

Home Truths.

BEING MISCELLANEOUS ADDRESSES AND TRACTS,

BY THE

REV. J. C. RYLE M.A.,

*Honorary Canon of Norwich,
Vicar of Stradbroke, and Rural Dean of Hoxne, Suffolk.*

ARRANGED, REVISED, AND CORRECTED SPECIALLY
FOR THIS EDITION.

EIGHTH SERIES.

*“If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare
himself to the battle?” (1 COR. xiv. 8.)*

LONDON:

WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY,

23, HOLLES STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE; AND ALDINE CHAMBERS,
PATERNOSTER ROW.

IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

M.D.CCC.LIX

Have You a Priest?

HEBREWS IV. 14.

“We have a great High Priest.”

THE question before your eyes deserves your best attention. Whether you know it or not, it is a question of deep and wide importance. He that wishes to have any comfort in religion must have a priest. A religion without a priest is a poor, unhappy, useless, powerless thing. Now what is your religion? *Have you a Priest?*

You and I are such sinful, corrupt creatures, that we are unfit by ourselves to have anything to do with God. God is so holy a Being that He cannot bear that which is evil, and so high a Being that His majesty makes us afraid. We are such sinful, defective and guilty beings, that we naturally shrink from God, and dare not speak to Him or look Him in the face. We need an almighty Friend between us. We need a Mediator and Advocate, able, willing, loving, commissioned, tried, proved, and ready to help us. Reader, have you found this out? Have you got a Friend in heaven? *Have you a Priest?*

The Christian religion provides the very thing that man's soul and conscience require. It is the glory of God's Word that it reveals to man the very Friend and Mediator that he needs,—the God-man Christ Jesus. It tells us of the very Priest that meets our wants,—even Jesus the Son of God. It sets Him fully before us, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as the very Person that our longing hearts could desire. To open up this great subject is the simple purpose of this tract.

I think it will clear our way, and throw broad light on the matter in hand, if I start three plain questions, and try to supply answers to them.

I. *Where is Jesus Christ now?*

II. *What is Jesus Christ doing now?*

III. *What is Jesus Christ going to do before the end of the world?*

Reader, when we have considered these three questions you will perhaps be better able to answer the inquiry, Have you a Priest?

I. In the first place, *Where is Jesus Christ now?*

Let us take care that we understand the drift of this inquiry. He about whom we are now asking is no common person. He is God as well as man, and man as well as God. The words of the creed ought to be carefully remembered. Jesus Christ is—"God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world; perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting."— This, at any rate, is sound speech that cannot be condemned. This is one of the foundation doctrines of Christianity.

Now where is Jesus Christ as God? That is not the question I want to consider. As God He is everywhere. He fills heaven and earth. There is no secret corner, there is no height above or depth beneath, where He is not. Wherever two or three are met together on earth in His name, there is He in the midst of them.—"Show me where your God is," said a sneering infidel to a little boy whom he saw coming out of a Bible-reading school: "Show me where your God is, and I will give you a penny."—"Show me where He is not," was the crushing reply, "and I will give you two."—Reader, I am not asking where Christ is as God.

But where is Jesus Christ as Man? That is the point. Where is the body that was born of the Virgin Mary? Where is the head that was crowned with thorns? Where are the hands that were nailed to the cross, and the feet that walked by the sea of Galilee? Where are the eyes that wept tears at the grave of Lazarus? Where is the side that was pierced with a spear? Where is the "visage that was marred more than any man, and the form more than the sons of men"? (Isa. lii. 14.) Where, in a word, is the Man Christ Jesus? That is the question.

I answer in the words of Scripture, that "Christ is passed into the heavens,"—that He "has entered into the holy place,"—that "He has entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us,"—and that "the heavens must receive Him until the time of restitution of all things." (Heb. iv. 14; ix. 12–24. Acts iii. 21.)

Let us mark this well. Christ, as Man, is *in heaven, and not in the grave*. The Jews pretended to deny that He rose from the dead. The infidels of modern times profess to believe that the ashes and dust of Jesus of Nazareth are still lying, like the remains of any other man, in some Syrian town. That He lived and died they dare not deny: but that He rose again they do deny. What is this but kicking against the pricks? If ever there was a fact proved by unanswerable evidence in this world, it is the fact that Jesus rose from the dead!—That He died on a Friday,

is certain. That He was buried that night in a sepulchre hewn out of rock, is certain. That the stone over the place was sealed, and a guard of soldiers set around it, is certain. That the grave was open and the body gone on Sunday morning, is certain. That the soldiers could give no account of it, is certain. That the disciples themselves could hardly believe that their Master had risen, is certain. That after seeing Him several times for forty days, they at last were convinced, is certain. That once convinced, they never ceased to teach and hold even to death, that their Master had risen, is certain. That the unbelieving Jews could neither shake the disciples out of their belief, nor show Christ's dead body, nor give any satisfactory account of what had become of it, is equally certain. All this is certain, certain, certain! The resurrection of Christ is a great, unanswerable, undeniable fact. There are none so blind as those that will not see.

Once more let us mark this point. Christ, as Man, is *in heaven, and not on the Communion-table* at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. He is not present at that holy sacrament under the form of bread and wine, as the Roman Catholics, and some Anglicans, say. The consecrated bread is not the body of Christ, and the consecrated wine is not the blood of Christ. Those sacred elements are the emblem of something absent, and not of something present. The words of the Prayer-book state this fact with unmistakable clearness: "The sacramental bread and wine remain still in their very natural substance, and therefore may not be adored (for that were idolatry to be abhorred of all faithful Christians); and the natural body and blood of our Saviour Christ are in heaven and not here, it being against the truth of Christ's natural body to be at one time in more places than one." (*Rubric at the end of the Communion Service.*)

Reader, let these things sink down into your heart. It is a point of vast importance in this day, to see clearly where Christ's natural body and blood are. Right knowledge of this point may save your soul from many ruinous errors.

Be not moved, for a moment, by the infidel, when he sneers at miracles, and tries to persuade you that a religion based on miracles cannot be true. Tell him not to waste his time in talking about the flood, or the sun standing still, or Balaam's ass speaking, or the whale swallowing Jonah, or the ravens feeding Elijah. Ask him to grapple, like a man, with the greatest miracle of all,—the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Ask him to explain away the evidence of that miracle, if he can.

Remind him that, long before Jesus Christ died, He staked the truth of His Messiahship on His resurrection, and told the Jews not to believe Him if He did not rise from the dead. Remind him that the Jews remembered this, and did all they could to prevent any removal of our Lord's body, but in vain. Tell him, finally, that when he has overthrown the evidence of Christ's resurrection, it will be time to listen to his argument against miracles, but not till then. The Man Christ Jesus is in heaven, and not on earth. The mere fact that His natural body and blood are in heaven, is one among many proofs of the truth of Christianity.

Reader, be not moved by the Roman Catholic, any more than by the infidel. Listen not to his favourite doctrine of Christ's body and blood being really "present" in the elements of bread and wine at the Lord's Supper. It is his common argument that we should believe the doctrine, though we cannot understand it; and that it is a pleasant, comfortable, and reverent thought that Christ's natural body and blood are in the bread and wine in some mysterious way, though we know not how. Beware of the argument. It is not only without foundation of Scripture, but full of dangerous heresy. Stand fast on the old doctrine, that Christ's natural body and blood "cannot be in more places than one at one time." Maintain firmly that Christ's human nature is like our own, sin only excepted, and cannot therefore be at once in heaven and on the communion-table. He that overthrows the doctrine of Christ's real, true, and proper humanity, is no friend to the Gospel, any more than he that denies His divinity. Tell me that my Lord is not really Man, and you rob me of one half of my soul's comfort. Tell me that His body can be on earth and yet in heaven at the same time, and you tell me that He is not Man. Resist this mischievous doctrine. Christ, as Man, is in heaven, and in heaven alone.

So much for the first question which I proposed to answer. Christ is in heaven, and not in the grave. Miserable indeed is that religion which is content to honour Him as nothing more than a mortal teacher, who died, like Plato or Socrates, and saw corruption.—Christ is in heaven, and not in the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper. They do Him little real honour who in fancied reverence try to persuade us that His body is a body unlike that of man.—Christ is in heaven, alive and not dead. For ever let us glory in His atoning death, and the life-blood that He shed for us on the cross. But never let us forget that He was "raised again for our justification." His life is as important to us as His death. What saith the Scriptures? "If, when we were enemies, we were

reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” (Rom. iv. 25; v. 10.)

II. Let us next consider the second question which I proposed to examine: *What is Jesus Christ doing now?*

That He is doing some great thing for man we need not doubt for a moment. The Bible account of all His dealings with man makes it impossible to arrive at any other conclusion. In abounding mercy and grace He has always been taking thought for our poor fallen race, and providing for our best interests. He has been ever caring and working for our souls. And “His mercy endureth for ever.” He never changes.

Do we not read that Christ was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”? (Rev. xiii. 18.) Do we not hear Him saying, “When the Lord gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment: when He appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him; rejoicing in the habitable part of the earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.” (Prov. viii. 29–31.) Are we not taught everywhere in Scripture that for 4,000 years He was trusted for salvation by all saved souls, though seen dimly and afar off through figures and sacrifices?—Do we not learn that Christ, and Christ alone, was the only hope of Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses, and Samuel, and David, though they only saw “through a glass darkly” what we see face to face?—Do we not know that in the fulness of time Christ came into the world born of a woman, lived for us, suffered for us, wrought righteousness for us, made satisfaction for us, died for us, rose again for us, and purchased eternal redemption for sinners at the cost of His own blood?—And can we doubt for a moment that Christ is still doing great things for us? No: indeed!—He said Himself in a certain place, “My Father worketh hitherto and I work.” (John v. 17.) We may take up the expression and say, “Christ has worked for us, and Christ is working for us at this very day.”

Reader, what is that special thing that Christ is doing now? Give me your attention. This is no light and speculative matter. It lies near the foundation of all comfortable Christianity. Come and see.

Christ is now carrying on in heaven the work of a Priest which He began upon earth. He took our nature on Him in the fulness of time, and became a man that He might be perfectly fitted to be the Priest that

our case required. As a Priest He offered up His body and soul as a sacrifice for sin upon the cross, and made a complete atonement for us with His own blood. As a Priest He ascended up on high, passed within the veil, and entered into the presence of God. As a Priest He is now sitting on our behalf at the right hand of God; and what He began actively on earth He is carrying on actively in heaven. This is what Christ is doing.

How and in what manner does Christ exercise His priestly office? This is a deep subject, and one about which it is easy to make rash statements. The action of one of the Persons of the blessed Trinity in heaven is a high thing, and passes man's understanding. The place whereon we stand is holy ground. The thing we are handling must be touched with reverence, like the ark of God. Nevertheless, there are some things about Christ's priestly office which even our weak eyes may boldly look at, and God has caused them to be written plainly for our learning. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children." (Deut. xxix. 29.) Let us see.

(1) We need not doubt that Christ, as our Priest, is *ever presenting the merits of His sacrifice for us before God*. Of course He has no need to repeat that sacrifice. "By one offering He has perfected for ever those that are sanctified." (Heb. x. 14.) But in some ineffable manner He is ever in God's presence as the Bearer of the sins of His people. The atonement made on the cross for us is kept continually in remembrance by the appearance of Him who made it. Twenty-seven times the visions of heaven in Revelation describe Christ as the "Lamb." Twice they call Him "the Lamb slain." Twice they speak of His "blood." The Priest who offered the sacrifice is always in heaven: the sacrifice is never forgotten in heaven, and so they that trust in it are always acceptable in heaven. This is one thing.

(2) Again: we need not doubt that Christ, as our Priest, is *ever interceding for us* in heaven. It is written, "He is able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him, because He ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Heb. vii. 25.) It is asked by St. Paul, "Who is he that condemneth?" and one reason he gives why there is "no condemnation" for believers, is the fact that "Christ maketh intercession for us." (Rom. viii. 34.) Of the manner of that intercession we cannot

of course speak particularly: we may not intrude into things unseen. But it may suffice us to remember how our Lord prayed for His people in the seventeenth chapter of John, and how He told Peter He prayed for him, that his faith might not fail, (Luke xxii. 32.) Our great High-priest knows how to intercede. This is another thing.

(3) Again: we need not doubt that Christ, as our Priest, *presents the names of His people continually before His Father*. The Jewish high-priest had the names of the tribes of Israel engraved on the ornaments he wore upon his breast and shoulders. That this was the figure of something which Christ is ever doing for Christians in heaven, is clear and plain as the day. He “appears in the presence of God for us.” (Heb. ix. 24.) He acts as the Representative of His people. Through Him they are known and thought for in heavenly places, long before they go there. The interests and safety of the body are secured and provided for, because the Head is already in heaven. This is another thing.

(4) Again: we need not doubt that Christ, as our Priest, *presents the prayers and services of His people before God*, and obtains for them hearing, acceptance, and favour. Like the Jewish priests, He offers incense within the veil (Levit. xvi. 12, 13), and that incense is “mingled with the prayers of His saints.” (Rev. viii. 3.) This is a great mystery, no doubt, but one full of consolation. It is hard at any time to understand how any word or deed of sinful creatures like us can ever come into the presence of God, and do us any good. But the Priesthood of Christ explains all. Placed in His hands and endorsed by Him, our petitions, like bank-notes duly signed, obtain a value which they have not in themselves. A young Christian once said to an old one, “My prayers are so poor and weak, that I cannot think they are of any use.” The old Christian replied, with deep wisdom, “Only place them in Christ’s hands, and He makes them look so different in heaven that you would hardly know them again.”—Prayers that are worth nothing in themselves are effectual, when offered “through Christ,—for the sake of Christ, through the mediation of Christ.” Expressions like these are so common, that few duly weigh their meaning. But, rightly considered, they are full of deep doctrine, even the doctrine of the priestly office of the Lord Jesus. This is another thing.

(5) Again: we need not doubt that Christ, as our Priest in heaven, *is ever doing the work of a Friend*, a Protector, a Counsellor, and an Advocate, on behalf of His people. It is not for nothing that we are told that He is “at God’s right hand” (Rom. viii. 34), and that He “sitteth at the right hand of God.” (Coloss. iii. 1; 1 Peter iii. 22.) These words have a deep meaning. They teach that Christ is ever watching over the interests of His people, and providing a continual supply of all that they need.—“He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.”—“We have an Advocate with the Father,—Jesus Christ, the righteous.” (Psalm cxxi. 4; 1 John ii. 1).—To hear the daily confessions of His saints, and grant them daily absolution; to sympathize with them in all their troubles, guide them in their perplexities, strengthen them for their duties, preserve them in their temptations,—all this is part of Christ’s priestly office. What else can be the meaning of St. Paul’s words, when he says to the Hebrews, “Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”? (Heb. iv. 16). The Priesthood of Jesus is the very hinge and pivot on which that whole exhortation turns. This is another thing.

(6) Finally, we need not doubt that Christ as a Priest in heaven, is continually *doing the work of a Receiver of sinners, and a Mediator between God and man*. The Priest was the person to whom the Israelite was bidden to go when he was ceremonially unclean and wanted forgiveness. The command was distinct: “Go to the priest.” The Heavenly Priest is the person to whom labouring and heavy-laden souls ought always to be directed, when they want pardon and rest. He that feels the burden of sin on his conscience, and wants it taken away, ought to be told that there is One appointed by the Father for the very purpose of taking it away, and that the first step he must take is to go to Him. When the frightened jailor of Philippi cried out in agony of spirit, “What must I do to be saved?” he got, to all appearance, a very simple answer: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” (Acts xvi. 30, 31.) Yet simple as that answer seems, it contains the whole doctrine of Christ’s priestly office. It was as good as saying, “There is a Priest ready to receive, confess, and absolve you: Jesus Christ the Lord. Go and put your soul into His hands, and you shall have full pardon.” The power of absolving every sinner that comes to Him, is one grand part of Christ’s priestly office. “Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou

hast given Him.” (John xvii. 3.) “Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree, Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” (Acts v. 31.) This is another thing.

Such is the manner in which Christ exercises the work of a Priest in heaven. It is a vast and wide subject. I feel deeply that I have only touched the surface of it, and the half of it is left untold. Who can describe fully the singular fitness of our Lord Jesus Christ to be the Priest of man. His possession of all power in heaven and earth, so that He is able to save to the uttermost, and no case is too hard for Him, and no sinner too bad to be saved,—His tenderness and sympathy, so that He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities,—His longsuffering and patience, so that He can bear with our weaknesses and pity our mistakes,—His wisdom, His faithfulness, His readiness to aid: who can describe or number up these things? None know them but those who know them by experience; and even they know very little of their extent. Of all the offices that Christ exercises on behalf of His people, none will repay thought and study so richly as that of His priesthood.

Reader, let us thank God daily that Christ is doing the work of a Priest for us in heaven. Let us glory in His death, but let us not glory less in His life. Let us praise God daily that Jesus “died for our sins according to the Scriptures;” but let us never forget to praise Him that He rose again for us, and sat down at the right hand of God. Let us be thankful for the “precious blood” of Christ; but let us not be less thankful for His precious intercession.

Christ’s Priesthood is the grand secret of daily comfort in Christianity. It is hard to do our duty in that place of life which God has appointed us, and not to get absorbed in it. We are such poor weak creatures that we cannot do two things at once. The cares, and business, and occupations of life, however sinless, often seem to drink up all our thoughts, and swallow up all our attention. But, oh, what an unspeakable comfort it is to remember that we have a High Priest in heaven, who never forgets us night or day, and is continually interceding for us, and providing for our safety! Happy is that man who knows how to begin and end each day with his Priest! This is indeed, to “live the life of faith.”

Christ’s Priesthood is the grand secret of a saint’s perseverance to the end. Left to ourselves there would be little likelihood of our getting

safe home. We might begin well and end ill. So weak are our hearts, so busy the devil, so many the temptations of the world, that nothing could prevent our making shipwreck. But, thanks be to God, the Priesthood of Christ secures our safety.—He who never slumbers and never sleeps is continually watching over our interests, and providing for our need. While Satan pours water on the fire of grace, and strives to quench it, Christ pours on oil, and makes it burn more brightly. Start us in the narrow way of life, with pardon, grace, and a new heart, and leave us to ourselves, and we should soon fall away. But grant us the continual intercession of an Almighty Priest in heaven,—God as well as Man, and Man as well as God,—and we shall never be lost. “Because I live,” says our Lord, “ye shall live also.” (John xiv. 19.)

Reader, let us ever beware of any doctrine which interferes with the Priesthood of Christ. Any system of religion which teaches that we need other mediators beside Jesus,—other priests beside Jesus,—other intercessors beside Jesus,—is unscriptural and dangerous to men’s souls. What greater folly can be conceived than to flee to the Virgin Mary, or the saints, or to put our souls in the hands of clergymen and ministers, when we have such a Priest as Jesus Christ in heaven? What can a woman, who herself needed a “Saviour,” do for the souls of others? (Luke i. 47.) What has she done to prove her love to sinners, compared to the Great High Priest,—Christ the Lord? What single example have we in all the New Testament of any one using a minister as a priest,—even in the days of Peter and Paul? This modern system, which is not satisfied with Christ’s Priesthood, but must have mortal men as priests besides, bears the mark of its origin on its face. It is from beneath, and not from above. “There is no office of Christ,” said John Owen, “that Satan labours so hard to obscure and overthrow as His priestly one.” Satan cares little, comparatively, for Christ the Prophet, and Christ the King, so long as he can persuade man to forget Christ the Priest. For ever let us stand fast on this point. That Christ is carrying on the office of a Priest in heaven, is the crown and glory of Christian theology.

III. Last of all, let us consider the third question which I proposed to examine: *What is Jesus Christ going to do before the end of the world?*

I will answer that inquiry in the words of Scripture. In speaking of things to come, the safest plan is to go to the Book. Let us hear what

St. Paul says to the Hebrews: "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." (Heb. ix. 28.) Let us hear what the angel said to the Apostles on the Mount of Olives, in the day of the ascension: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? 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." (Acts i. 11.) Let us hear what St. Peter preached to the Jews at Jerusalem: "Times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things." (Acts iii. 19–21.) Let us hear what St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." (1 These. iv. 16.) Let us hear what Enoch prophesied 5,000 years ago: "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints." (Jude 14.)

The world has not done with Jesus Christ yet. The wicked, and worldly, and unbelieving, and sceptical, who flatter themselves that Christianity, as a system, is worn out and dying away, will find themselves fearfully mistaken one day. The philosophers and admirers of Science, falsely so called, who talk glibly of "modern progress" and "free thought," and sneer at "old world creeds," as they term them, will have their eyes rudely opened by-and-by. That same Jesus of Nazareth, of whom they speak so lightly now, will appear to their confusion, and set up a kingdom over all the earth. He shall rise up from that seat at God's right hand, which He now occupies as Priest, and come down to this sin-burdened world to rule over it as King. Every eye shall see Him, and every knee shall bow before Him, and every tongue which has spoken against Him shall be silenced for ever. The great High Priest shall come forth from within the veil, and sit upon His throne as a King. This is what Christ is going to do before the end of the world.

How will Jesus come the second time? Not spiritually and figuratively, as some say; but really, literally, truly, and in the body, as He came the first time. He came with a real material body, when He came the first time to suffer and be crucified. He will come with a real material body, when He returns to be glorified and to reign. There will be a "*real presence*" at length on earth of that holy body which was born of the Virgin Mary and crucified under Pontius Pilate. But it will be a very

different presence from that which is now ignorantly talked of by the Church and the world!

In what fashion will Jesus Christ return the second time? Not as He came the first time, in weakness and humiliation. He shall come, as He told Caiaphas in the judgment-hall, “in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.” He shall come attended by thousands of ministering angels, with all the pomp and majesty that becomes the King of kings. Before His face the frame of this world shall be shaken to the very centre. It was shaken when the law was given on Mount Sinai. It was shaken again when Christ offered Himself for our sins on the cross. How much more shall it be shaken when the throne of mercy shall be taken down, and the great High Priest shall return in power to reign! The earth quaked, and the rocks were rent, and the sun was darkened, when the great High Priest of our profession shed His atoning blood for us on Calvary. Much more then may we expect signs and wonders when He “appears the second time, without sin, unto salvation,”

For what purpose is Christ coming the second time? He is coming to set up His throne of judgment, and to wind up the affairs of this sin-laden and bankrupt world. He is coming to raise the dead and change the living; to gather all mankind before His bar, and to hold a last assize. He is coming to reckon with His professing Churches, and to punish with everlasting destruction the impenitent, the unbelieving, and the ungodly. They will find to their cost that there is such a thing as “the wrath of the Lamb.” He is coming to reward His own believing people, to gather them into one happy home, to wipe away all their tears, and to give them a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

When is the Lord Jesus Christ coming the second time? We do not know the precise season. “Of that day and hour knoweth no man: no, not the angels in heaven.” (Matt. xxiv. 36.) The time is wisely withheld from us, in order that we may be kept in a watchful frame of mind. We know the fact, but we do not know the date. When the iniquity of Christ’s enemies is full,—when the number of His elect is complete,—when the last sinner in the mystical company of His people has been brought to repentance,—then, and not till then, the Lord will return. He will not send the plough of judgment into the field till the last sheaf has been gathered into the barn. Come when He may, His advent will be a very sudden and unexpected one. It will take a sleeping world by surprise, like a thief in the night. It will startle a drowsy Church from its slumber, and make myriads cry, “Give us of your oil; for our lamps are

gone out.” (Matt. xxv. 8.) As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be at the second coming of the Son of Man. Blessed, indeed, is that servant whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching!

Great indeed are the things which our great High Priest shall do at His second coming. He did great things when He came the first time, and spoiled principalities and powers by His sacrifice on the cross. He is doing great things now, by carrying believers safely from grace to glory, by His almighty intercession. But He will put the crown on all His doings for His Church, when He comes forth from within the veil the second time, to confound His enemies and reward His friends. Never will our great High Priest appear so glorious as when He presents His people before the Father’s throne, saying, for the last time, “Of them whom Thou gavest Me, have I lost none.” (John xviii. 9.) He did thoroughly the work He came to do, when He made His soul a sacrifice for sin, and died upon the cross as our substitute. He is doing thoroughly the work He undertook when He ascended up to heaven and sat down on the right hand of God, to be the Priest and Advocate of His people. He will yet do thoroughly His last great work, when He shall come again to complete our salvation, and to present us “without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing,” before His Father’s throne. (Ephes, v. 27.)

Reader, if you know anything of saving religion, lean back your soul on Christ coming again, as well as on Christ dying and Christ interceding. Let the comfortable thought of your Lord’s return sustain you in public troubles, and cheer you in private trials. When the governments of the world are reeling and tottering,—when the air is filled with rumours of wars and revolutions, when the nations of the earth are heaving up and down and ill at ease, when faith is faint and love is waxing cold, and the best of Churches seem running to seed and decay,—when men’s hearts are failing for fear and looking after the things coming on the earth,—in times like these fix your eyes steadily on the second advent of your Lord Jesus Christ. That great High Priest who died for you and intercedes for you, will never forget His people, or allow one lamb of His flock to perish. The disciples on the sea of Galilee, when tossed by storm and worn with toil, were ready perhaps to think their Lord had forgotten them. Yet, just when it was the darkest hour of the night, Jesus came to them “walking on the water,” and they heard His welcome voice, saying, “It is I: be not afraid.” Cast not away your confidence, however dark the horizon may seem around you.

Look *back* to the cross. Look *upward* to the right hand of God. Look *forward* to the day of the promised return. Let experience of the past give lessons for the future. The merciful and faithful High Priest who began a work for you on the cross, will bring that work to a triumphant conclusion. He will never forsake the work of His own hands. "Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." (Heb. x. 37.)

My task is done and my tract is ended. It only remains to wind up the whole subject with a few words of practical application. Living, as we certainly do, in very critical times, not knowing what a day or a year may bring forth, I commend the following words to the attention of all who may read these pages.

(1) First, *a word of friendly inquiry*. Have you a Priest in your religion? Is there any one whom you employ as your Mediator and Advocate with God? Is the person you employ the one true appointed and anointed Priest, Jesus Christ the Lord? Can you lay your hand on your heart and say,—“Christ is mine and I am His? I have come to Him, poured out my heart to Him, received absolution from Him, cast all my burden on Him, placed my soul in His hands”?—Reader, what say you? Depend on it, if you have a religion without a Priest, or any priest except Christ, you are in awful danger; you are yet unpardoned, unforgiven, unfit to die, unprepared to meet God. If you die without Christ as your Priest, you will awake to find you had better never have been born. Reader, mind what I say. It is not enough to talk of “God,” and “mercy,” and “providence,” and “trying all you can,” and “saying your prayers,” and “going to church or chapel,” and being “a member” here and there. It will not do. This will not save you. You need far more than this. You must lay hold on Christ as your Mediator and Advocate, or else you will never be saved. Have you done this? Is Christ your Priest?

(2) My second word shall be *an invitation*. If you feel you are not yet saved, and want to be saved, I invite you this day to come to Christ, as your Priest and Mediator, and entreat Him to save your soul. You need not be afraid to do this. It is His office and business to receive and absolve sinners. It is His delight to see the sons of men coming to Him.—You need not think you are too bad to come. It is the glory of a

physician to cure desperate cases, and it is the glory of Christ to save great sinners. With Him nothing is impossible. Though your sins be as scarlet, He can make them white as snow; though they be red like crimson, He can make them like wool. It is His own royal declaration: “Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.”—Reader, if you are not saved, the fault will be all your own. A Priest is ready, absolution is ready, mercy is ready, pardon is ready, angels are ready to rejoice over you, the Father’s house is ready to receive you. How long haltest thou between two opinions? Why tarriest thou? Wait no longer. Arise and come to Christ this very day. Come at once to the Priest.

(3) My third word shall be *advice*. If Christ is really the Priest of your soul, be sure that you use Him regularly, and keep back nothing from Him. It is a sorrowful fact that many believers enjoy the Gospel far less than they ought to do, for lack of boldness in using the priestly office of Jesus Christ. They go mourning and weeping along the way to heaven, perplexing themselves by poring over their infirmities and sins, and carrying ten times as much weight on their backs as Christ ever meant them to bear. Ignorance, sad ignorance, is too often the simple account of the condition of these people. They think only of the death of Christ, and not of the life of Christ. They think of His finished work on the cross, but forget His priestly intercession. Reader, if this be your case, I advise you to turn over a new leaf, and to change your plan this very day. Think of Jesus Christ as a loving Friend, to whom you may go morning, noon, and night, and get relief from Him every day. “Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He will sustain thee.” (Psalm lv. 22). Live the life of faith in the Son of God, and hold communion with Him continually. Use Him every morning as a Fountain of grace and help, and drink freely of that Fountain. Use Him every evening as a Fountain of absolution and refreshment, and draw out of Him living water. Reader, try this plan, and you will find it for the health of your soul.

(4) My fourth word shall be *a warning*. If Christ is the Priest of your soul, beware of ever giving His office to another. Let no man delude you into supposing that you need any clergyman, or minister, or priest of any Church on earth, to be your spiritual director and soul’s confessor.

Reader, I am sure this warning is greatly needed, in this day. One of the most mischievous delusions of this age, I firmly believe, is the attempt that is widely made to teach the benefit of habitual private confession to a clergyman. Occasional private conference with a minister is one thing. Habitual confession of sin, with habitual absolution, is quite another. The first practice under proper restrictions may do good. The last is a practice fraught with danger, dishonouring to our Lord Jesus Christ, and calculated to do infinite harm to souls.

Where is the warrant of Scripture for habitual private confession and private absolution? I answer, Nowhere at all. Not a single case can be shown in the New Testament where any one confessed sin in private to a minister, or was privately absolved. Not a single word did Paul say to his two young friends in the ministry, Timothy and Titus, to justify habitual private confession and absolution.

Where is the man upon earth who is really fit to be an habitual hearer of confessions?—He only is fit for such an office who has perfect knowledge, and knows that the person confessing is telling all the truth.—He only is fit who will receive no damage himself by hearing others constantly confess and unbosom their secret sins.—He only is fit who is sure to use the knowledge he possesses of others' sins rightly, and can always feel rightly for those who confess.—He only is fit who has full power to pardon the sins he hears confessed, and to set the conscience of the confessing entirely free.—Where shall we find such a man upon earth? I answer boldly, Nowhere at all! There is but one Person fit to be our Confessor, and that One is Christ Jesus the Lord.

Where is the wisdom of ignoring the lessons of history and experience? If there is any fact in Church history which is clearly established, it is the fact that "the confessional" has led to a flood of wickedness and immorality. I challenge any well-informed reader of history to deny this, if he can. He that desires to re-introduce the practice of habitual private confession into the Church of England, may be a devout and well-meaning man, but he is ignorantly seeking to bring back among us a fountain of the worst kind of sins.

Where is the sense or reason of going to an earthly confessor, so long as we can have the best of all priests,—the commissioned and appointed Priest, the perfect Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus! When His ear is deaf, and His heart is frozen, when His hand is feeble, and His power to heal is exhausted, when the treasure-house of His sympathy is empty, and His love and goodwill have

become cold,—then, and not till then, it will be time to turn to earthly priests and earthly confessionals. Thank God, that time is not yet come!

Reader, stand fast in the old paths. Let no man deceive you with vain words. Away with the plausible idea that habitual private confession tends to “deepen spiritual life.” Be sure it does nothing of the kind. Nothing really “deepens spiritual life” which interposes anything between your own soul and Christ. Ministers are useful just so far as they promote private communion between Jesus Christ and your soul. But the moment a minister begins to stand between your soul and Christ, even in the slightest degree, he becomes an enemy and not a friend to your peace.

Reader, once more I repeat my warning. No priest but Christ! No confessor but Christ! No absolver but Christ! No habitual private submission or bowing down in religion to any one but Christ! No spiritual director but Christ! No putting of your conscience in the power of any one but Christ! If you love peace and wish to honour Christ, beware of the confessional or the slightest approach to it. Stand clear of it. Have nothing to do with it. Remember this to your dying day. I declare I had almost rather hear my sons and daughters had gone to the grave than hear they had adopted the habit of going to a confessional.

(5) My last word shall be *an exhortation*. If Christ is the Priest of your soul, live always like one who looks for His second coming. Live like one who longs to see face to face the Saviour in whom he believes. Live like one who would be found ready at any moment,—like a servant prepared for his master. Happy is the Christian who lives the life of faith in Christ, dying, interceding, and coming again! There is a crown laid up for “all that love His appearing.” (2 Tim. iv. 8.) Let us give diligence as long as we live, that this crown may be ours!