 18 ("after these things"), the divine side of the great catastrophe is emphasised. The Beast and his confederate kings are not mentioned. "The kings of the earth" who bewail her ruin (Rev. 18: 9) must be carefully distinguished from the ten sovereigns who accomplish her overthrow. They are the more distant rulers of the earth "who have committed fornication, and lived deliciously with her." Her glitter has attracted and ensnared them, but their geographical situations have preserved them from feeling the weight of her oppressive hand in the same degree as those nearer to the seat of her power.

The merchants of the earth weep and mourn over Babylon's fall. Her merchandise is catalogued in detail in Rev. 18: 12, 13. It begins with "gold" and ends with "bodies and souls of men."

The long-suffering of God and His silence in the presence of iniquity have frequently been a cause of perplexity to God's harassed people. But the divine judgements, however delayed, are sure. No form of evil will escape His hand, least of all that which cloaks itself with the Name of His beloved Son.

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

The Bride of the Lamb is now brought into view, that the Marriage Supper may be celebrated (Rev. 19). Both the judgement of the Whore, and the marriage supper take place before the public manifestation of the Lord Jesus the one on earth and the other in Heaven. The Whore is overthrown instrumentally by the Beast and his confederate kings; the Beast himself is dealt with directly by Christ at His appearing.

While many on earth Lament the overthrow of Babylon, all Heaven rejoices. The foulest blot that ever disgrace the earth is removed in her judgement, and the whole of Heavens occupants justify the divine sentence. "True and righteous are His judgements.... And again they said Alleluia." Moreover, the elders and the living creatures in the presence of these judgements, fall down and worship God who sits upon the throne.

Next, there comes a call from out of the throne to "Praise our God," and with voice as of a great multitude and as the rushing of many waters, and as of mighty thunderings, there bursts forth the response: "Alleluia for the Lord God omnipotent (or, the Lord our God, the Almighty) reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come and His wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19: 5-7) The removal of the false system, Babylon, is a great step towards the establishment of the Kingdom; but since the King is destined to have a bride (antitype of Eve) associated with Him in His glories, the marriage must take place ere the Kingdom really appears.

But who is the Bride? What company of believing people is represented by so happy a symbol? Here we must carefully distinguish between dispensations, if we would indeed understand. In Psalm 45 we see the king in His might, with the Queen standing by His side in gold of Ophir. To confound this with the picture in Revelation 19 is to confound earthly things with Heavenly. The viewpoint in the Psalms is necessarily the earth, and there Israel has the chief place in the ways of God; but Revelation 19 describes a scene in Heaven, and what place has Israel there? It would be incongruous to think of Israel as Bride in the Book of Revelation, seeing that in chapter 12 Israel is shown rather as the mother of our Lord. Moreover, the Bride of Revelation is the Lamb's wife. This title is suggestive of suffering. Not Israel, but the Church, has been His associate in rejection and suffering, and this during the entire period of her pathway. At the very close of Scripture we have the Spirit and the Bride crying with one voice, "Come." Who is this that is thus possessed of the Spirit before the Lord's return? Assuredly not Israel, but the Church.

It is interesting to note that we have four women shown to us in the Apocalypse; each representative of a corporate body, or system. First, we have Jezebel in Rev. 2: 20. This is Popery. Second, we have the sun-clothed woman of Rev. 12: 1. This is Israel. Third, we have Babylon the Great in Rev. 17. This is Popery at the end, with whatever else she may have incorporated with herself. Finally, we have "the Bride, the Lamb's wife," in Rev. 19: 7; Rev. 21: 9. This is the Church.

The twenty-four elders, who fill so interesting a part in the Apocalyptic visions, are mentioned for the last time in Rev. 19: 4. The reason, we believe, is this. The saints of both Old and New Testament dispensations down to the time of the Lord's Coming for His own are included in that symbol, and until the Marriage Supper takes place all these act together as sharers of a common priesthood; but when the moment comes for the marriage, these divide into two

distinct companies, for the Bride is the Church, and the Church began, not in Eden, but in Jerusalem in the day of Acts 2. As the Revised Version of Ephesians 3: 15 correctly teaches, there are various families in Heaven and on earth. There are blessings that are common to the people of God in all ages, and there are also blessings peculiar to this most favoured era. Election, faith, redemption, saintship, and heirship we share with all the objects of God's grace in every dispensation, but other blessings, as the relationships of body and bride to Christ are ours alone. Thus we must distinguish between saint of Old and New Testament dispensations as we contemplate the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. All are there but some as Bride, and some as guests.

Remark, it is the Marriage of the Lamb, not of the Bride whosoever she may be. God's object is Christ. It is "the day of His espousals, . . . the day of the gladness of His heart" (Cant. 3: 11). On the same principle, the grace of God to man is charmingly presented to us in Matthew 22: 2, as a marriage made by a king for his son. A wedding feast described without even a mention of the wife; is there anything like it elsewhere in literature? In this way God would show us that in providing good things for man, He is seeking, first of all, the joy and glory of His beloved Son.

But what have we in such a statement as this: "His wife hath made herself ready"? Is not all our meetness His alone? In one sense, yes. The best robe of divine righteousness is upon every saint. But there is another garment that will be conspicuous at the Marriage Supper it is called "the righteousnesses of the saints." This will be granted in divine government as the result of the manifestation at the Judgement Seat of Christ (Revelation is characterised, as a book, by divine government)

The Judgment Seat must be set up before the supper is spread. There every believer will read his life anew in the light of God. The deeds done in the body (2 Cor. 5: 10) will be appraised at their true worth by One with whom no mistake is possible. While bad and good will alike pass before Him, it will be His joy to commend and reward the good. Every deed wrought in the power of the Spirit, fruit of the life of God within, will be held in eternal remembrance. Every such deed is a stitch, as it were, in the garment of saintly righteousness which the Bride will wear on the marriage day, and which the Bridegroom will survey with the utmost delight, as the evidence of love manifested to His Name here below. The Kingdom is a reign of righteousness, and we take our place therein according to righteousness. All this is settled at the Judgement Seat. Following the Judgement Seat is the Marriage Supper, and then the public appearing of the King.

The Bride is arrayed in "fine linen, clean and bright." Her evil rival loves purple and scarlet (Rev. 17: 4). This world's glories appeal to the latter; righteousness and purity are the delight of the former. There are four figures of righteousness employed in the Scriptures: (1) Gold, expressive of intrinsic divine righteousness; (2) Brass, the judgement of righteousness as applied to man; (3)

Fine Linen, the righteousness of saints; (4) Filthy Rags, all human efforts apart from grace.

The marriage scene having been described, John was commanded: "Write, blessed are they which are called unto the Marriage Supper of the Lamb." Who are the called ones? Scarcely the saints who compose the Bride, and certainly not those of anti-Christian times, for they are not raised until the supper is past (Rev. 20: 4). We conclude, therefore, that the called ones are the saints of Old Testament days, all of whom will share the bliss of the coming Day in their own divinely appointed positions and relationships.

Overwhelmed by the glories thus presented to his gaze, John fell at the angel's feet to worship him, and was promptly rebuked for his fault. Even an apostle was liable to err. Flesh cannot be trusted even in the presence of glories. How merciful the provision of the thorn after Paul had been caught up to the third Heaven (2 Cor. 12).

Another supper is described in the same chapter in Revelation. In verse 17 we see an angel standing in the sun, and crying with a loud voice to all the fowls of Heaven to gather themselves together unto the great supper of God. The details, as given by the Seer, are terrible. The birds gorge themselves with the flesh of kings, captains, horses, and men of every degree. It is Armageddon, not the Armageddon of the newspapers, but the Armageddon of Holy Scripture. It is the most awful incident in the judgement of the quick, when earth's true Sovereign appears. Finding Himself opposed by the armed hosts of earth, He will destroy them by the word of His mouth.

Whatever men's dreams, war will not end until He end it summarily once for all (Ps. 46: 8, 9).

What bliss to have part in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, but what horror to be involved in the great supper of God !

The Re-Gathering of Israel.

Nearly nineteen centuries have passed since the Apostle asked the question, "Hath God cast away His people? meaning the twelve tribes of Israel (Rom. 11: 1). Christendom's answer to this question has been practically "Yes," for Christendom has long treated Israel with disdain and cruelty, as though they were a people (like Amalek of old for whom divine forgiveness could never be. But Christendom has blundered in this, as in many another matter of grave importance.

In answer to his inquiry, the Apostle directs attention to his own case. "I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." If God could find mercy in His heart for such a one as Paul, it may be regarded as the earnest of mercy for his guilty nation, for Paul was a specimen case, both in sin and in grace (1 Tim 1: 12-16). Moreover, he adds in Romans 11: 2: "God hath not

cast away His people which He foreknew." Mark the word "foreknew," for it covers everything. It explains all God's dealings with Israel from first to last. Seeing that He "foreknew" His people, He was fully aware, when He pledged Himself to Abraham, how ungrateful and evil his seed would be, yet He gave the father of the faithful both His word and His oath (Heb. 6: 13; Gal. 3: 15-18). His purposes therefore stand postponed undoubtedly, but not abandoned. Israel must yet possess every inch of the territory promised to Abraham and must yet enjoy every predicted blessing in the land and that for evermore. The divine character makes this absolutely sure.

When God in His Word speaks of judgement upon Israel He invariably limits it with an "until." Thus in Romans 11: 25 we are told that "blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." In Luke 21: 24 we read: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." "The fullness of the Gentiles" means the present Christian company; "the times of the Gentiles" means the period of Gentile supremacy, which commenced with Nebuchadnezzar some six centuries before Christ. When the Christian company is completed, and removed to Heavenly glory, and when the appointed period of Gentile supremacy is ended, God will turn His attention once more to the whole house of Israel.

We repeat, "the whole house of Israel," for so runs the Word of Jehovah. See Ezekiel 39: 25, as one of many passages that could be quoted in this connection. Ten of Israel's tribes are lost to us (the assertions of certain cranks notwithstanding); we are familiar with representatives of two tribes only. "The Jews," we call them. But all Israel's tribes are known to God, and "He that scattered Israel will gather him" (Jer. 31: 10). "Though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee" (Jer. 30: 11).

The world's blessing awaits Israel's restoration to God and to Canaan. Not to the Church, but to Abraham, Jehovah said: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22: 18). Peter told the people in Acts 3 that Jesus would remain in the Heavens until their repentance and conversion. When Israel turns to God, times of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord, and the restitution of all things will take place. In Psalm 67: 1, 2 Israel in faith prays: "God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us (Selah); that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy salvation among all nations." Israel and Jerusalem form the pivot upon which everything turns for the nations and for creation. Neither London, Berlin, nor Rome is, nor ever can be, God's centre of administration and blessing. How little do the proud ones of earth understand this! Truly God's thoughts are not men's thoughts, neither are His ways men's ways (Isa. 56: 8).

The resuscitation of Israel as a nation, when it comes about, will be one of the most remarkable events in the history of our planet. It will be a divine work. Only God can make the dry bones live (Ezek. 37). Man will try his hand at it before God's time is fully come. Isaiah 18 suggests an effort on the part of a

maritime power to re-establish the people so long "scattered and peeled." Such a movement is being discussed at the present hour. The Turkish Empire having been overthrown, the future status of Palestine has become practical politics. Such is the fascination which that land has for the "Christian" powers, and such is its geographical situation, that it would be well-nigh impossible to allot it to any existing State without serious trouble ensuing. Accordingly, the suggestion has already been made to give it back to the Jews. This is a very likely thing to happen, but such an event will be no fulfilment of the Scriptures we have been considering. It is a partial restoration only, and a restoration for trouble.

The re-establishment of a Jewish State will furnish the Antichrist with his opportunity, with all the horrors that that means for the unhappy people. God's time will come when the Son of Man appears in glory. Then the great trumpet will be blown, and all Israel will be gathered, never again to fall a prey to their neighbours (Isa. 27: 13). Jerusalem will become the metropolis of the earth; the throne of Jehovah will once more be set up there; the Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh; and righteousness and peace will be established.

Israel's enemies will be numerous at the time of the end, for Satan ever delights to stir up hostility against those who are loved of God. The enemy in the land (the crafty Antichrist) will be set upon by both the kings of the North and South, the Jewish people suffering terribly in the fray, as though ground between the upper and nether millstones. The king of the North is the latter-day representative of the potentates who once ruled from the Aegean to the Indus (Dan. 11); the king of the South is the ruler of Egypt. The king of the North, in whom will be fulfilled the many unaccomplished prophecies concerning "the Assyrian," will be no mean foe. His prowess is described in Daniel 11:40-45; and the experiences of the Jewish people

under his iron heel are given in Psalm 79); Zechariah 14: 1, 2. His allies are named in Psalm 83 and Daniel 8: 24 shows that he will be backed by a power mightier still than his own.

That power is Russia—Israel's last and most deadly enemy. Two whole chapters in Ezekiel (Ezek. 38, Ezek. 39) are devoted to the last disastrous enterprise of the Czar of that day. It is remarkable that so detailed a description should have been given by the Spirit of God more than twenty-five centuries in advance. There was no Russian Empire when Ezekiel penned those chapters. China, India, and Egypt were already hoary. The very foundations of the Russian Empire were not laid until about fifteen hundred years after Ezekiel's day. The alliances with which we were familiar during the Great War have already been annulled as far as Russia is concerned. France and England will at the end form part of the revived Roman Power, the policy of which will be utterly at variance with that of Russia. The cupidity of the Northern Empire will be aroused by the wealth of restored Israel, and the absence of fortifications in their land will suggest an easy victory (Ezek. 38: 10-12). But Jehovah will speak in His jealousy, and in the fire of His wrath; He will put hooks into the jaws of Gog, turning him back with utter destruction. The burying of the bones will

occupy the house of Israel seven months, and the munitions of war left upon that frightful battlefield will supply Israel with firewood for seven years (Ezek. 39: 8-16).

The closing words of Moses' wilderness song (Deut. 32: 43) describe the situation at the end when the judgements of God have done their work.

"Rejoice, O ye nations, with His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to His adversaries, and will make expiation for His land and for His people" (R.V.). Israel's wrongs avenged, the people and their land reconciled to God in virtue of Christ's atonement and all the nations of the earth sharers of Israel's joy— such are the gracious purposes of God when fighting days are done.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

The goal of Christian desire, according to 1 Corinthian 1: 7 and 1 Peter 1: 7, is "the revelation of Jesus Christ. In the one passage the Authorised Version reads "coming and in the other "appearing"; in both, "revelation" the proper term. The reference is to the great and notable day when God will bring again His First-Begotten into the world, not in lowly grace, as long ago, but in majesty and glory. That day will be momentous in its issues. No day (that of the Cross alone excepted) could be more far-reaching in its results. It will be 1. The solemn winding up of Man's Day, and the ushering in of the Day of the Lord. "Man's Day" (1 Cor. 4: 3, margin) is that long period of human pride and self will which commenced with the intrusion of sin into the world, and which will be ended by divine judgement at the revelation of Jesus Christ. During Man's Day God is naught, and man is all. The Day of the Lord will reverse the conditions. Isaiah 2: 10-22 is the first passage of Scripture that specifically mentions that Day; and graphically describes the complete overthrow of all that of which man has boasted himself, that Jehovah alone may be exalted. Terror will fill men's minds when this takes place. Twice it is stated that Jehovah will arise to "shake terribly the earth." All human schemes and accomplishments will tumble to pieces, to be patched up no more. The cataclysm of 1914-1918, appalling though it was, is, nothing compared with the utter collapse of everything of man's at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Happy are they who have received a Kingdom which cannot be shaken (Heb. 12: 28).

2. God's public vindication of the Man Christ Jesus. Let Satan and men attempt what they may, the once crucified One must reign, and every created being must render homage to His Name and title. Long ago, by the pen of Isaiah, Jehovah drew attention to Him as His Servant whom He upholds, and His elect in whom His soul delights, and concerning Him He has declared: "He shall not fail, nor be discouraged till He have set judgement in the earth, and the isles shall wait for His law" (Isa 42: 1-4). This passage is quoted in Matthew 12: 17-21 in proof of God's pleasure in Him when Man on earth, the Day will come when He will fulfil every sentence of it, and the despised One will reign.

It is becoming in the Christian to "love His appearing" (2 Tim. 4: 8), and that not because of the relief and reward it will bring to us (and it will bring us both "rest"— 2 Thess. 1: 7—and "the crown of righteousness"), but because of what that Day will mean for Christ. We love that Day in advance; we delight to think of the vindication and glory it will yield to the Lord Jesus.

3. The first step towards the final overthrow of Satan. The great adversary will lose for ever his footing in the Heavens as the result of the war with Michael and his angels (Rev. 12: 7, 8), but he will still have liberty to pursue his evil designs, although his activity will be limited to the earth. But the revelation of Jesus Christ will put an end even to this. The angel of Revelation 20: 1, with key and chain in hand, will apprehend him and cast him into the abyss, sealing up that place of horror for a thousand years.

During the lengthy period of the Kingdom of the Son of Man, men will not be exposed to the craft of the deceiver. But the abyss is not his place of final punishment. The Kingdom being a dispensation—a term of responsibility for man—Satan is released for a little season at its close. A revolt ensues in the outlying parts of the Saviour's dominion after which the adversary is apprehended a second time and forthwith consigned to the Lake of Fire, where he, with the Beast and the false prophet, will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Even infernal beings must confess Jesus as Lord (Phil. 2: 10, 11). He is their Judge as well as the Judge of men, as the demons acknowledged with such manifest terror in the days of His flesh (Matt. 8: 29). It is His business to put out of the way all —men and spirits alike—who dare to challenge the supremacy of God.

4. The revelation of Jesus Christ will be the solution of every problem, and the settlement of every question.

Problems and difficulties of every kind, social and political, are increasing rapidly as the age grows old. The world's leaders are sorely perplexed. Already we see something of the condition of mind described by the Lord Jesus in Luke 21: 25, 26, though the fulfilment of the passage is not yet. It looks forward to an even graver crisis than the present. "Upon the earth, distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." Man's sin and folly have created the confusion, but man is not capable of dissipating it. No difficulty is ever really settled. Politicians and others succeed from time to time in putting a patch on here and a patch on there. A reasonable appearance is thus put upon things for the time being, only to be followed by outbreaks more serious and widespread. There is only One man in the universe really competent to straighten out human affairs. In symbolic vision He is shown to us in Revelation 5:6 as a Lamb "having seven horns and seven eyes." This means perfection of power and wisdom. It sometimes happens now that a man has power without wisdom, and sometimes wisdom without power. The first is disastrous to the people, and the second is useless to meet the need. Solomon, with his phenomenal wisdom was just the shadow beforehand of the Lord Jesus. When

He arises in His might, and shows himself in His glory, He will take earth's sceptre into His own capable hands, "and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain" (Isa. 40:4). God will "lay help upon One that is mighty" (Ps. 89: 19). His hand will be upon the Man of His right hand, upon the Son of Man whom He has made strong for Himself (Ps. 80: 15). "With righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth" (Isa. 11: 4).

Knowing where men's true hope lies it is impossible for the spiritually instructed believer to give the smallest countenance to creature schemes and aspirations. Instead, he waits in patience for God to bring out the Man of His purpose. The Christian waits for "the revelation of Jesus Christ," suffering meanwhile with all others.

The Restitution of All Things.

This is that Golden Era of which prophets have written glowingly, and psalmists have sung rapturously from the beginning of their testimony. It is that wonderful time when divine rights will everywhere be respected here below; when the long-rejected Jesus will be enthroned in His appointed Kingdom; and when man's evil career will receive an abrupt check. Then Satan's power will be set aside; his wretched work will be in large measure undone and creation's wounds will be healed. "The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;" "instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree;" "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together;" yea, "all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Isa. 35: 1; Isa. 55: 13; Isa. 40: 5; Isa. 52: 10). Blessed era! How remote if we were to judge by appearances, but how near when we hold the prophetic lamp aloft in faith!

Let us read together Acts 3: 19-21 (in a corrected translation): "Repent therefore and be converted, for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and He may send Jesus Christ, who was fore-ordained for you, whom Heaven indeed must receive till the times of the restoring of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began" (J.N.D.). Peter was the speaker. He was addressing the Jewish people on the occasion of the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. He made a definite proposal to his audience—by divine authority, of course. If they would repent of their many sins, and especially of their murderous rejection of Jesus, times of refreshing should come to them from the presence of Jehovah. He would even send back the very One whom they had driven away, and the times of the restitution of all things should set in. Bible readers in Israel had long looked for such a consummation. In Matthew 17: 11, the Lord confirmed the disciples in their expectation that Elijah "shall first come and restore all things." In keeping with this hope, they asked Him after His resurrection: "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1: 6). Now Peter, with light from Heaven in his own soul such as even he never possessed before, lays before the people the conditions upon

which the longed-for restoration could take place. Their thoughts might be limited to Israel; God's thoughts take in the whole creation.

The restoration of all things is contingent upon two other events: the repentance of Israel, and the return of Jesus. He will not return until Israel is prepared to welcome Him; and until His return no universal restoration is possible. A Millennium without the Lord Jesus, whatever the aims and desires of men, can never be.

The restoration of all things has limitations. Peter's words show this: "of which God has spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began." Some have pressed the Apostle's words to make them include even the unpardoned dead. The restoration does not go beyond what "God has spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets," and certainly no prophet bids us look for the restoration to divine favour of men who have died in their sins. The prophets' standpoint was the earth, and in heart-stirring language they describe the removal by divine power of all the scars that sin has caused in order that God may once more have pleasure in the works of His hands, and that men may enjoy His mercy. The healing of the lame man was an example, strikingly illustrating Isaiah 35: 5, 6.

In that era Israel will be restored. All the twelve tribes will enjoy the blessing of God throughout the whole extent of the magnificent possession promised to the fathers. (In the past they have occupied only a small part of their destined inheritance.) The temple will be restored to them, with Jehovah's presence filling it continually (Ps. 68: 29; Ezek. 43: 4, 5). None of them will need to exhort his neighbour to "know the Lord," for all will know Him from the least to the greatest of them (Jer. 31: 34).

The Nations will also be blessed (Ps. 22: 27, 28; 72: 17). No longer characterised by pride and independence of God, no longer filled with envy and hatred towards each other, they will dwell peacefully under the sway of the King of kings and Lord of lords. In accordance with the divine purpose, they will acknowledge the special place of favour and supremacy given to Israel, and will render respectful homage. They will seek Jacob's face, as Psalm 24: 6 tells us, because God is in Jacob's land. From year to year the ambassadors of all nations will attend at Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles (Zech. 14: 16).

Creation at large will be restored. No longer will the strong prey upon the weak. Even the wolf will dwell with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the lion will eat straw like the ox (Isa. 11: 6, 7). The Son of Man's beneficent rule will extend to "the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas" (Ps. 8: 7, 8). The manifestation of the sons of God will be the signal for the complete deliverance of all from the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8: 19-21).

But whatever the blessedness of that era, absolute perfection will not then be realized, and thus finality will not be reached. The Millennial Age (the last of the

dispensations of God) is the vestibule to the everlasting Kingdom, the eternal state, the new Heavens and the new earth. Therein perfection will indeed be found. The Son of Man having subdued every antagonist, and silenced every rebellious tongue, God will be "all in all" (1 Cor. 16: 28).