HAS THE SECOND ADVENT ALREADY TAKEN PLACE,

OR MUST WE LOOK FOR ANOTHER?

BY THE

REV. P. S. DESPREZ, B.D.,

AUTHOR OF

"The Apocalypse fulfilled in the Consummation of the Mosaic Economy, and the coming of the Son of Man." "Babylon the Great, neither Rome Pagan nor Papal, but Jerusalem."

"If men teach one thing, and God himself teach another then He, and not they, is to be obeyed." — Richard Hooker.

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It need scarcely be said that various periods have been fixed for the second coming of the Lord which have been found to be untrue. Mede laid down two epochs for this event in his own lifetime. Subsequent prophetical writers have fixed the dates of 1716, 1793, 1814, 1825, 1843, 1847, 1849, 1852. The falsification of these periods has not deterred modern prophets from attempting to fix another, and 1864 is now pronounced to be the season of the Lord's appearing. This will suffice to show that while the subject possesses a high degree of interest, many idle and distressing calculations have been made respecting it, and the question naturally arises—since so many good men have been so often and so grossly deceived—may they not have been looking for an event which has already received its accomplishment? Scripture, be it remembered, speaks only of two advents; the first, in the flesh, as man; the second, in the glory of the Father, as the Son of God. No such idea is mooted in the Sacred Volume as that of a third coming. It is said, indeed, "He shall appear the second time" (Heb. ix. 28); but it is nowhere said, He shall appear the third time. Let us try to get at the mind of Christ and his apostles on this important point; for it seems unreasonable to suppose that He could have left the chronological character of His advent an open question, or that the inspired preachers of His gospel could have uttered on a subject of such moment an uncertain sound. To do this effectually, we must not look through the hermeneutical glasses of other people, nor suffer our own vision to be obscured by the mists of prejudice and preconceived opinions. Could we realise the impartial position of some person in whose hands the New Testament had been placed for the first time, it would greatly assist the fairness of our inquiry; as this, however, cannot be done, and we must come to the consideration of the subject biased by early prepossessions, it will be well to bear in mind that truth has nothing to fear from discussion, and that respect is always due to sincere convictions, even when they may happen to differ from our own.
The question before us is,

HAS THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST ALREADY TAKEN PLACE, OR MUST WE LOOK FOR ANOTHER?

This, for the sake of perspicuity, we shall arrange under the following heads.

1. Texts which define with precision the time of the coming.
2. Texts which declare the particular object of the coming.
3. Texts which speak generally of the speediness of the coming.

1. TEXTS WHICH DEFINE WITH PRECISION THE TIME OF THE COMING.

1. The great prophecy of our Lord respecting his second advent (of which all other mention in the New Testament is simply a reiteration), is found in Matt. xxiv. and xxv., Mark xiii., Luke xxi. Four of his disciples ask him a question respecting the time when he would come to destroy the temple, the ruin of which he had just foretold, and to close the aeon or age. That the question proposed to him did not relate to events separated by great intervals, but to one specific event, is evident from the fact that it is put to our Lord three times, each time in a different form, as recorded by the three Evangelists, and by Mark and Luke, in a shape in which it is impossible for any ingenuity of man to make three separate questions of it, the answer given in each case being substantially the same. To a straightforward question he gave a straightforward answer. He said, indeed, that the precise day and hour when "these things" should be was not known to the angels nor to himself, but that "all these things" should be fulfilled before that generation had passed away.

"Tell us WHEN shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world" (consummation of the age).* Did our Lord determine that when?

"When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation—stand in the holy place,—then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains;—and woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days,—for then shall be

* "The context here makes it quite impossible that the end of the world generally can be meant, unless we suppose it was to end with that generation, which is absurd."—Professor Lee. A similar expression is employed (Heb. ix. 26), "Now once, in the end of the world (ages) hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself;" if the end of the world generally is meant, Christ will not suffer for sinners until the so-called consummation of all things. So Matt. xiii. 38, 39, "The field is the world" (cosmos); "The harvest is the end of the age" (eon); where the age is put in opposition to the world, showing that the world generally could not be meant. So 1 Cor. x. 11, "They are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world (ages) are come."
great tribulation;—and except those days should be shortened there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect’s sake, those days shall be shortened.—Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened—and then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Matt. xxiv. 3—30.

The coming, according to St. Matthew, was to take place “immediately after the tribulation of those days.”

Mark xiii. 4-26. “Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?” “When ye shall see the abomination of desolation—standing where it ought not,—then let them which be in Judea flee to the mountains;—but woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days—for in those days shall be affliction—and except that the Lord had shortened those days no flesh should be saved—but in those days after that tribulation the sun shall be darkened—and then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.”

There is no possibility of evading the statement of St. Mark, that they were to see the Son of Man coming “in those days after that tribulation.”

Luke xxi. 7-27. “Master, but when shall these things be, and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?” “When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies,—then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains—for these be the days of vengeance—but woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days—and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled; and there shall be signs in the sun—and then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

No honest mind can escape from the conclusion that the days of vengeance, when Jerusalem was trodden down of the Gentiles, were the days of the coming of the Son of Man. Our Lord confirmed these statements in a manner which leaves no room for doubt. In each of the three Gospels he appealed to common sense from the common course of nature, by the parable of the fig-tree, and wound up the most minute and circumstantial prophecy in the whole Word of God, with the clenching words, “Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled.” Matt. xxiv. 34.

“Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass till all these things be done.” Mark xiii. 30.

“Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled.” Luke xxi. 32.
How shall we avoid the force of all these “whens” and “thens”?
Should a fisherman say to his son, take a boat and go out to sea, but when you see a cloud rising in the west turn the boat's head homewards, for a storm is brewing; could it be thought he was giving directions not for a present but for a far distant emergency? Apply the same common-sense principle to this prophecy. Remember what “ALL THESE THINGS” include. “Nation rising against nation,” fulfilled in the commotions in Syria, Alexandria, Scythopolis, and elsewhere, in which 150,000 Jews perished. “Famines” mentioned in Josephus and the Acts. “Earthquakes” at Rome, Apamea, Laodicea, three cities of Asia, and in other places; the persecution of the disciples, the Gospel preached as a witness, “which,” says St. Paul, “was preached to every creature which is under heaven.” (Col. i. 23.) Jerusalem compassed with armies—signs in the sun, moon, and stars—the coming of the Son of Man—the sending forth of the angels and the gathering of the elect; and if you can, and if you dare, postpone to some distant period what the Lord said should be seen by the men of that generation,* and put off the coming which he said should then take place to some indefinite season, treasured up in the fancy chambers of your own imagination.

2. We refer you next to the passages immediately preceding the transfiguration recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as additional proof that the Lord said he would come within the lifetime of those who heard his words. That these do not relate to the glory of the transfiguration, is evident from the circumstance that in all three Gospels allusion is made to the coming in the glory of his Father, “with the holy angels;” and St. Matthew adds, “to reward every man according to his works;” which he certainly did not do at his transfiguration.

“For the Son of Man shall come (shall soon come) in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works; verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” Matt. xvi. 27, 28. (Compare Luke xxi. 31; 2 Tim. iv. 1.)

“Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels; and he said unto them, verily I say

* We are aware of the gloss given by Mede and others to these plain words, viz., “The nation of the Jews shall not perish till all these things be fulfilled.” This, however, does not much help the argument, as the Jews have had no distinct nationality since the time. “The Romans took away their place and nation,” But even if it were possible to avoid the force of the demonstrative pronoun, “this generation,” elsewhere called “this wicked generation,” the force of the words “in those days” remains untouched.
unto you, that there be some of them that stand here which shall not taste of death till they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power." (Mark viii. 38; ix. 1.)

"Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels; but I tell you of a truth there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Kingdom of God." (Luke ix. 26, 27.)

Can it be thought that the solemn asseveration "Verily I say unto you, I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till," &c., could possibly have been employed in reference to an event which occurred some six or eight days after. Nay, does not the negation, "there be some standing here which shall not taste of death" imply that others should "taste of death" before the event referred to had taken place. Two of those who stood there, we know, did "taste of death" before they saw the "Son of Man coming in his kingdom." James the brother of John was slain with the sword before the Church had welcomed back her absent Head. Peter, according to our Lord's prediction, was made to "stretch forth his hands," possibly upon a cross; "whilst another girded him and carried him whither he would not." It was not so, however, with another of those who stood there. After our Lord had shown Peter, "by what death he should glorify God," "Peter seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following, and saith unto Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?" Jesus saith unto him, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee." This is the disciple who saw "heaven opened" and "one like unto the Son of Man, reaping the harvest of the earth" (land Judea.) This is the disciple who wrote, "Surely I come quickly, Amen," and who tarried to add his hearty response, "Even so, come Lord Jesus."

3. The next proof to which your attention is invited is the answer given by our Lord to the solemn question put to him by the high priest immediately before his execution; and this comes to us with all the greater force, inasmuch as it bears the character of the dying testimony of the Lord Jesus.

The question as given by the three Evangelists is as follows:—

"I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ the Son of God." (Matt. xxvi. 63.)

"Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, art thou the Christ the Son of the Blessed." (Mark xiv. 61.)

"Art thou the Christ, tell us!" (Luke xxii. 67.)

What reply did our Lord make to these questions?

"Jesus saith unto him, thou hast said; nevertheless, I say unto you, hereafter (from just now) shall ye see the Son of Man
sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” (Matt. xxvi. 64.)

“And Jesus said, I am, and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” (Mark xiv. 62.)

“Hereafter (from the now) shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God.” (Luke xxi. 69.)

Observe it well, that in answer to the most solemn question which the Jews ever put to our Lord—a question touching his Messiahship—He publicly gave out as the proof of that Messiahship that, according to St. Matthew, “from just now” (words never used except of events soon to take place) or according to St. Luke, “from the now” (words only found in five other places of the New Testament, and always employed of things immediately about to happen) they of that day and generation should “see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” This immediate advent the apostles taught, and their adversaries the Jews denied. The one affirming “The Lord is at hand,” “The end of all things is at hand,”—The other gainsaying and blasphemying, “Where is the promise of his coming?” “All things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” One event only could decide the question, and if that event has not transpired, neither Jew nor Gentile have sufficient evidence that Jesus is the Christ.

4. Another decided passage determining the precise period of the advent is found Matt. x.23, “But when they persecute you (my disciples) in this city, flee ye to another, for verily I say unto you, ye (my disciples) shall not have gone over (accomplished) the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come.” Should it be said that our Lord meant ministers generally, and not his disciples in particular, how are we to get over the statement of Matt. xi.1, “When Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples?” Should it be said that the cities of Israel are not yet gone over, we answer, for nearly two thousand years there have been no cities of Israel to go over; added to which, it is certain that the cities of Israel then existing are the cities meant, for it is said, verses 5 and 6, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles—but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” It is out of the power of logic to controvert, or sophistry to evade, this decided testimony to the precise period of the advent. Indeed, we cannot conceive of any reply being made to it, unless it should be asserted that there is a third coming, of which the Scriptures do not say one word.

5. It is confirmatory of the preceding positions that our Lord should have said of St. John, “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” (John xxi. 22.) A miserable equivocation
has insinuated that Christ did not positively say that John should be alive upon earth when he came, (as if our Lord could have intended to create a false impression,) but he only expressed the possibility of such an event; but when it is remembered that the conversation turned on the future prospects of John and Peter, and that our Lord having foretold Peter's death, is asked by that disciple respecting the hereafter of St. John—"Lord, and what shall this man do?"—It can hardly be doubted that the idea intended to be conveyed was, that John should not die before the coming, like Peter, but should be alive upon earth when he came. It does not follow because the disciples were under the impression that John should not die at all, that our Lord's expression was capable of such a meaning; on the contrary, St. John appears anxious to correct this erroneous interpretation: "yet Jesus said not unto him, he shall not die; but if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John xxi.23.) If the advent has not taken place, one of the disciples must be now living upon earth to witness it, and the fable of the Wandering Jew has to be realised in the person of St. John.

Put these texts together so conclusive with regard to the time of the advent. Admit, for argument's sake, that the phrase "this generation" means, in this solitary instance, the present existence of the Jewish people, how is the statement to be got over that he would come "immediately after the tribulation of those days?" Let it be granted that the word "immediately" means something indefinitely future, the difficulty meets us in the face that St. Mark, by omitting the word "immediately," and declaring that He would come "in those days after that tribulation" (the days and the tribulation before referred to), precludes all possibility of any interval. Let the expression "those days" three times previously mentioned by Matthew and Mark, be twisted to refer not to the evil days upon Judea and Jerusalem, but to days still future, still the force of the saying, "Ye (my disciples) shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come" remains untouched. Give our adversaries the benefit of the doubt, "If I will that he tarry till I come," what can they do with the words, "There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom?" Christian reader, is truth paramount with you, and are you prepared to embrace it in spite of creeds and councils, and, what is stronger still, long cherished opinions? Then go, sift this question to the bottom, and we do not fear for the result. Whatever difficulty exists with regard to the manner of the coming, no such difficulties exist with regard to the time, and it is more logical as well as more deferential to Holy Scripture to infer the fulfilment from
the time which is mentioned, than the time from a supposed non-fulfilment.

I pass on to consider,

2. TEXTS WHICH DECLARE THE PARTICULAR OBJECT OF THE COMING.

It will be seen from these that the coming is connected with the destruction of a particular people, and that these events are inseparably united. And before we examine them it may be well to say that the destruction of Jerusalem ought not to be regarded in the light of the destruction of an ordinary city. It is not correct to affirm that this view of the coming merely represents a Roman general leading an army into Judea to destroy the principal city, and that but for the chronology Carthage would answer quite as well. "The desolation of that time exceeded," says Josephus, "all the destructions which either God or man ever brought upon the world." It was the overthrow not of a dynasty, but of a dispensation, not of a nation, but of a religion; a religion given by Jehovah himself, and which for 2,000 years was the only religion in the world. The temple then laid in ruins was the dwelling place of the great God; and the abolition of legal sacrifice which then took place, when "the daily sacrifice failed for want of men to offer it," was pregnant with vital consequences to the whole human family.* In a word, the downfall

* It is a commonly received opinion that the Mosaic dispensation closed with the death of Christ; this, however, is unsupported by any scriptural authority. He who established the law could alone repeal it, and it is clear that, if repealed, there must be something to witness to the fact. Our Lord during his sojourn on earth did not repeal it—He came not "to destroy but to fulfil;" nay, he asserted that "till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled." (Matt. v. 18.) The Apostles did not set it aside: the Jewish priests and people are never told that the law was abrogated; even the Jewish converts received no such instructions: the Gentiles, it is true, were admitted to the privileges of Jewish converts, independently of the law of Moses, but the law was as binding on the Jew as ever. We have proof of a positive kind that the Jewish law was in force during the apostolic age. e. g. "They who receive the office of the priesthood have a commandment to take tithes." (Heb. vii. 5.) "There are priests that offer gifts according to the law." (Heb. viii. 4.) The Apostles sedulously adhered to the Jewish ritual. Thus, "Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer." (Acts iii. 1.) Thus, Paul "bade them farewell saying I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem;" "for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem, the day of Pentecost." (Acts xviii. 21, xx. 16.) Thus James, "My sentence is that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles are turned unto God," (Acts xv. 19,) clearly implying that the law was still binding on the Jews, for otherwise there could have been no question respecting the Gentiles. In Acts xxii. James and the elders at Jerusalem admonish Paul to make a public demonstration of his conformity to the Mosaic ritual, with a view of removing the suspicion that he preached its abrogation—"Thou seest brother how many thousands (myriads) of Jews there
of Judaism by the destruction of its temple, city, priests, sacrifice, and nation, was the culminating proof of the triumph of Christianity, and the smoking embers of the holy house, then “left unto them desolate,” the unanswerable evidence that the conqueror had come, of whom it should be said, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

Let us trace this connection first in the parable of the wicked husbandmen.

“When the Lord therefore of the vineyard cometh what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen.” (Matt. xxi. 40, 41.)

“He will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others.” (Mark xii. 9.)

“He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others.” (Luke xx. 16.)

A coming must be conceded here; and if not the second coming, what other coming is it? Should it be objected that a verb of motion is sometimes employed to denote an act rather than a coming in person, so much the better for our argument. Mark it well, then, that the coming is connected with the time of judgments upon the Jewish house, for not only is the vineyard to be taken from them and given unto others (the Gentiles), but at the close of each of the parables it is added, “They perceived that he had spoken the parable against them.”

are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law, and they are informed of thee that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses . . . . do therefore this . . . . that all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly and keepest the law.” Of this same James, the brother of our Lord, it is said by Eusebius that his knees were as hard as those of camels, from interceding in the temple for the Jewish people. Added to this St. Paul speaks of the old covenant as decaying and waxing old, and “ready to vanish away,” (Heb. viii. 13,) making it evident that it was not then abolished. In the following chapter, it is said that the whole system of Jewish ceremonies was imposed on them “until the time of reformation,” (Heb. ix. 10,) consequently “the time of reformation” had not then arrived. But when did it arrive? This we learn at the close of chapter xii. “Now he hath promised (not then fulfilled) saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only (as at the giving of the law) but also heaven, and this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken (the temporary ordinances of Moses) as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken, (the enduring and irremovable kingdom of Christ,) may remain.” (Heb. xii. 26-29.)

Now that dispensation, the abrogation of which is expressed by the shaking of heaven and earth,—terms in common use among the prophets, signifying the subversion of a state or kingdom, (Isaiah xiii. 13, li. 16, lxv. 17; Matt. v. 18, xxiv. 35; 2 Peter iii. 13; Rev. xxi. 1,) and which in St. Paul’s day was “ready to vanish away,” was a short time afterwards entirely removed, when, by the destruction of the only place in which the Jew could offer sacrifice, the observance of the Mosaic ritual was rendered impossible, and Christianity established to be from that time the universal religion of mankind.
The same connection between the advent and the punishment of the Jews is observable in Luke xix. 11—27.

The parable speaks of "a certain nobleman who went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return." Before he undertakes his journey he call his servants (St. Matthew calls them "his own servants,") and gives them the charge, "Occupy till I come." We have here the departure of the nobleman, the commission given to his servants during his absence, and his return. Now is there any circumstance in this parable which fixes the period of the return? It will be observed that the citizens of the nobleman "hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, we will not have this man to reign over us." It will scarcely be disputed that these citizens are the Jewish people, who rejected their Messiah with the words, "We have no king but Caesar." At his return he punishes those citizens; and to certify that these do not mean the inhabitants of the world generally, but the Jewish people and no other, it is added, "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me." Here the period of the return is evidently contemporaneous with the punishment of the Jews.

Pass we on now to Luke xvii. 20—27.

Our Lord is demanded of the Pharisees, "when the kingdom of God should come." The question is plainly one of time. The answer appears at first sight of difficult interpretation. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation [i.e. outward show, as their kings of old came riding through the gates of Jerusalem, Jer. xxii. 4.] neither shall they say, Lo here, or lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (among you). But on comparing this answer with the explanation given to the disciples, verses 22—24, and repeated Matt. xxiv. 23—27, it will be seen that these expressions, "Lo here, lo there!" are those of the false Christs and false prophets, who at the time immediately preceding his advent, should say, "Lo, here is Christ, or there;" "Behold he is in the desert;" "Behold, he is in the secret chambers;" and that our Lord intended to convey the idea that although impostors should announce a literal coming to the desert or to the secret chambers of the temple (as we know from Josephus they did,) yet that his coming would be of a totally different kind.

To remove, however, all misconceptions, he proceeded to illustrate the nature and object of his coming.

"Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed," (apocalypted.)

"In that day" he who was on the housetop and his stuff in the house (evidently referring to eastern modes of life) was not to come down to take it away. He who was in the field (outside
the doomed city) was not to turn back. Of the women grinding at the mill (a custom purely Jewish) one was to be taken and the other left. And all this was to happen whilst the Roman armies were gathered round Jerusalem, and the Roman eagles preying upon the carcass of the Jewish nation.

It is impossible to desire evidence more complete or more unanswerable. We may fearlessly challenge the world to prove that “THE DAY WHEN THE SON OF MAN WAS REVEALED” meant any other day than the day of his coming in vengeance upon the Jewish nation. We are told, Matt. xxiv. 16, 17, and Mark xiii. 14, 15, that the house-tops and fields here spoken of were in the land of Judea; and that the time of the escape was when they should see the abomination of desolation stand in the holy place, explained by St. Luke, “When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies;” St. Matthew speaks of the eagles preying upon the carcass among the woes to be accomplished before that generation had passed away; and St. Luke says that after this revealing of the Son of Man, beds, mills, fields, men and women, should be left. If this revealing meant the so-called end of the world, would not all those have perished in the general conflagration? Lay it to heart, then, as a position utterly incontrovertible, that “IN THE DAY WHEN THE SON OF MAN WAS REVEALED,” they on the house-tops and in the fields, who were in the land of Judea, and not in Rome or in London, were to make all haste to escape; that the time of their escape was when Jerusalem was compassed with armies; that the Roman eagles were to prey upon the Jewish carcass, and not on the carcass of other nations, before that generation had passed away, and that after this revealing of the Son of Man, beds, and mills, and fields, and men and women were to be left in Judea; and then believe, if you can, that these calamities refer to some tribulation yet to come upon the whole world, and to some future revealing of the Son of Man, to be accompanied by the dissolution of the universe.

The same great truth that the coming is connected with the punishment of the Jews is expressed, Luke xviii. 7, 8, “Shall not God avenge his own elect? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily; nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh shall he find faith (the faith) on the earth” (land Judea). Here the coming is not only for the purpose of vengeance, but it is local and restricted to a particular land.

We notice here an unfair translation of the original. In the parallel passage (Luke xxi. 22, 23), the words translated “on the earth” are rendered “in the land”; the qualifying cause “this people” in the latter passage, making it certain that the land of Judea must be meant. Why are not the words rendered with equal fairness “in the land” in the passage before us? Why,
indeed, but because the translators, good men as they were, were not insensible to the bias of a foregone conclusion; and yet, could they have reflected that at his coming he was to “slay his enemies which would not that he should reign over them” (the Jews); to “destroy those husbandmen” (the Jews); to “recompense tribulation to them that troubled his church” (the Jews); to “destroy this place” (Jerusalem); it would have been seen that his coming could only be local and restricted to a particular land.

St. Paul, equally with our Lord, connects the Advent with the punishment of the Jewish people. Writing to the Thessalonians, he says, “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled, rest with us when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.” (2 Thess. i. 6, 7.) The question arises, who were those that troubled the Christian converts at Thessalonica? By referring to the Acts we shall find that they were Jews: “But the Jews which believed not, troubled the people and the rulers of the city.” And not content with this, they came to Berea on the same errand. “But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul, at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.” (Acts xvii. 5-13.) These Jews, and not their own countrymen who also troubled the Thessalonian Christians, were to be recompensed at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This fixes the time of the Advent to the “tribulation” which fell upon the Jewish people. Should it be objected, How could the Jews at Thessalonica suffer in the miseries which came upon Jerusalem? it is answered, the Jews who lived in foreign countries made every effort to keep the feasts at Jerusalem, and the blow came upon the Jewish nation at the time of the Passover, when, as Josephus says, “They were come up from all the country to the feast of unleavened bread; and the entire nation was shut up by fate, as in a prison.” “The number of those (he adds) that perished during the whole siege was 1,000,000; the greatest part of whom were of the same nation with the citizens of Jerusalem, but not belonging to the city itself.”

It is remarkable that throughout these Epistles the personal pronouns, “us, you, them,” are constantly employed. These are explained (1 Thess. ii. 14-16) to relate to “The Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus, and persecuted us—for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost;” that is to say, the Christian converts and the Jewish persecutors. These personal pronouns are again used, (1 Thess. v. 1-10), where beyond all controversy they relate to the parties previously named by the Apostle. “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night; for when they shall say
peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as
upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape, but ye,
brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you
as a thief—for God hath not appointed us to wrath,” &c. What
mean these personal pronouns, “us, you, them?” who were those
that persecuted us? when did sudden destruction come upon
them? when was that day of the Lord from which they should
not escape? Surely to tell the converts of Thessalonica, “but
ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake
you as a thief,” which day, it appears, was not to happen for
2,000 years or more was a solemn mockery, to say the least of
it. The same decided personality is observable in the rest of
Scripture; thus 1 Peter, 1-7, “That the trial of your faith
being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it
be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and
glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” “These very Israelites
(says an esteemed writer)* were then undergoing trials and per-
secutions, as believers in the Gospel, and the Apostle desires
that their faith may continue firm and unshaken to a certain
period, and that period was to the appearing of Jesus Christ.
The Apostle must either have made a serious mistake as to the
time when this event should be accomplished, or he must have
grossly deceived these believing Israelites.” Indeed, until the
Epistles are read in the light of the past second Advent, it is
impossible for any man to understand them, or, with deference
be it spoken, to explain them satisfactorily to others.

The same connection between the punishment of the Jews and
the coming of the Lord is observed by St. James. Writing to the
twelve tribes he says, “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl,
for your miseries shall come upon you; ye have heaped up trea-
sures for (in) the last days; ye have condemned and killed the
just, and he doth not resist you.” It will hardly be disputed
that these miseries were to come upon the Jews who killed their
Messiah. What follows? “Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord; be ye also patient, stablish your
hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.” James
v. 1-8.

If the “ye” who condemned and killed the just are the Jews
of that day, why are the “ye” who were to be patient to the
coming of the Lord transformed into Christians of our times?
If the “miseries” refer to the troubles then about to come on the
Jewish people, why should the patience addressed equally to the
twelve tribes relate to Gentile Christians living at the distance
of hundreds of years? Had the readers of this epistle under-
stood it upon this principle when they came to the 12th verse,

* The late Mr. Robert Stark of Torquay.
“but above all things, my brethren, swear not,” they might have said this has nothing to do with us, but concerns those who shall be alive at the coming of the Lord.

St. John in the delineation of the coming which he has given in the Apocalypse, everywhere connects these two events. A slight examination of the book will show us that its woes are denounced against a particular people, kings, merchants, and city, defined as “the inhabiters of the earth,” land, “the kings of the earth,” land, “the merchants of the earth,” land, “the great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth,” land; these are put into contrast with “every nation and kindred and tongue and people,” people who were not Jews; “The kings of the whole world”—the Roman Empire; “The cities of the nations”—heathen cities. It is well known that this isolated position belonged only to one peculiar people, kings, merchants, and cities—the people, &c., of Judea. At the coming (Rev. xiv.) the Son of Man reaps “the harvest of the earth,” land, and the wine-press is trodden “without the city.” What city? The city elsewhere called in the Revelation, “The great city.” “The holy city.” “The beloved city.” “The great city where also our Lord was crucified.” “The holy city which the Gentiles should tread down.” “The city in which was found the blood of prophets and of saints.” “The great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth”—Jerusalem.

But why multiply proofs? The charge, in all probability correct, was brought by his enemies against Stephen for not ceasing to say, “Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place” (Acts vi. 14). James, the Lord’s brother, was martyred for his glorious testimony to the speedy coming of Christ, “Why do ye ask me respecting Jesus the Son of Man; he is now sitting on the right hand of great power, and is soon about to come in the clouds of heaven” (Jus. Hist. ii. 23). Clement, the fellow-labourer of Paul, said that the coming should take place before the destruction of the temple. “Of a truth, quickly and suddenly shall his will be accomplished, for he shall come quickly and shall not delay, and suddenly the Lord shall come to his temple, and the Holy One whom ye expect” (1 Epist. xxiv). Eusebius writes of that period, “As there were many of the rulers that believed, there was danger that the people would now expect Jesus as the Messiah.” Josephus says that with every stone hurled by the engines of the tenth legion against the walls of Jerusalem, the watchmen on the towers cried out “The Son cometh,” and he expressly attributes the miseries which fell upon the Jews to the martyrdom of James. “These things happened to the Jews to avenge James the Just, who was the brother of him that was called Christ” (Eus. ii. 23). Nay, we should be unwilling to affirm that no sign of the Son of Man in heaven, similar to the
vision of Stephen, when he saw "the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God," took place at that time. The disciple who describes the coming in vengeance on "them that dwell on the earth" (Judea), beholds in the vision "the heavens opened, and lo! a white horse, and he that sat upon him is called The Word of God." Josephus tells us that these times were full of prodigy and miracle. He speaks of a star like a sword standing over the city, of a comet which continued a whole year, of a light round the altar and the holy house—which lasted for half an hour, turning night into day, of chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour—running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities, of the quaking in the temple, and the sound as of a great multitude saying, "Let us remove hence." These were "the signs (he says) which were so evident, and did so plainly foretell their future desolation." "Now if any one," continues the historian, "considers these things, he will find that God takes care of mankind, and by all ways possible foreshows to our race what is for their preservation; but these men interpreted some of these signals according to their own pleasure, and some of them they utterly despised, until their madness was demonstrated both by the taking of their city and their own destruction" (Joseph. Wars of the Jews, book vi. 5).

Probably enough was revealed to make men sensible of the presence and power of miracle. To the servants of Christ these portents were signs of the coming of the Lord Jesus.

We propose to examine, in this last division of our subject,

3. Texts which speak generally of the speediness of the coming.

And here a startling fact presents itself. The writers of the epistles do not appear to have entertained the idea that the Lord's prediction extended beyond the period which he had assigned to it, but believed and taught that the advent was near at hand. The declaration of the Saviour, that he would come in the lifetime of the then existing generation, seems to have sunk deeply into their hearts, and the expectation of this immediate coming, like some huge mountain set in the midst of a plain, visible from all points and at all times, rose up ever prominently before them. Theirs was not an unnatural effort of the mind to apprehend an improbable event; neither was it the habitual confession of a creed which they did not heartily feel. The coming was to them an impending reality, interfering with the business and even the social relations of life. Hence we find St. Paul writing to the Corinthians, "But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth that both they that have wives be
as though they had none; and they that weep as though they wept not; and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy as though they possessed not; and they that use this world as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Cor. vii. 29, 30.) Nay, so approximate did the Christians of that day believe the coming of the Lord, that the same apostle found it necessary to warn the Thessalonian converts who were in danger of neglecting their daily duties in consequence of apocryphal notices of its arrival, not to be “soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand” (actually upon them); for that day would not come without its preceding signs. And what should these signs? “The (not “a” making the whole indefinite) falling away first.”—The apostacy foretold by Christ when “iniquity should abound, and the love of many should wax cold.” Secondly,—The revealing of some enemy well known to the Thessalonians, and then (A.D. 54) opposing the church. This enemy then exalting himself, then sitting in the temple of God, then showing himself that he is God, “already” working, but let or hindered from being revealed in his time by something known to the Thessalonians, the Lord should consume (we presume not literally) “with the spirit of his mouth, and destroy with the brightness of his coming” (2 Thess. ii). The apostles may be said to have been men, not of one book, but of one thought, interwoven in their writings with every motive to duty, obedience, zeal, and holiness. Would they deter from apostacy? They spake of “fiery indignation which would (soon) devour the adversaries” when the Lord should judge his people (the Jews, Heb. 10). Would they beseech their countrymen to avoid the impending calamities? They exhorted them to “save themselves from this untoward generation” (Acts ii. 40). Would they exhibit the doom of the false teachers of those last days? They represented their “judgment as now of a long time lingering not, and their damnation slumbering not” (2 Peter ii. 3.) Would they quicken ministerial fidelity? They “charged before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall (soon) judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom” (2 Tim. iv. 1). Would they point out the season of reward? It is enjoined on Timothy “that thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. vi. 14). Would they exhibit the love of God in redemption? They held out the prospect that “when he should appear they should be like him, for they should see him as he is” (1 John iii. 2). Would they provoke to holiness? They admonished “every man that had this hope in him to purify himself, even as he is pure” (1 John iii. 3). Would they inculcate obedience to apostolic precepts? They “besought by the coming of our Lord
Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him” (2 Thess. ii. 1). Would they encourage steadfastness? They urged the plea, “And now, little children, abide in him, that when he shall appear we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 John ii. 28). Would they support under persecution? They comforted with the same blessed hope, “Ye (then living) had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods . . . . cast not therefore away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward, for ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God ye might receive the promise” (Heb. x. 34-36). The coming of Christ was all in all to them—the object of faith and expectation, the boundary line of promise and prophecy, the mainspring of action and duty, the stay under trial and suffering, and the climax of joy and reward. It is remarkable they did not so much look for death as for the coming of the Lord—uncertain, as it were, which of the two events would precede the other, hence they were wont to say, “Whether present or absent” (2 Cor. v. 9), “Whether we wake or sleep” (1 Thess. v. 10), “We which are alive and remain” (1 Thess. iv. 15), “We shall not all sleep” (1 Cor. xv. 51), “Whether we live, we live unto the lord; whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord’s” (Rom. xiv. 8).

Unlike our modern millennarians—one moment ejaculating “The Lord is at hand,” and anon creating a millennium of their own by a summer up the Rhine, a winter in Rome, and a season in Paris; protesting that every instant they expect the earth and all the works that are therein to be burnt up; and ere the echo of their words has died away, purchasing a fair share of this combustible property at 99 years’ lease—these sincere and heaven-taught men had good grounds for believing that day to be near, “even at the doors.” This will be seen from expressions indicative of an approaching advent everywhere scattered throughout their writings. These we proceed to lay before you without comment, leaving truth to be its own and its best interpreter. Lest us first take the testimony of

ST. PAUL.

“And that knowing the time that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.” (Rom. xiii. 11.)

“Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” (Rom. xiii. 11.)

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand.” (Rom. xiii. 12.)

“But this I say, brethren, the time is short.” (1 Cor. vii. 29.)

“The Lord is at hand. (Phil. iv. 5.)

“So much the more that ye see the day approaching.” (Heb. x. 25.)
"Yet a little while and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." (Heb. x. 37.)

ST. JAMES.

"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord." (James v. 7.)
"The coming of the Lord draweth nigh." (James v. 8.)
"Behold the Judge standeth before the door." (James v. 9.)

ST. PETER.

"Salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter i. 5.)
"Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead." (1 Peter iv. 5.)
"The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God." (1 Peter iv. 17.)
"If it first begin at us, what will be the end," &c. (1 Peter iv. 17.)
"The end of all things is at hand." (1 Peter iv. 7.)
"The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." (2 Peter iii. 10.)

ST. JOHN.

"Little children, it is the last time." (1 John ii. 18.)
"Now are there many antichrists whereby we know that it is the last time." (1 John ii. 18.)
"The time is at hand." (Rev. xxii. 10.)
"Behold, I come quickly." (Rev. xxii. 12.)
"Surely, I come quickly, Amen." (Rev. xxii. 20.)
"Even so, come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. xxii. 20.)

We are free to confess that we should find it difficult to maintain the position that these texts relate, not to a coming then imminent, but to one, which, like the sword of Damocles, is supposed to be continually suspended over the church; and the suggestion arises that if an event said to be "at hand," "nearer," "approaching," "drawing nigh," "ready to be revealed," A.D. 60, or thereabouts, can be wire-drawn to mean something which has not taken place, A.D., 1856, the Scriptures must be capable of very elastic interpretation. Compare such passages with our Lord's words, "my time is at hand," or with those of St. Peter and Paul, "knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle," "the time of my departure is at hand," and say if the former refer to events yet future, why did not our Lord mean that he should not die upon the cross till 1864, or his apostles, that the time of their martyrdom should be indefinitely
postponed. Upon what principle does the expression “at hand” mean something impending in the one case, and something distant in the other? The Bible does not countenance such latitudinarian systems of interpretation. Thus Jeremiah (xxvii. 16) rebukes the false prophets for saying that a long time was a short one, “Hearken not to the words of your prophets that prophecy unto you, saying, behold the vessels of the Lord’s house shall now shortly be brought again from Babylon;” in his opinion, seventy years was not a short, but a long time. Thus Abraham saw the promises “as far off;” thus David says, “Thou hast spoken also of thy servant’s house for a great while to come.” Thus Daniel was told to seal his prophecy, because the vision was yet for many days, meaning, we should think, that the events referred to were far distant; on the other hand, when Paul said, “I will come unto you shortly, if the Lord will,” or when the charge was given to St. John, “Seal not the saying of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand,” it is plain that the events were of immediate fulfilment. In the estimation of these servants of the Most High, short and long were not convertible terms, but a long time was a long time, and a short time was a short one. On what principle, save that of 1000 years being as one day (2 Peter (words spoken to the scoffers of those last days,* who marvelled that the Lord’s prediction of an immediate advent had not already received its accomplishment,) to which St. Peter replies, that although the

*The term “The last days” has been perverted to mean the last days of the Christian dispensation, as if there could be any last days to a kingdom which was to have no end and never to be removed. (Dan. vii., Heb. xii., 2 Peter i. 11, Rev. xi. 15.) Be it, however, borne in mind that “The last days,” called elsewhere “The last of the days,” (2 Peter, iii. 3,) and as the time dwindled to a still narrower compass, “The last hour” (John ii. 18), must necessarily precede the period called “The end;” which was to take place “before that generation had passed away.” This was the view taken by the apostles: hence they spoke of their own days as “These last days.” (Heb. i. 2.) “These last times,” (1 Peter i. 20,) “Little children, it is the last time (hour), and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even so now are there many antichrists whereby we know that it is the last time.” (1 John ii. 18.) The men of their day (the apostles’) were those upon whom “the ends of the world are come,” (1 Cor. x. 11,) and the impious Jews of that generation, and not of future times, were those who “heaped up treasure in (not for) the last days.” (James v. 3.) Hence we find St. Paul writing to Timothy. “In the last days perilous times shall come, for men shall be lovers of their own selves,” &c., and that “The last days” here spoken of were the days when Timothy was living, is evident from the circumstance that the command is given to him, “From such (then living) turn away,” (9 Tim. iii. 1–5.) Hence St. Peter says, “There shall come in the last days, scoffers walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming? . . . but this they (the scoffers of that time then living) willingly are ignorant of—” (2 Peter 3.) What are “the last days” here referred to? are they our own times or the times immediately consequent upon the prediction?

Let us turn to the epistle of St. Jude for an answer. “Beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the Apostles
Lord's coming had not then taken place (A.D. 66,) yet the day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night (compare 1 Thess. v. 2, where the coming as a thief is connected with the punishment of the Jews,) and bids them (then living) be looking for and hastening unto it; can expositors of Scripture say that black means white, and that the time is long, although inspired men declared "the time is short?" Such a principle, if fully carried out, is vicious enough to do more harm than Gibbon or Voltaire ever contemplated, to hold up the interpretation of Scripture to the merited scorn of the infidel, and to make the "more sure word of prophecy" the most uncertain of all. It is true that the coming being alluded to possibly five hundred times in the New Testament, the time, object, and speediness of it are not always mentioned; just as Alison does not upon every occasion mention the exact period of the French Revolution, or Macaulay insist upon the geographical position of England with every notice of this country. Hence, texts are to be found which speak of the coming without further qualification; indeed, at last, it came simply to be called "that day," that well-known day, which needed no further definition. But, although, in order to avoid a needless repetition, this must necessarily have been the case, sufficient indications of time, object, and speediness are inter-spersed throughout the writings of the apostles, to satisfy honest and unprejudiced inquiry; and surely it is more prudent to trust to what they did say, than to what they did not say, and more reasonable to give credit to the faintest whisper of revelation, than to the loudest assertions of uninspired men. Say then that St. Paul was deceived when he supposed that the night was "far spent;" (meaning, one might think, that a greater part had passed than what remained;) that St. Peter knew not what he said in declaring "the end of all things is at hand;" that St. John was mistaken in the conclusion which the many antichrists (Peter and the rest) of our Lord Jesus Christ, how they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk (as Peter said they should) after their own ungodly lusts." Here, then, are the very scoffers mentioned by Peter. Now when did they utter these taunts? for this will decide the question of what is meant by "the last time." St. Jude says they were living A.D. 66, after the words spoken by Peter and Paul had been uttered, but before the judgment had been executed upon them. "There are (he says) certain men crept in unawares ordained of old unto this condemnation . . . . these are spots in your feasts of charity . . . Enoch, also the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these . . . . These are murmurers . . . ." And as if this was not enough to designate these scoffers as then living—he points his finger to the men. "These be they who separate (then separate) themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit." (Jude 19.) It is plain that the apostles considered their own times to be the last times, and that they never extended that period beyond the close of the Mosaic economy which, in their estimation, was "the end of all things," when "all things which were written should be fulfilled."
of his day led him to form, "now as there are many antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time;" that St. James fell short of the truth in stating "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh;" that St Jude was in error when he pointed to the mockers of the last time, "these be they who separate;" of whom Enoch prophesied, saying, "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints to execute judgment upon all," as living in his day; that the Hebrew Christians who saw "the day approaching," mistook the signs before their eyes;—yet how shall we say that He was deceived who said, "THEN SHALL THE END COME," "VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU," (I speak the truth on oath) "THIS GENERATION SHALL NOT PASS TILL ALL THINGS BE FULFILLED."

Here is no strained interpretation—here are no shifts resorted to, to defend a system. Here is no patching of the Word of God, no miserable defence of a position which is plainly untenable. The glorious truth is written as with a sunbeam, and the whole body of the Scriptures coincides with it—the definite statements of our Lord in the Gospels, the confirmation of the Epistles, and the symbols of the Apocalypse, proclaim the same grand and continuous fact, that the second coming of the Lord is a past event, of which the precise period can be accurately determined, the particular object satisfactorily ascertained, and whose near approach was the unvarying theme of the universal Church in those days.

But we are told that all this is typical of another and a more glorious coming. We ask where is the Scripture which countenances such a supposition? Where is the Scripture that speaks of a third coming, or which disconnects it from the wrath upon the Jewish people? Nay, did not our Lord expressly say that the coming in vengeance at that time SHOULD NEVER BE REPEATED.

"Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." (Matt. xxiv. 21.)

"In those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be." (Mark xiii. 19.)

"These be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled." (Luke xxi. 22.)

Where is the faintest intimation of two ends, two comings, or two tribulations? If the coming is to be repeated, then must all the premonitory signs be repeated also. The abomination of desolation must again stand in the holy place. Jerusalem must again be compassed with armies. They which are in Judea must once more flee unto the mountains. The disciples must renew their mission to the cities of Israel, and St. John must reappear on the earth to tarry till he comes. Besides, what precedent exists for such a supposition? What prophecy respecting the
destruction of a city was typical of the destruction of another city? Did "the burden of Nineveh" prefigure the calamities of Babylon, or was "the lamentation for Tyre" premonitory of the woes of Jerusalem? They who suppose the judgments on Jerusalem to be again typical of future judgments, can only suppose so; and is it well to rest the faith and hope of the church on a supposition not borne out by the precedents of similar prophecies, and negatived by the prediction itself?

But we are told again that the coming will be personal, and Acts i. 11 is appealed to with great confidence, "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Now it must be remembered that St. Luke, the author of the Acts and of the gospel which bear his name, describes the coming in the latter in an equally personal manner with the statement of the Acts, "Then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud" (not "in the clouds," as Matthew and Mark), and this personal coming was to take place before that generation had passed away. Unless, then, it should be thought that St. Luke depicts a different coming in the Acts from that set forth in the gospel, it is plain that only one event can be intended. Added to which our Lord declared that although deceivers should announce a personal coming, saying, "Lo here, or lo there;" "Behold he is in the desert, behold he is in the secret chambers;" his coming would not be of that kind. "For as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so (of that sort) shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. xxiv. 27); that is, not as an individual on earth, either in the desert, the secret chambers, or elsewhere, but in power, sudden, visible, and destructive, like the lightning. So St. Luke (xvii. 30), "Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed." And how should it be; Not a personal coming in the clouds of heaven, which are not clouds of heaven at all, but vapours of the earth, invisible to the people of any given land, and their antipodes at the same time, but "in that day" and "in that night" (proving that the coming could not be a momentary appearance only), the Jew on the housetop, in the field, and the women at the mill, were to make all haste to escape whilst the Roman eagles were gathered around the carcasse of the Jewish nation. Besides, the coming is described under a variety of aspects. Matthew and Mark say he should come "in the clouds," Luke in the gospel, "in a cloud," in the Acts, "as he went up" in a cloud; John, "sitting on a cloud" and "sitting on a white horse;" Paul, "in flaming fire," All these descriptions cannot be literally true; for he could not come "in the clouds," and "in a cloud," "sitting on a cloud," "sitting on a white horse," and "in flaming fire," at the same time. Added to this, they were to see him "sitting on the right
hand of power, and \textit{coming in the clouds of heaven}” (Matt. xxvi. 64). How could they see him \textit{sitting and coming at the same time}? If he sits on the right hand of power, he cannot come in the clouds of heaven, and if he comes with clouds, he cannot sit on the right hand of power. To demand a literal coming in clouds, and at the same time a literal sitting on the right hand of power, is to require a physical impossibility.

But it is said, \textit{who saw him coming in the clouds of heaven}? We answer, \textit{who saw “the Lord riding upon a swift cloud into Egypt when he came into Egypt, and the idols were moved at his presence.”} (Isaiah xix. 1.) \textit{Who saw him when he “shined forth from Mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints?”} (Deut. xxxiii. 2.) \textit{Who saw him when “he came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men built?”} (Gen. xi. 5.) \textit{Who saw him when “he bowed the heavens also and came down, and he rode upon a cherub and did fly, yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind?”} (Psalm xviii. 9, 10.) \textit{Who saw him when “he came forth out of his place, and came down and trod upon the high places of the earth,” for the transgression of Samaria (Micah i. 3)? and is it necessary to ask who saw him when he came and destroyed those husbandmen?}

But it is said that no event which then took place comes up to the grandeur of the predictions; and yet the destruction of Babylon, Idumea, and Egypt is couched in almost similar terms;—

\textit{Behold the day of the Lord cometh (upon Babylon), the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light, the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.”} (Isaiah xiii. 10.) \textit{“All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll, and all their host shall fall down as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig-tree, for my sword shall be bathed in heaven, behold it shall come down upon Idumeæ.”} (Isaiah xxxiv. 4, 5.) When I shall put thee (Egypt) out, I will cover the heaven and make the stars thereof dark. I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light.” (Ezekiel xxxii. 7.) No one, however, questions the fulfilment of these prophecies, nor asks who saw the sun, moon, and stars, darkened at the fall of Babylon, the host of heaven falling down at the desolation of Idumea, or the sun covered with a cloud at the calamities of Egypt. So with the predictions descriptive of the fall of Jerusalem. A Scripture key will unlock a Scripture difficulty, and it will be seen that minds strongly tinctured with the phraseology of the Hebrew prophets would naturally depict great and astounding events in a similar strain of metaphor and allegory; and that to interpret such figurative language on the same literal principles as we
should explain a paragraph in a newspaper, without reference to age, country, habits of thought, or modes of expression, is not the way to arrive at a safe or Scriptural conclusion.

The argument, then, resolves itself into this. The writers of the New Testament when they represented, as they all did, the coming of Christ as about to take place immediately, either were deceived themselves or else willingly intended to deceive others. Gibbon has directed a polite sneer against the first of these positions. In chap. 15, vol. 1, of his "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," he says, "In the primitive church it was universally believed that the end of the world and the kingdom of heaven were near at hand. The near approach of this wonderful event had been predicted by the apostles; the tradition of it was preserved by their earliest disciples, and those who understood in their literal sense the discourses of Christ himself were obliged to expect the second and glorious coming of the Son of Man in the clouds, before that generation was totally extinguished which had beheld his humble condition upon earth. The revolution of seventeen centuries has instructed us not to press too closely the mysterious language of prophecy and revelation, but so long as for wise purposes this error was permitted to subsist in the church, it was productive of the most salutary effects on the faith and practice of Christians."

This taunt has never yet been answered. For if the apostles were in error upon this point, what then did they know? What dependence can be placed upon their teaching, or what obligation rests upon us to obey their instructions?

There have been found men wicked enough to entertain the painful alternative that the apostles willingly intended to deceive others; on this, however, we need not enlarge, the bare mention of it is its own refutation.

There is no escape from one or other of these dilemmas. If, as some have dared to think, God purposely concealed His will from the apostles on this important subject, how strange that they should have been suffered to enunciate, as inspired truth, what the event proved to be false! If they willingly deceived us, whom shall we trust?

The simple conclusion is, that our Lord and his apostles were neither deceived themselves nor intended to deceive others; that they meant what they said; that the coming predicted in the Gospels, confirmed in the Epistles, and delineated in the Apocalypse, took place at the destruction of Jerusalem, and that no other coming is in any way alluded to in the Word of God.
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