

COMING EVENTS AND PRESENT DUTIES.

BEING PLAIN PAPERS
ON PROPHECY

BY

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,
CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,
VICAR OF STRADBROKE, SUFFOLK;
Author of "Expository Thoughts on the Gospels," etc.

LONDON:
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET,
CAVENDISH SQUARE.
IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

1879.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

IN sending forth a new and enlarged edition of this volume, I have nothing to add or withdraw.

I see nothing in the state of the Church or the world to make me alter the opinions on prophecy which I expressed twelve years ago.

I can only say, that I am more and more convinced, as I grow older, that to keep our eyes steadily fixed on the second coming of Christ is one great secret of Christian peace.

If this volume helps any one reader to cultivate the habit of looking at Christ's coming again, as well as Christ crucified, and Christ interceding, I shall be satisfied.

J. C. RYLE.

*Stradbroke Vicarage,
October, 1879.*

PREFACE.

THE volume now in the reader's hands requires a few introductory words of explanation.

It contains little that is entirely new. It consists of eight sermons, delivered on public occasions, at various intervals during my ministry, and afterwards published in the form of tracts. Of these sermons, one or two have perhaps obtained a greater circulation than they deserved, while one or two, in my humble judgment of more real worth, have received comparatively little notice. They are now brought together in their present form, for the convenience of those who wish to have a manual of my views of prophecy, in a compact state.

At the very outset I warn the reader of these pages that he will find here nothing deep or abstruse. I have purposely avoided everything that can be called speculative or conjectural. I have strictly confined myself to a few great prophetic principles, which appear to me written as it were with a sunbeam. I have not attempted to expound such portions of God's Word as Ezekiel's temple, or the symbolical visions of Revelation. I have not ventured to fix any dates. I have not tried to settle the precise order or manner in which predictions of things to come are to be fulfilled. There is nothing I dislike so much in prophetic inquiry as dogmatism or positiveness. Much of the discredit which has fallen on prophetic study has arisen from the fact that many students instead of expounding prophecy have turned prophets themselves.

If any one asks me what my prophetic opinions are, I am quite ready to give

him an answer. Cautious and doubtful as I feel on some points, there are certain great principles about which I have fully made up my mind. I have held by them firmly for many years, and have never had my opinion shaken about them. I have lived in the belief of them for more than a third of a century, and in the belief of them I hope to die. The older I grow, the more do I feel convinced of their truth, and the more satisfied am I that no other principles can explain the state of the Church and the world.

One thing only I wish to premise, before making my statement. The reader must distinctly understand that I do not put forth my prophetic views as articles of faith, but only as my private opinions. I do not say that nobody can be saved who does not agree with me about prophecy. I am not infallible. I am very sensible that holier and better men than myself do not see these subjects with my eyes, and think me utterly mistaken. I condemn nobody. I judge nobody. I only ask liberty to hold and state distinctly my own views. The day will decide who is right. It is the new heart, and faith in Christ's blood, which are absolutely necessary to salvation. The man who knows these two things experimentally may be wrong about prophecy, but he will not miss heaven. .

The following, then, are the chief articles of my prophetic creed

I. I believe that the world will never be completely converted to Christianity by any existing agency, before the end comes. In spite of all that can be done by ministers, churches, schools, and missions, the wheat and the tares will grow together until the harvest; and when the end comes, it will find the earth in much the same state that it was when the flood came in the days of Noah. (Matt. xiii. 24-30; xxiv. 37-39.)

II. I believe that the wide-spread unbelief, indifference, formalism, and wickedness, which are to be seen throughout Christendom, are only what we are taught to expect in God's Word. Troublous times, departures from the faith, evil men waxing worse and worse, love waxing cold, are things distinctly predicted. So far from making me doubt the truth of Christianity, they help to confirm my faith. Melancholy and sorrowful as the sight is, if I did not see it I should think the Bible was not true. (Matt. xxiv. 12; 1 Tim. iv. 1; 2 Tim. iii. 1, 4, 13.)

III. I believe that the grand purpose of the present dispensation is to gather out of the world an elect people, and not to convert all mankind. It does not surprise me at all to hear that the heathen are not all converted when missionaries preach, and that believers are but a little flock in any congregation in my own land. It is precisely the state of things which I expect to find. The Gospel is to be preached "as a witness," and then shall the end come. This is the dispensation of election, and not of universal conversion. (Acts xv. 14; Matt. xxiv. 14.)

IV. I believe that the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is the great event which will wind up the present dispensation, and for which we ought daily to long and pray. “Thy kingdom come,”—“Come, Lord Jesus,” should be our daily prayer. We look backward, if we have faith, to Christ dying on the cross, and we ought to look forward no less, if we have hope, to Christ coming again. (John xiv. 3; 2 Tim. iv. 8; 2 Peter iii. 12.)

V. I believe that the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ will be a real, literal, personal, bodily coming; and that as He went away in the clouds of heaven with His body, before the eyes of men, so in like manner He will return. (Acts i. 11.)

VI. I believe that after our Lord Jesus Christ comes again, the earth shall be renewed, and the curse removed; the devil shall be bound, the godly shall be rewarded, the wicked shall be punished; and that before He comes there shall be neither resurrection, judgment, nor millennium, and that not till after He comes shall the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. (Acts iii. 21; Isa. xxv. 6-9; 1 Thess. iv. 14-18; Rev. xx. 1, etc.)

VII. I believe that the Jews shall ultimately be gathered again as a separate nation, restored to their own land, and converted to the faith of Christ, after going through great tribulation. (Jer. xxx. 10, 11; xxxi. 10; Rom. xi. 25, 26; Dan. xii. 1; Zech. xiii. 8, 9.)

VIII. I believe that the literal sense of Old Testament prophecies has been far too much neglected by the Churches, and is far too much neglected at the present day, and that under the mistaken system of *spiritualizing and accommodating* Bible language, Christians have too often completely missed its meaning. (Luke xxiv. 25, 26.)

IX. I do not believe that the preterist scheme of interpreting the Apocalypse, which regards the book as almost entirely *fulfilled*, or the futurist scheme, which regards it as almost entirely *unfulfilled*, are either of them to be implicitly followed. The truth, I expect, will be found to lie between the two.

X. I believe that the Roman Catholic Church is the great predicted apostacy from the faith, and is Babylon and antichrist, although I think it highly probable that a more complete development of antichrist will yet be exhibited to the world. (2 Thess. ii. 3-11; 1 Tim. iv. 1-3.)

XI. Finally, I believe that it is for the safety, happiness, and comfort of all true Christians, to expect as little as possible from Churches or Governments under the present dispensation,—to hold themselves ready for tremendous convulsions and changes of all things established,—and to expect their good things only

from Christ's second advent.

The student of prophecy will see at a glance that there are many subjects on which I abstain from giving an opinion. About the precise time when the present dispensation will end,—about the manner in which the heathen will be converted—about the mode in which the Jews will be restored to their own land,—about the burning up of the earth,—about the first resurrection,—about the rapture of the saints,—about the distinction between the appearing and the coming of Christ,—about the future siege of Jerusalem and the last tribulation of the Jews,—about the binding of Satan before the millennium begins,—about the duration of the millennium,—about the loosing of Satan at the end of the thousand years,—about the destruction of Gog and Magog,—about the precise nature and position of the new Jerusalem,—about all these things, I purposely decline expressing any opinion. I could say something about them all, but it would be little better than conjecture. I am thankful that others have more light about them than I have. For myself, I feel unable at present to speak positively. If I have learned anything in studying prophecy, I think I have learned the wisdom of not “making haste” to decide what is true.

I am well aware that the views I have laid down appear to many persons very gloomy and discouraging. The only answer I make to that charge is this:—Are they Scriptural? Are they in accordance with the lessons of history and experience?—To my mind they certainly are. I see human failure and human corruption stamped on the conclusion of all dispensations preceding our own. I see much in the present state of the world to make me expect that the present dispensation will not end better than those which have gone before. In short, there seems an inherent tendency to decay in everything that man touches. There is no such thing as creature perfection. God is teaching that lesson by all His successive modes of dealing with mankind. There will be no perfection till the Lord comes. The Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Christian dispensations all tend to prove this. Those words of Scripture shall yet be verified, “I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until He come whose right it is; and I will give it Him.” (Ezek. xxi. 27.) When the Lord Jesus comes back to earth, and the tabernacle of God is with men, then will there be perfection, but not till then. God will have all the glory at last, and all the world shall confess that without God man can do nothing. God shall be “all in all.” (1 Cor. xv. 28.)

The one point on which I desire to fix the eyes of my own soul, is the second personal coming of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To that “blessed hope and glorious appearing,” I wish, by God's help, to direct all who read this volume. God forbid that anyone should neglect present duties! To sit idly waiting for Christ, and not to attend to the business of our respective positions, is not Christianity, but fanaticism. Let us only remember in all our daily employments, that we

serve a *Master who is coming again*. If I can only stir up one Christian to think more of that second coming, and to keep it more prominently before his mind, I feel that the volume will not have been published in vain.

If any one ask me why I have chosen this particular period for the republication of these prophetic tracts, I think it is sufficient answer to point to the times in which we live. I do not forget that we are poor judges of our own days, and are very apt to exaggerate their importance. But I doubt much whether there ever was a time in the history of our country, when the horizon on all sides, both political and ecclesiastical, was so thoroughly black and lowering. In every direction we see men's hearts "failing for fear, and for looking for those things that seem coming on the earth." Everything around us seems unscrewed, loosened, and out of joint. The fountains of the great deep appear to be breaking up. Ancient institutions are tottering, and ready to fall. Social and ecclesiastical systems are failing, and crumbling away. Church and State seem alike convulsed to their very foundations, and what the end of this convulsion may be no man can tell.

Whether the last days of old England have really come,—whether her political greatness is about to pass away,—whether her Protestant Church is about to have her candlestick removed,—whether in the coming crash of nations England is to perish like Amalek, or at length to be saved, and escape "so as by fire,"—all these are points which I dare not attempt to settle: a very few years will decide them. But I am sure there never was a time when it was more imperatively needful to summon believers to "cease from man," to stand on their watch-towers, and to build all their hopes on the second coming of the Lord. Happy is he who has learned to expect little from Parliaments or Convocations, from Statesmen or from Bishops, and to look steadily for Christ's appearing! He is the man who will not be disappointed.

J. C. RYLE.

*Stradbroke Vicarage,
August, 1867.*

P.S. The reader of this volume will probably observe that some of the thoughts and ideas are occasionally repeated. They will kindly remember that this arises from the sermons which comprise it having been delivered at different places, and at long intervals. I have thought it best and wisest, for many reasons, to reprint them without alteration.

“WATCH.”

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

“And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

“They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

“But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

“While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

“And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh: go ye out to meet him.

“Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

“And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

“But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

“And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

“Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

“But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

“Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”—
(MATT. xxv. 1–13.)

THE passage of Scripture before our eyes is one that deserves the close attention of all professing Christians. We ought to read it again and again, until we are thoroughly familiar with every sentence that it contains. It is a passage that concerns us all, whether ministers or people, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, old or young. It is a passage that can never be known too well.

These thirteen verses make up one of the most solemn parables that our Lord Christ ever spoke; partly because of the time at which it was spoken, partly because of the matter which it contains.

As to the *time*, it was but a few days before our Lord’s crucifixion. It was spoken within view of Gethsemane and Calvary, of the cross and the grave.

As to the *matter*, it stands as a beacon to the Church of Christ in all ages. It is a witness against carelessness and slothfulness,—against apathy and indifference about religion,—and a witness of no uncertain sound. It cries to thoughtless sinners, “Awake!” It cries to true servants of Christ, “Watch!”

There are many trains of thought which this parable opens up, that I must of necessity leave alone. It would be foreign to my purpose to follow them out. I do not sit down to compose a learned commentary, but to write a simple practical address. I shall only clear my way by explaining two things, which otherwise might not be understood. And when I have done that, I shall keep to those main truths which it is most useful for us to know.

The marriage customs of the country where the parable was spoken, call for a few words of explanation. Marriages there generally took place in the evening.

The bridegroom and his friends came in procession to the bride's house after nightfall. The young women who were the bride's friends were all assembled there, waiting for him. As soon as the lamps and torches, carried by the bridegroom's party, were seen coming in the distance, these young women lighted their lamps, and went forth to meet him. Then, having formed one united party, they all returned together to the bride's home. As soon as they arrived there they entered in, the doors were shut, the marriage ceremony went forward, and no one else was admitted. All these were familiar things to those who heard the Lord Jesus speak; and it is right and proper that you should have them in your mind's eye while you read this parable.

The figures and emblems used in the parable also call for some explanation. I will give you my own view of their meaning. I may be wrong. I freely admit that they are not always interpreted exactly in the same way. But you have a right to have my opinion, and I will give it you shortly and decidedly.

I believe the parable to be a prophecy all the way through.

I believe the time spoken of in the parable, is the time when Christ shall return in person to this world, and a time yet to come.. The very first word, the word "then," compared with the end of the twenty-fourth chapter, appears to me to settle that question.

I believe the ten virgins carrying lamps represent the whole body of professing Christians,—the visible Church of Christ.

I believe the Bridegroom represents our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

I take the wise virgins to be the true believers, the real disciples of Christ, the converted part of the visible Church.

I take the foolish to be the mere nominal Christians, the unconverted, the whole company of those who have no vital godliness.¹

I take the lamps, which all alike carried, to be that mere outward profession of Christianity which every one possesses who has been baptized and has never formally renounced his baptism.

I take the oil, which some virgins had with their lamps, and others had not, to be the grace of the Holy Ghost,—that "unction of the Holy One" which is the mark of all true Christians.

I consider the coming of the Bridegroom to mean the second personal coming or advent of the Lord Christ, when He shall return in the clouds with glory.

I consider the going in to the marriage of the wise virgins, to mean the believer's entrance into his full reward in the day of Christ's appearing.

I consider the shutting out of the foolish virgins to mean the exclusion from Christ's kingdom and glory of every soul whom He shall find unconverted at His second advent.

I offer these short explanations to your attention. I am not going to enter into

any unprofitable discussion about them. And without saying another word in the way of preface, I will at once go on to point out the great practical lessons which the parable of the ten virgins is meant to teach us.

I. Learn, first of all, that the visible Church of Christ will always be a mixed body till Christ comes again.

II. Learn, secondly, that the visible Church is always in danger of neglecting the doctrine of Christ's second advent.

III. Learn, thirdly, that whenever Christ does come again, it will be a very sudden event.

IV. Learn, fourthly, that Christ's second advent will make an immense change to all the members of the visible Church, both good and bad.

Reader, let me try to set each of these four truths plainly before you. If I can bring you, by God's help, to see their vast importance, I believe I shall have done your soul an essential service.

I. Learn, first of all, that *the visible Church of Christ will always be a mixed body, till Christ comes again.*

I can gather no other meaning from the beginning of the parable we are now considering. I there see wise and foolish virgins mingled together in one company,—virgins with oil, and virgins with no oil, all side by side And I see this state of things going on till the very moment the Bridegroom appears. I see all this, and I cannot avoid the conclusion that the visible Church will always be a mixed body till Jesus comes again. Its members will never be all unbelievers: Christ will always have His witnesses. Its members will never be all believers: there will always be a vast proportion of formality, unbelief, hypocrisy, and false profession.

I frankly say that I can find no standing ground for the common opinion that the visible Church will gradually advance to a state of perfection,—that it will become better and better, holier and holier, up to the very end,—and that little by little the whole body shall become full of light. I see no warrant of Scripture for believing that sin will gradually dwindle away in the earth, consume, melt, and disappear by inches, like the last snow-drift in spring. Nor yet do I see warrant for believing that holiness will gradually increase, like the banyan tree of the East, until it blossoms, blooms, and fills the face of the world with fruit. I know that thousands think in this way. All I say is, that I cannot see it in God's Word.

I fully admit that the Gospel appears sometimes to make rapid progress in some countries; but that it ever does more than call out an elect people, I utterly deny. It never did more in the days of the Apostles. Out of all the cities that Paul visited, there is not the slightest proof that in any one the whole population became believers. It never has done more in any country, from the time of the Apostle down to the present day. There never yet was a parish or congregation in any part of the

world,—however favoured in the ministry it enjoyed,—there never was one, I believe, in which all the people were converted. At all events, I never read or heard of it, and my belief is the thing never has been, and never will. I believe that now is the time of *election*, not of universal conversion. Now is the time for the *gathering out* of Christ's little flock. The time of general obedience is yet to come.

I fully admit that missions are doing a great work among the heathen, and that schools and district-visiting are rescuing thousands from the devil at home. I do not undervalue these things. I would to God that all professing Christians would value them more. But men appear to me to forget that Gospel religion is often withering in one place while it is flourishing in another. They look at the progress of Christianity in the West of Europe. They forget how fearfully it has lost ground in the East. They point to the little flood-tide of Tinnevelly and Krishnaghur. They forget the tremendous ebb in North Africa, Egypt, and Asia Minor. And as for any signs that all the ends of the earth shall turn to the Lord, under the present order of things, there are none. God's work is going forward, as it always has done. The Gospel is being preached, for a witness to every quarter of the globe. The elect are being brought to Christ one by one, and there is everything to encourage us to persevere. But more than this no missionary can report in any station in the world.

I long for the conversion of all mankind as much as anyone. But I believe it is utterly beyond the reach of any instrumentality that man possesses. I quite expect that the earth will one day be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. But I believe that day will be in an entirely new dispensation: it will not be till after the Lord's return. I would not hesitate to preach the Gospel, and offer Christ's salvation to every man and woman alive; but that there always will be a vast amount of unbelief and wickedness until the second advent, I am fully persuaded. The Gospel-net may perhaps be spread far more widely than it has been hitherto, but the angels shall find abundance of bad fish in it as well as good, in the last day. The Gospel labourers may possibly be multiplied a thousand-fold, and I pray God it may be so; but however faithfully they may sow, a large proportion of tares will be found growing together with the wheat, at the time of harvest.

Reader, how is it with your own soul? Remember, that till the Lord Jesus Christ comes again there always will be wise and foolish in the Church. Now, which are you?

The *wise* are they who have that wisdom which the Holy Ghost alone can give. They know their own sinfulness. They know Christ as their own precious Saviour. They know how to walk and please God, and they act upon their knowledge. They look on life as a season of preparation for eternity,—not as an end, but as a way,—not as a harbour, but as a voyage,—not as a home, but as a journey,—not as their full age, but their time of school. Happy are they who know these things!

The world may despise them, but they are the wise.

The *foolish* are they who are without spiritual knowledge. They neither know God, nor Christ, nor sin, nor their own hearts, nor the world, nor heaven, nor hell, nor the value of their souls as they ought. There is no folly like this. To expect wages after doing no work,—or prosperity after taking no pains,—or learning after neglecting books,—this is rank folly. But to expect heaven without faith in Christ,—or the kingdom of God without being born again,—or the crown of glory without the cross and a holy walk,—all this is greater folly still, and yet more common. Alas! for the folly of the world!

Reader, till the Lord Jesus Christ comes, there always will be some who have grace, and some who have not grace, in the visible Church. Now which are you? How is it with your own soul?

Some have nothing but the name of Christian: others have the reality. Some have only the outward profession of religion: others have the possession also. Some are content if they belong to the Church; others are never content, unless they are also united by faith to Christ. Some are satisfied if they have only the baptism of water: others are never satisfied unless they also feel within the baptism of the Spirit, and the sprinkling of the blood of atonement. Some stop short in the form of Christianity: others never rest until they have also the substance.

Reader, the visible Church of Christ is made up of these two classes. There always have been such. There always will be such until the end. There must, no doubt, be borderers and waverers, whom man's eye cannot make out, though God's eye can. But gracious and graceless, wise and foolish, make up the whole visible Church of Christ. You yourself are described and written down in this parable. You are either one of the wise virgins, or one of the foolish. You have either got the oil of grace, or you have got none. You are either a member of Christ, or a child of the devil. You are either travelling towards heaven, or towards hell. Never for a moment forget this. This is the point that concerns your soul. Whatever your opinion may be on other points, this is the one that you should never lose sight of. Let not the devil divert your attention from it. Say to yourself, as you read this parable, "I am spoken of here."

II. Learn, secondly, that *the visible Church is always in danger of neglecting the doctrine of Christ's second advent.*

I draw this truth from that solemn verse in the parable, "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." I am quite aware that many good men explain these words in a different way. But I dare not call any man master. I feel that I am set for the proclamation of that which my own conscience tells me is true, and I cannot be bound by the opinions of others. There are such things as erroneous interpretations received by tradition, as well as false doctrines received by

tradition, and against both I think we ought to be on our guard.

I do not believe that the words, “they all slumbered and slept,” mean the death of all, though many think so. To my mind such an interpretation is contrary to plain facts. All the professing Church will not be sleeping the sleep of death when Jesus comes again. St. Paul himself says in one place, “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed” (1 Cor. xv. 51);—and in another, “We which are alive and remain shall be caught up, to meet the Lord in the air.” (1 Thess. iv. 17) Now the interpretation of which I speak involves a most awkward contradiction to these two plain texts.

I do not believe that the words were meant to teach us that the whole professing Church will get into a slumbering and sleeping state of soul, though many think so. I would not be misunderstood in saying this. I do not for a moment deny that the love of even the brightest Christians is very cold, and that neither their faith nor works are what they ought to be. All I mean to say is, that this is not the truth which appears to me to be taught here. Such a view of the text seems to me to wipe away that broad line of distinction between believers and unbelievers, which, with all the short-comings of believers, undoubtedly does exist. Sleep is one of those very emblems which the Spirit has chosen to represent the state of the unconverted man. “Awake, thou that sleepest,” He says, “and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Ephes. v. 14.)

But what does the verse mean? I believe that the words “all slumbered and slept,” are to be interpreted with a special regard to the great event on which the whole parable hinges;—even the second advent of Christ. And I believe our Lord’s meaning was simply this, that during the interval between His first and second advent, the whole Church, both believers and unbelievers, would get into a dull and dim-sighted state of soul about the blessed doctrine of His own personal return to earth.

And, reader, I say deliberately, that so far as my own judgment goes, there never was a saying of our Lord’s more thoroughly verified by the event. I say that of all doctrines of the Gospel, the one about which Christians have become most unlike the first Christians, in their sense of its true value, is the doctrine of Christ’s second advent. I am obliged to say this of all denominations of Protestants. I know not of any exception. In our view of man’s corruption, of justification by faith, of our need of the sanctifying work of the Spirit, of the sufficiency of Scripture,—upon these points I believe we should find that English believers were much of one mind with believers at Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, or Rome, in former times. But in our view of the second advent of Christ, I fear we should find there was a mighty difference between us and them, if our experience could be compared. I am afraid we should find that we fall woefully short of them in our estimate of its importance; that in our system of doctrine it is a star of the fifteenth

magnitude, while in their's it was one of the first. In one word, we should discover, that compared to them in this matter, *we slumber and sleep*.

I must speak my mind on this subject, now that I am upon it. I do so most unwillingly. I do so at the risk of giving offence, and of rubbing against the prejudices of many whom I love. But it is a cross I feel it a duty to take up. And speak I must.

I submit, then, that in the matter of Christ's second coming and kingdom, the Church of Christ has not dealt fairly with the prophecies of the Old Testament. We have gone on far too long refusing to see that there are two personal advents of Christ spoken of in those prophecies,—an advent in humiliation, and an advent in glory,—an advent to suffer, and an advent to reign,—a personal advent to carry the cross, and a personal advent to wear the crown. We have been “slow of heart to believe ALL that the Prophets have written.” (Luke xxiv. 25.) The Apostles went into one extreme: they stumbled at Christ's sufferings. We have gone into the other extreme: we have stumbled at Christ's glory. We have got into a confused habit of speaking of the kingdom of Christ as already set up amongst us, and have shut our eyes to the fact that the devil is still prince of this world, and served by the vast majority; and that our Lord, like David in Adullam, though anointed, is not yet set upon His throne. We have got into a vicious habit of taking all the promises spiritually, and all the denunciations and threats literally. The denunciations against Babylon, and Nineveh, and Edom, and Tyre, and Egypt, and the rebellious Jews, we have been content to take *literally* and hand over to our neighbours. The blessings and promises of glory to Zion, Jerusalem, Jacob, and Israel, we have taken *spiritually*, and comfortably applied them to ourselves and the Church of Christ. To bring forward proofs of this would be waste of time. No man can hear many sermons, and read many commentaries, without being aware that it is a fact.

Now I believe this to have been an unfair system of interpreting Scripture. I hold that the first and primary sense of every Old Testament promise as well as threat is the *literal* one,—and that Jacob means Jacob, Jerusalem means Jerusalem, Zion means Zion, and Israel means Israel, as much as Egypt means Egypt, and Babylon means Babylon. That primary sense, I believe, we have sadly lost sight of. We have adapted and accommodated to the Church of Christ the promises that were spoken by God to Israel and Zion. I do not mean to say that this accommodation is in no sense allowable. But I do mean to say that the primary sense of every prophecy and promise in Old Testament prophecy was intended to have a literal fulfilment, and that this literal fulfilment has been far too much put aside and thrust into a corner. And by so doing I think we have exactly fulfilled our Lord's words in the parable of the ten virgins,—we have proved that we are *slumbering and sleeping* about the second advent of Christ.

But I submit further, that in the interpretation of the New Testament, the Church of Christ has dealt almost as unfairly with our Lord's second advent, as she has done in the interpretation of the Old. Men have got into the habit of putting a strange sense upon many of those passages which speak of "the coming of the Son of Man," or of the Lord's "appearing." And this habit has been far too readily submitted to. Some tell us that the coming of the Son of Man often means death. No one can read the thousands of epitaphs in churchyards, in which some text about the coming of Christ is thrust in, and not perceive how widespread this view is. Some tell us that our Lord's coming means the destruction of Jerusalem. This is a very common way of interpreting the expression. Many find the literal Jerusalem everywhere in New Testament prophecies, though, oddly enough, they refuse to see it in the Old Testament prophecies, and, like Aaron's rod, they make it swallow up everything else. Some tell us that our Lord's coming means the general judgment, and the end of all things. This is their one answer to all inquiries about things to come.

Now I believe that all these interpretations are entirely beside the mark. I have not the least desire to underrate the importance of such subjects as death and judgment. I willingly concede that the destruction of Jerusalem is typical of many things connected with our Lord's second advent, and is spoken of in chapters where that mighty event is foretold. But I must express my own firm belief that the coming of Christ is one distinct thing, and that death, judgment, and the destruction of Jerusalem, are three other distinct things. And the wide acceptance which these strange interpretations have met with I hold to be one more proof that in the matter of Christ's second advent the Church has long *slumbered and slept*.

The plain truth of Scripture I believe to be as follows. When the number of the elect is accomplished, Christ will come again to this world with power and great glory. He will raise His saints, and gather them to Himself. He will punish with fearful judgments all who are found His enemies, and reward with glorious rewards all His believing people. He will take to Himself His great power, and reign, and establish an universal kingdom. He will gather the scattered tribes of Israel, and place them once more in their own land. As He came the first time in person, so He will come the second time in person. As He went away from earth visibly, so He will return visibly. As He literally rode upon an ass,—was literally sold for thirty pieces of silver,—had His hands and feet literally pierced,—was numbered literally with the transgressors,—and had lots literally cast upon His raiment,—and all that Scripture might be fulfilled,—so also will He literally come, literally set up a kingdom, and literally reign over the earth, because the very same Scripture has said it shall be so.

The words of the angels, in the first of Acts, are plain and unmistakable: "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.) So also the words of the Apostle Peter: “The 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 heavens must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts iii. 19–21.) So also the words of the Psalmist: “When the Lord shall build up Zion He shall appear in His glory.” (Ps. cii.16.) So also the words of Zechariah: “The Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.” (Zech. xiv. 5.) So also the words of Isaiah: “The Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously.” (Isai. xxiv. 23.) So also the words of Jeremiah: “I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord, and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.” “I will bring again the captivity of Jacob’s tents, and have mercy on his dwelling-place; and the city shall be built on her own heap.” (Jer. xxx. 3, 18.) So also the words of Daniel: “Behold one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away; and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.” (Dan. vii. 13, 14.) All these texts are to my mind plain prophecies of Christ’s second coming and kingdom. All are yet without their accomplishment, and all shall yet be literally and exactly fulfilled.

I say “literally and exactly fulfilled,” and I say so advisedly. From the first day that I began to read the Bible with my heart, I have never been able to see these texts, and hundreds like them, in any other light. It always seemed to me that as we take literally the texts foretelling that the walls of Babylon shall be cast down, so we ought to take literally the texts foretelling that the walls of Zion shall be built up,—that as according to prophecy the Jews were literally scattered, so according to prophecy the Jews will be literally gathered,—and that as the least and minutest predictions were made good on the subject of our Lord’s coming to suffer, so the minutest predictions shall be made good which describe our Lord’s coming to reign. And I have long felt it is one of the greatest shortcomings of the Church of Christ that we ministers do not preach enough about this advent of Christ, and that private believers do not think enough about it. A few of us here and there receive the doctrine, and profess to love it; but the number of such persons is comparatively very small. And, after all, we none of us live on it, feed on it, act on it, work from it, take comfort in it, as much as God intended us to do. In short, the Bridegroom tarries, and we all *slumber and sleep*.

It proves nothing against the doctrine of Christ’s second coming and kingdom, that it has sometimes been fearfully abused. I should like to know what doctrine

of the Gospel has not been abused. Salvation by grace has been made a pretext for licentiousness,—election, an excuse for all manner of unclean living,—and justification by faith, a warrant for Antinomianism. But if men will draw wrong conclusions we are not therefore obliged to throw aside good principles. We do not give up the Gospel because of the outrageous conduct of the Anabaptists of Munster, or the extravagant assertions of Saltmarsh and William Huntingdon, or the strange proceedings of Jumpers and Shakers. And where is the fairness of telling us that we ought to reject the second advent of Christ because there were Fifth Monarchy Men in the days of the Commonwealth, and Irvingites and Millerites in our own time. Alas, men must be hard pressed for an argument when they have no better reasons than this!

It proves nothing against the second advent of Christ, that those who hold the doctrine differ among themselves on many particular points in prophecy. Such differences need never stumble any one who recollects that unity on great points is perfectly consistent with disagreement on small ones. Luther and Zuinglius differed widely in their views of the Lord's Supper: yet who would think of saying that therefore Protestantism is all false? Fletcher and Toplady were both clergymen in the Church of England, but differed widely about Calvinism: yet where would be the sense of saying that all Evangelical religion was therefore untrue? In common fairness this ought to be remembered when people talk of the differences among those who study prophecy. It is possible for men to differ much as to the meaning they place on the symbols in the book of Revelation, and yet on the matter of Christ's coming and kingdom they may be entirely and substantially agreed.

It proves nothing against the doctrine that it is encompassed with many difficulties. This I fully concede. The order of events connected with our Lord's coming, and the manner of His kingdom when it is set up, are both deep subjects, and hard to be understood. But I firmly believe that the difficulties connected with any other system of interpreting unfulfilled prophecy, are just twice as many as those which are said to stand in our way. I believe too that the difficulties connected with our Lord's second coming, are not half so many as those connected with His first, and that it was a far more improbable thing, "a priori," that the Son of God should come to *suffer*, than it is that He should come to *reign*. And, after all, what have we to do with the "how," and "in what manner" "prophecies are to be fulfilled? Is our miserable understanding of what is possible to be the measure and limit of God's dealings? The only question we have to do with is, "Has God said a thing?" If He has, we ought not to doubt it shall be done.

For myself, I can only give my own individual testimony; but the little I know experimentally of the doctrine of Christ's second coming, makes me regard it as most practical and precious, and makes me long to see it more generally received.

I find it a powerful spring and stimulus to holy living,—a motive for patience,

for moderation, for spiritual-mindedness,—a test for the employment of time, and a gauge for all my actions: “Should I like my Lord to find me in this place,—should I like Him to find me so doing?”

I find it the strongest argument for missionary work. The time is short. The Lord is at hand. The gathering out from all nations will soon be accomplished. The heralds and forerunners of the King will soon have proclaimed the Gospel in every nation. The night is far spent. The King will soon be here.

I find it the best answer to the infidel. He sneers at our churches and chapels, at our sermons and services, at our tracts and our schools. He points to the millions who care nothing for Christianity, after 1800 years of preaching. He asks me how I can account for it, if Christianity be true? I answer, It was never said that all the world would believe, and serve Christ under the present dispensation. I tell him the state of things he ridicules was actually foreseen, and the number of true Christians, it was predicted, would be few. But I tell him that Christ’s kingdom is yet to come; and that though we see not yet all things put under Him, they will be so one day.

I find it the best argument with the Jew. If I do not take all the prophecy of Isaiah literally, I know not how I can persuade him that the fifty-third chapter is literally fulfilled. But if I do, I have a resting-place for my lever, which I know he cannot shake. How men can expect the Jews to see a Messiah coming to suffer in Old Testament prophecies, if they do not themselves see in them a Messiah coming to reign, is past my understanding.

And now, is there any one among the readers of this address who cannot receive the doctrine of Christ’s second advent and kingdom? I invite that man to consider the subject calmly and dispassionately. Dismiss from your mind traditional interpretations. Separate the doctrine from the mistakes and blunders of many who hold it. Do not reject the foundation because of the wood, hay, and stubble which some have built upon it. Do not condemn it and cast it aside because of injudicious friends. Only examine the texts which speak of it, as calmly and fairly as you weigh texts in the Romish, Arian, or Socinian controversies, and I am hopeful as to the result on your mind. Alas, if texts of Scripture were always treated as unceremoniously as I have known texts to be treated by those who dislike the doctrine of Christ’s second advent, I should indeed tremble for the cause of truth!

Is there any one among the readers of this address who agrees with the principles I have tried to advocate? I beseech that man to endeavour to realize the second coming of Christ more and more. Truly we feel it but little compared to what we ought to do, at the very best. Be gentle in argument with those that differ from you. Remember that a man may be mistaken on this subject, and yet be a holy child of God. It is not the slumbering on this subject that ruins souls, but the want

of grace! Above all, avoid dogmatism and positiveness, and specially about symbolical prophecy. It is a sad truth, but a truth never to be forgotten, that none have injured the doctrine of the second coming so much as its over-zealous friends.

III. Learn, in the third place, that *whenever Christ does come again, it will be a very sudden event.*

I draw that truth from the verse in the parable which says, "At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him."

I do not know when Christ will come again. I should think it most presumptuous if I said that I did. I am no prophet, though I love the subject of prophecy. I dislike all fixing of dates, and naming of years, and I believe it has done great harm. I only assert positively that Christ will come again one day to set up His kingdom on earth, and that whether the day be near, or whether it be far off, it will take the Church and the world exceedingly by surprise.

It will come on men suddenly. It will break on the world all at once. It will not have been talked over, prepared for, and looked forward to by everybody. It will awaken men's minds like the cry of fire at midnight. It will startle men's hearts like a trumpet blown at their bedside in their first sleep. Like Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, they will know nothing till the very waters are upon them. Like Dathan, and Abiram, and their company, when the earth opened under them, the moment of their hearing the report of the visitation will be the same moment when they will see it with their eyes. Before they can recover their breath and know where they are, they shall find that the Lord is come.

I suspect there is a vague notion floating in men's minds that the present order of things will not end quite so suddenly. I suspect men cling to the idea that there will be a kind of Saturday night in the world,—a time when all will know the day of the Lord is near; a time when all will be able to cleanse their consciences, look out their wedding garments, shake off their earthly business, and prepare to meet their God. If any reader of this address has got such a notion into his head, I charge him to give it up for ever. If anything is clear in unfulfilled prophecy, this one fact seems clear,—that the Lord's coming will be sudden, and take men by surprise. And any view of prophecy which destroys the possibility of its being sudden,—whether by interposing a vast number of events as yet to happen, or by placing the millennium between ourselves and the advent—any such view appears to my mind to carry with it a fatal defect. Everything which is written in Scripture on this point confirms the truth, that Christ's second coming will be sudden. "As a snare shall it come," says one place.—"As a thief in the night," says another.—"As the lightning," says a third.—"In such an hour as ye think not," says a fourth.—"When they shall say, Peace and safety," says a fifth. (Luke xxi. 35; 1 Thess. v. 2; Luke xvii. 24; Matt. xxiv. 44; 1 Thess. v. 3.)

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself uses two most striking comparisons, when dwelling on this subject. Both are most instructive, and both ought to raise in us solemn thoughts. In one He compares His coming to the days of Lot. In the days when Lot fled from Sodom, the men of Sodom were buying and selling, eating and drinking, planting and building. They thought of nothing but earthly things: they were entirely absorbed in them. They despised Lot's warning. They mocked at his counsel. The sun rose on the earth as usual. All things were going on as they had done for hundreds of years. They saw no sign of danger. But now mark what our Lord says: "The same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed." (Luke xvii. 28–30.)

In the other passage I allude to, our Lord compares His coming to the days of Noah. Do you remember how it was in Noah's day? Stay a little, and let me remind you. When the flood came on the earth in Noah's time, there was no appearance beforehand of anything so awful being near. The days and nights were following each other in regular succession. The grass, and trees, and crops were growing as usual. The business of the world was going on. And though Noah preached continually of coming danger, and warned men to repent, no one believed what he said. But at last, one day the rain began and did not cease: the waters rose and did not stop: the flood came, and swelled, and went on, and covered one thing after another; and all were drowned who were not in the ark. Now mark what our Lord says: "As it was in the Days of Noe, so shall it also be in the days of the Son of Man: they did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." (Luke xvii. 26, 27.) The flood took the world by surprise,—so also will the coming of the Son of Man. In the midst of the world's business, when everything is going on just as usual,—in such an hour as this the Lord Jesus Christ will return.

Reader, the suddenness of the Lord's second advent is a truth that should lead every professing Christian to great searchings of heart. It should lead him to serious thought, both about himself and about the world.

Think for a moment how little the world is prepared for such an event. Look at the towns and cities of the earth, and think of them. Mark how most men are entirely absorbed in the things of time, and utterly engrossed with the business of their callings. Banks, counting-houses, shops, politics, law, medicine, commerce, railways, banquets, balls, theatres,—each and all are drinking up the hearts and souls of thousands, and thrusting out the things of God. Think what a fearful shock the sudden stoppage of all these things would be, the sudden stoppage which will be in the day of Christ's appearing. If only one great house of business stops payment now, it makes a great sensation. What then shall be the crash when

the whole machine of worldly affairs shall stand still at once? From money-counting and earthly scheming, from racing after riches and wrangling about trifles, to be hurried away to meet the King of kings, how tremendous the change! From dancing and dressing, from opera-going and novel-reading, to be summoned away by the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, how awful the transition! Yet remember, all this shall one day be.

Look at the rural parishes of such a land as ours, and think of them. See how the minds of the vast majority of their inhabitants are buried in farms and allotments, in cattle and corn, in rent and wages, in rates and tithes, in digging and sowing, in buying and selling, in planting and building. See how many there are who evidently care for nothing, and feel nothing, excepting the things of this world; who reckon [=care for] nothing whether their minister preaches law or gospel, Christ or antichrist, and would be utterly unconcerned if the Archbishop of Canterbury was turned out of Lambeth Palace, and the Pope of Rome put in his place. See how many there are of whom it can only be said that their bellies and their pockets are their gods. And then fancy the awful effect of a sudden call to meet the Lord Christ,—a call to a day of reckoning, in which the price of wheat and the rate of wages shall be nothing, and the Bible shall be the only rule of trial! And yet remember, all this shall one day be.

Reader, picture these things to your mind's eye. Picture your own house, your own family, your own fire-side. What will be found there? Picture, above all, your own feelings, your own state of mind. And then, remember, that this is the end towards which the world is hastening. There will be no long notice to quit. This is the way in which the world's affairs will be wound up. This is an event which may possibly happen in your own time. And surely you cannot avoid the conclusion that the second coming of Christ is no mere curious speculation. It is an event of vast practical importance to your own soul.

“Ah!” I can imagine some reader saying, “This is all foolishness, raving, and nonsense; this writer is beside himself. This is all extravagant fanaticism. Where is the likelihood, where is the probability of all this? The world is going on as it always did. The world will last my time.” Do not say so. Do not drive away the subject by such language as this. This is the way that men talked in the days of Noah and Lot, but what happened? They found to their cost that Noah and Lot were right. Do not say so. The Apostle Peter foretold, eighteen hundred years ago, that men would talk in this way. “There shall come in the last day scoffers,” he tells us, “saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” (2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.) Oh, do not fulfil his prophecy by your unbelief!

Where is the raving and fanaticism of the things which I have been saying? Show it to me if you can. I calmly assert that the present order of things will come

to an end one day. Will any one deny that? Will any one tell me we are to go on as we do now for ever?—I calmly say that Christ's second coming will be the end of the present order of things. I have said so because the Bible says it.—I have calmly said that Christ's second coming will be a sudden event, whenever it may be, and may possibly be in our own time. I have said so, because this and thus I find it written in the Word of God. If you do not like it, I am sorry for it. One thing only you must remember, you are finding fault with the Bible, not with me.

IV. Learn, in the last place, that *Christ's second coming will make an immense change to all members of the visible Church, both good and bad.*

I draw this truth from the concluding portion of the parable,—from the discovery of the foolish virgins that their lamps were gone out,—from their anxious address to the wise, "Give us of your oil,"—from their vain knocking at the door when too late, crying, "Lord, Lord, open to us,"—from the happy admission of the wise who were found ready, in company with the bridegroom.

Each and all of these points are full of food for thought. But I have neither time nor space to dwell upon them particularly. I can only take one single broad view of all. To all who have been baptized in the name of Christ,—converted or unconverted,—believers or unbelievers,—holy or unholy,—godly or ungodly,—wise or foolish,—gracious or graceless,—to all the second advent of Christ will be an immense change.

It will be an *immense change to the ungodly*,—to all who are found mere nominal Christians,—a change both in their opinions and position.

All such persons, when Christ comes again, will see the value of real spiritual religion, if they never saw it before. They will do in effect what the parable describes under a figure,—they will cry to the godly, "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out."

Who does not know, that, as things are now, spiritual religion never brings a man the world's praise? It never has done, and it never does at this day. It entails on a man the world's disapprobation,—the world's persecution,—the world's mockery,—the world's opposition,—the world's ridicule,—the world's sneers. The world will let a man serve the devil and go to hell quietly, and no one lifts a little finger to stop him, or says, "Be merciful to your soul." The world will never let a man serve Christ and go to heaven quietly; everybody cries, "Hold hard," and does everything that can be done to keep him back.

Who has not heard of nicknames in plenty, bestowed on those who follow Christ, and try to be saved—Pietists, Puritans, Methodists, Fanatics, Enthusiasts, Calvinists, Ultra-religionists, the Saints, the Righteous overmuch, the Very Good People, and many more? Who does not know the petty family persecutions which often go on in private society in our day? Let a young person go to every ball, and opera, and race-course, and worldly party, and utterly neglect his soul, and no one

interferes; no one says "Spare thyself,"—no one says "Take care: remember God, judgment, and eternity." But let him only begin to read his Bible, and be diligent in prayer,—let him decline worldly amusements, and become particular in his employment of time, let him seek an evangelical ministry, and live like an immortal being;—let him do this, I say, and all his friends and relations will probably be up in arms. "You are going too far. You need not be so very good. You are taking up extreme views." This, in all probability, is the very least that such a person will hear. If a young woman, she will be marked and avoided by all her equals. If a young man, he will be set down by all who know him, as weak, silly, and precise. In short, such a person will soon discover that there is no help from the world in the way to heaven, but plenty of help in the way to hell.

Alas, that it should be so: but so it is! These are ancient things. As it was in the days of Cain and Abel,—as it was in the days of Isaac and Ishmael, even so it is now. "They that are born after the flesh will persecute those that are born after the Spirit." (Gal. iv. 29.) The Cross of Christ will always bring reproach with it. As the Jews hated Christ, so the world hates Christians. As the Head was bruised, so also the members will be. As contempt was poured on the Master, so it will be also on the disciples. In short, if a man will become a decided evangelical Christian, in the present order of things, he must "count the cost," and make up his mind to lose the world's favour. In a word, he must be content to be thought by many little better than a fool.

Reader, there will be an end of all this when Christ returns to this world. The light of that day will at length show everything in its true colours. The scales will fall from the poor worldling's eyes. The value of the soul will flash on his astonished mind. The utter uselessness of a mere nominal Christianity will burst upon him like a thunder-storm. The blessedness of regeneration and faith in Christ, and a holy walk, will shine before him like "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Peres," on the wall of the Babylonian palace. The veil will fall from his face. He will discover that the godly have been the wise, and that he has played the fool exceedingly. And just as Saul wanted Samuel when it was too late, and Belshazzar sent for Daniel when the kingdom was about to be taken from him, so will the ungodly turn to the very men they once mocked and despised, and cry to them, "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out."

But as there will be a complete change in the *feelings* of the ungodly, in the day of Christ's second advent, so will there also be a complete change in their *position*. Hope, the plank to which they now cling, and on which they generally depend to the very last,—hope will be entirely taken away in that awful day. They will seek salvation with earnestness, but not be able to find it. They will run hither and thither in a vain search for the oil of grace. They will knock loudly at the door of mercy, and get no answer. They will cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us," but all to no

purpose. They will discover to their sorrow that opportunities once let slip can never be regained, and that the notion of universal mercy always to be obtained, is a mere delusion of the devil.

Who does not know that thousands are urged to pray and repent now, who never attempt it? They mean to try one day perhaps. Like Felix, they hope for a convenient season. They fancy it will never be too late to seek the Lord. But there is a time coming when prayer shall be heard no longer, and repentance shall be unavailing. There is a time when the door by which Manasseh and Saul the persecutor entered, shall be shut and opened no more. There is a time when the fountain in which Magdalene, and John Newton, and thousands of others were washed and made clean, shall be sealed for ever. There is a time when men shall know the folly of sin, but like Judas too late for repentance,—when they shall desire to enter the promised land, but like Israel at Kadesh not be able,—when they shall see the value of God’s favour and covenant blessing, but like Esau when they can no longer possess it,—when they shall believe every jot and tittle of God’s revealed Word, but like the miserable devils only to tremble.

Yes, reader, men may come to this, and many will come to this in the day of Christ’s appearing. They will ask and not receive! They will seek and not find. They will knock and the door shall not be opened to them. Alas, indeed, that so it should be. Woe to the man who puts off seeking his manna till the Lord’s day of return. Like Israel of old, he will find none.—Woe to the man who goes to buy oil when he ought to be burning it! Like the foolish virgins, he will find himself shut out from the marriage supper of the Lamb.—Oh, that professing Christians would consider these things! Oh, that they would remember the words of our Lord have yet to be fulfilled, “When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: *then* shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets. But He shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity.” (Luke xiii. 25–27.)

But as Christ’s second coming will be a mighty change to the ungodly, so will it also be a *mighty change to the godly*.

They shall at length be freed from everything which now mars their comfort. “The door shall be shut.” Against the fiery darts of Satan,—against the loathsome weakness of the flesh which now clings to them,—against the unkind world which now misrepresents and misunderstands them,—against the doubts and fears which now so often darken their path,—against the weariness which now clogs their best efforts to serve the Lord,—against coldness and deadness,—against shortcomings and backslidings,—against all these the door shall be shut for ever. Not one single Canaanite shall be found in the land. They shall no longer be

vexed by temptation, persecuted by the world, warred against by the devil. Their conflict shall all be over. Their strife with the flesh shall for ever cease. The armour of God, which they have so long worn, shall at length be laid aside. They shall be where there is no Satan, no sorrow, and no sin. Ah, reader, the second Eden shall be far better than the first. In the first Eden the door was not shut; our joy was but for a moment. But, blessed be God, in the second Eden, the Lord shall “shut us in.”

And as the godly shall enjoy a freedom from all evil in the day of Christ’s appearing, so shall they also enjoy the presence of all good. They shall go in with the Bridegroom to the marriage. They shall be for ever in the company of Christ, to go out no more. Faith shall then be swallowed up in sight. Hope shall become certainty. Knowledge shall at length be perfect. Prayer shall be turned into praise. Desires shall receive their full accomplishment. Hunger and thirst after conformity to Christ’s image shall at length be satisfied. The thought of parting shall not spoil the pleasure of meeting. The company of saints shall be enjoyed without hurry and distraction. The family of Abraham shall no more feel temptations; nor the family of Job, afflictions; nor the family of David, household bereavements; nor the family of Paul, thorns in the flesh; nor the family of Lazarus, poverty and sores. Every tear shall be wiped away in that day. It is the time when the Lord shall say, “I make all things new.”

Oh, reader, if God’s children find joy and peace in believing even now; what tongue shall tell their feelings when they behold the King in His beauty! If the report of the land that is far off has been sweet to them in the wilderness, what pen shall describe their happiness, when they see it with their own eyes?—If it has cheered them now and then to meet two or three like-minded in this evil world, how their hearts will burn within them when they see a multitude that no man can number, the least defects of each purged away, and not one false brother in the list!—If the narrow way has been a way of pleasantness to the scattered few who have travelled it with their poor frail bodies, how precious shall their rest seem in the day of gathering together, when they shall have a glorious body like their Lord’s!—Then shall we understand the meaning of the text, “In Thy presence is fulness of joy, and at Thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.” (Psalm xvi. 11.) Then shall we experience the truth of that beautiful hymn, which says,—

“Let me be with Thee where Thou art,
My Saviour, my eternal rest;
Then only shall this longing heart
Be fully and for ever blest.

“Let me be with Thee where Thou art,
Thy unveil’d glory to behold;

Then only shall this wand'ring heart
Cease to be false to Thee, and cold.

“ Let me be with Thee where Thou art,
Where none can die, where none remove;
There neither death nor life shall part
Me from Thy presence and Thy love.”

Is there a man or woman among the readers of this address who ever laughs at true religion? Is there one who persecutes and ridicules vital godliness in others, and dares to talk of people being over-particular, and righteous over-much? Oh, beware what you are doing! Again I say, beware! You may live to think very differently. You may live to alter your opinion, but perhaps too late. Ah, reader, there is a day before us all when there will be no infidels.! No: not one! There is a day when the disciples of Paine, and Voltaire, and Emerson, shall call on the rocks to fall on them, and on the hills to cover them. Before the throne of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that He is the Lord. Remember that day, and beware.

Is there among the readers of this address some dear child of God, who is mocked and despised for the Gospel's sake, and feels as if he stood alone? Take comfort. Be patient. “Wait a little longer.” Your turn shall yet come. When the spies returned from searching Canaan, men talked of stoning Caleb and Joshua, because they brought a good report of the land. A few days passed away, and all the assembly confessed that they alone had been right. Strive to be like them. Follow the Lord fully, as they did, and sooner or later all men shall confess that you did well. Never, never be afraid of going too far. Never, never be afraid of being too holy. Never, never be ashamed of desiring to go to heaven, and of seeking to have a great crown. Millions will lament in the day of Christ's return, because they have not got religion enough: not one will be heard to say that he has got too much. Take comfort. Press on.

And now, reader, it only remains for me to close this paper by three words of application, which seem to me to arise naturally out of the parable of which I have been writing. I heartily pray God to bless them to your soul, and to make them words in season.

1. My first word of application shall be *a question*. I take the parable of the ten virgins as my warrant, and I address that question to every one of my readers. I ask you, “Are you ready?” Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, “They that were ready went in with the bridegroom to the marriage:” they that were ready, and none else. Now here, in the sight of God, I ask each and every reader, Is this your case? Are you ready?

I do not ask whether you are a Churchman, and make a profession of relig-

ion.—I do not ask whether you attend an evangelical ministry, and like evangelical people, and can talk of evangelical subjects, and read evangelical tracts and books. All this is the surface of Christianity. All this costs little, and may be easily attained. I want to search your heart more thoroughly, and probe your conscience more deeply. I want to know whether you have been born again, and whether you have got the Holy Ghost dwelling in your soul. I want to know whether you have any oil in your vessel while you carry the lamp of profession, and whether you are ready to meet the bridegroom,—ready for Christ's return to the earth. I want to know, if the Lord should come this week, whether you could lift up your head with joy, and say, "This is our God; we have waited for Him; let us be glad, and rejoice in His salvation." These things I want to know, and this is what I mean when I say, "Are you ready?"

"Ah!" I can imagine some saying, "this is asking far too much. *To be ready for Christ's appearing!* this is far too high a standard. This is extravagance. There would be no living in the world at this rate. This is a hard saying. Who can hear it?"—I cannot help it. I believe this is the standard of the Bible. I believe this is the standard Paul sets before us when he says the Thessalonians were "waiting for the Son of God from heaven," and the Corinthians "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. i. 10; 1 Cor. i. 7.) And surely this is the standard Peter sets before us, when he speaks of "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." (2 Peter iii: 12.) I believe it is a mark, that every true believer should be continually aiming at,—to live so as to be ever ready to meet Christ. God forbid that I should place the standard of Christian practice a hair's breadth higher than the level at which the Bible places it. But God forbid that I should ever put it a hair's breadth lower. If I do, what right have I to say that the Bible is my rule of faith?

I want to disqualify no man for usefulness upon earth. I require no man to become a hermit, and cease to serve his generation. I call on no man to leave his lawful calling, and neglect his earthly affairs. But I do call on every one to live like one who expects Christ to return, to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world,—to live like a pilgrim and a stranger, ever looking unto Jesus,—to live like a good servant, with his loins girded, and his lamp burning,—to live like one whose treasure is in heaven, with his heart packed up and ready to be gone. This is readiness. This is preparation. And is this too much to ask? I say unhesitatingly that it is not.

Now, reader, are, you ready in this way? If not, I should like to know what good your religion does you. What is it all but a burthensome form? What is it but a mere temporary cloak that will not wear beyond this world? Truly a religion that does not make a man ready for every thing,—for death, for judgment, for the second advent, for the resurrection,—such a religion may well be looked on with

suspicion. Reader, if your religion does not make you ready for anything, you may depend the sooner it is changed the better.

2. My second word of application shall be *an invitation*. I address it to everyone who feels in his conscience that he has no grace in his heart,—to everyone who feels that the character of the foolish virgins is his own. To every such person I give an invitation this day, in my Master's name. I invite you "to awake and flee to Christ."

Reader, if you are a man of this sort, you know that all within you is wrong in the sight of God. Nothing can be said more true about you than that you are asleep,—asleep not merely about the doctrine of Christ's second advent, but about everything that concerns your soul. You are wide awake perhaps about temporal things. You read the newspapers, it may be, and are mighty in the "Times." You have your head stored with earthly wisdom and useful knowledge. But you have no heartfelt sense of sin, no peace or friendship with God, no experimental acquaintance with Christ, no delight in the Bible and prayer. And yet you are a sinner, a dying sinner, an immortal sinner, a sinner going to meet Christ, a sinner going to be judged. What, I would put it to your conscience as an honest man, what is all this but being asleep?

How long is this to go on? When do you mean to arise and live as if you had a soul? When will you cease to hear as one who hears not? When will you give up running after shadows, and seek something substantial? When will you throw off the mockery of a religion which cannot satisfy, cannot comfort, cannot sanctify, cannot save, and will not bear a calm examination? When will you give up having a faith which does not influence your practice,—having a book which you say is God's Word, but treat as if it was not, having the name of Christian, but knowing nothing of Christ? Oh! reader, when, when shall it once be?

Why not this very year? Why not this very day? Why not at once awake and call upon your God, and resolve that you will sleep no longer? I set before you an open door. I set before you Jesus Christ the Saviour, who died to make atonement for sinners,—Jesus who is able to save to the uttermost,—Jesus willing to receive. The hand that was nailed to the cross is held out to you in mercy.—The eye that wept over Jerusalem is looking on you with pity. The voice that has said to many wanderers, "Thy sins are forgiven," is saying to you, "Come to Me." Go to Jesus first and foremost, if you would know what step to take. Think not to wait for repentance, and faith, and a new heart, but go to Him just as you are. Go to Him in prayer, and cry, "Lord save me, or I perish. I am weary of sleeping; I would fain sleep no longer." Oh! awake, thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light.

Sun, moon, and stars are all witnessing against you: they continue according to God's ordinances, and you are ever transgressing them. The grass, the birds, the very worms of the earth are all witnessing against you: they fill their place in

creation, and you do not. Sabbaths and ordinances are continually witnessing against you: they are ever proclaiming that there is a God and a judgment, and you are living as if there were none. The tears and prayers of godly relations are witnessing against you: others are sorrowfully thinking you have a soul, though you seem to forget it. The very grave-stones that you see every week are witnessing against you: they are silently witnessing that life is uncertain, time is short, the resurrection is yet to come, the Lord is at hand. All, all are saying, Awake, awake, awake! Oh! reader, the time past may surely suffice you to have slept. Awake to be wise. Awake to be safe. Awake to be happy. Awake, and sleep no more.

3. My last word of application shall be *an exhortation* to all true believers,—to all who have the oil of grace in their hearts, and have fled for pardon to the blood of the Lamb. I draw it from the words of the Lord Jesus at the end of the parable. I exhort you earnestly “to watch.”

I exhort you to watch against everything which might interfere with a readiness for Christ’s appearing. Search your own hearts. Find out the things which most frequently interrupt your communion with Christ, and cause fogs to rise between you and the sun. Mark these things, and know them, and against them ever watch and be on your guard.

Watch against sin of every kind and description. Think not to say of any sin whatever, “Ah! that is one of the things that I shall never do.” I tell you there is no possible sin too abominable for the very best of us all to commit. Remember David and Uriah. The spirit may be sometimes very willing, but the flesh is always very weak. You are yet in the body. Watch and pray.

Watch against doubts and unbelief as to the complete acceptance of your soul, if you are a believer in Christ Jesus. The Lord Jesus finished the work He came to do:—do not tell Him that He did not. The Lord Jesus paid your debts in full:—do not tell Him that you think He left you to pay part. The Lord Jesus promises eternal life to every sinner that comes to Him:—do not tell Him, even while you are coming, that you think He lies. Alas, for our unbelief! In Christ you are like Noah in the ark, and Lot in Zoar,—nothing can harm you. The earth may be burned up with fire at the Lord’s appearing, but not a hair of your head shall perish. Doubt it not. Pray for more faith. Watch and pray.

“Watch against inconsistency of walk, and conformity to the world. Watch against sins of temper and of tongue. These are the kind of things that grieve the Spirit of God, and make His witness within us faint and low. Watch and pray.

Watch against the leaven of false doctrine. Remember that Satan can transform himself into an angel of light. Remember that bad money is never marked bad, or else it would never pass. Be very jealous for the whole truth as it is in Jesus. Do not put up with a grain of error merely for the sake of a pound of truth. Do not tolerate a little false doctrine one bit more than you would a little sin. Oh, reader,

remember this caution! Watch and pray.

Watch against slothfulness about the Bible and private prayer. There is nothing so spiritual but we may at last do it formally. Most backslidings begin in the closet. When a tree is snapped in two by a high wind, we generally find there had been some long hidden decay. Oh, watch and pray!

Watch against bitterness and uncharitableness towards others. A little love is more valuable than many gifts. Be eagle-eyed in seeing the good that is in your brethren, and dim-sighted as the mole about the evil. Let your memory be a strong box for their graces, but a sieve for their faults. Watch and pray.

Watch against pride and self-conceit. Peter said at first, "Though all men deny Thee, yet will not I." And presently he fell. Pride is the high road to a fall. Watch and pray.

Watch against the sins of Galatia, Ephesus, and Laodicea. Believers may run well for a season, then lose their first love, and then become lukewarm. Watch and pray.

Watch not least against the sin of Jehu. A man may have great zeal to all appearance, and yet have very bad motives. It is a much easier thing to oppose Anti-Christ than to follow Christ. It is one thing to protest against error; it is quite another thing to love the truth. So watch and pray.

Oh, my believing readers, let us all watch more than we have done!— Let us watch more every year that we live. Let us watch, that we may not be startled when the Lord appears.

Let us watch *for the world's sake*. We are the books they chiefly read. They mark our ways far more than we think. Let us aim to be plainly-written epistles of Christ

Let us watch *for our own sakes*. As our walk is, so will be our peace. As our conformity to Christ's mind, so will be our sense of Christ's atoning blood. If a man will not walk in the full light of the sun, how can he expect to be warm?

And, above all, let us watch *for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake*. Let us live as if His glory was concerned in our behaviour. Let us live as if every slip and fall was a reflection on the honour of our King. Let us live as if every allowed sin was one more thorn in His head,—one more nail in His feet,—one more spear in His side. Oh, let us exercise a godly jealousy over thoughts, words, and actions;—over motives, manners, and walk. Never, never let us fear being too strict. Never, never let us think we can watch too much. Leigh Richmond's dying words were very solemn. Few believers were ever more useful in their day and generation. Of few can it be said so truly, that he "being dead yet speaketh." But what did he say to one who stood by, while he lay dying?—

BROTHER, BROTHER, WE ARE NONE OF US

MORE THAN HALF AWAKE.!”

FOOTNOTES

1 I am aware that Dean Alford does not take the view I have here stated. But his arguments do not satisfy me. My reasons will be found in my “Expository Thoughts on St. Matthew.” Most of the foreign Reformers and English Puritans maintain, as I do, that the foolish virgins represent the unconverted.